

AN EVALUATION OF TEACHERS' IMPLEMENTATION OF AND REACTION TO THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

Simon Masimini Malindi
J.S.T.C., B.A.

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Supervisor : Dr. C. Dreyer

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 The problem statement

The terms “notional”, “functional” and “communicative” are labels frequently used to describe current approaches to language teaching. In recent years teachers of English in widely diverse settings have found a new excitement and confidence in adopting the communicative approach: “The first assumption is that we are concerned in the classroom with language use, not language knowledge; the second is the view that we learn language most effectively by using it in realistic situations”. In practice the approach features students bridging a contrived or natural information gap or pooling their information and insight toward solving various problems (Littlewood, 1981). Emphasis on the imparting of the necessary language skills will enable our language learners to engage more efficiently and effectively in natural communicative activities is the new priority (Department of Education, 1995).

In introducing the communicative approach to students who have previously studied English as a Second Language (ESL) in traditional fashion, teachers are apt to encounter some initial student reservations. Teachers themselves, especially in the Mmabatho education region, may not be too comfortable with this approach, or know what is expected of them. Because of their own “traditional” language teaching and learning background as well as their self-expressed lack of confidence in the use of the C.A.

Students as well as teachers may manifest uneasiness, confusion, or even resistance in the requirements of communicative classroom activities (cf. Deckert, 1987). In considering these reservations, one can assume that students’ past schooling and

teachers' past training, particularly with second languages, have predisposed them toward a different kind of school activity. In following the traditional audiolingual approach, individual participants encounter an authoritarian air, avoidance of error is crucial, and collective response is routine (cf. Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

New approaches to language teaching are often advocated very enthusiastically by theorists, but some of these proposals amount to unrealistic demands which cannot be met by the teacher in the classroom. According to Van der Walt (1990:196) the "communicative approach requires teachers to make considerable adjustments in their attitudes, language-teaching philosophy and actual teaching practice". As a result, the correct implementation of the communicative approach in many classrooms has been short-circuited by teachers who don't know how to adjust to the requirements of the communicative classroom (cf. Ellis, 1987).

In the communicative approach, teaching is a dynamic process involving teachers and students in meaningful, collaborative efforts (cf. Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Teachers carefully tailor their instruction to the needs of their students.

Instruction arouses and maintains the interest of all students so that they are motivated to become successful, self-directed learners. Because the communicative approach fosters motivation and learner autonomy, it is necessary to reconceptualise the role of the teacher. The following questions, therefore, need to be addressed:

- * Do teachers know what the communicative approach entails?
- * What is their attitude toward the use of the communicative approach?
- * Do teachers know how to implement the communicative approach?

- * Do any problems arise with the implementation of the communicative approach?

1.2 Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is to:

- * determine teachers' knowledge of the communicative approach;
- * assess the attitudes of these ESL teachers toward the use of the approach;
- * evaluate the current implementation, or lack of it, of the approach by ESL teachers in the Mmabatho education region of the North-West Province;
- * establish which factors cause problems in the implementation of the approach.
- * provide guidelines to help teachers implement the communicative approach effectively in the ESL classroom.

1.3 General hypotheses

This study is based on the following general hypotheses:

- * There is a misconception among teachers as to what exactly the communicative approach entails;
- * The attitude of teachers toward the use of this approach is mixed;
- * The communicative approach is not appropriately implemented;
- * Factors such as the amount of preparation and the lack of suitable teaching material cause problems with the implementation of the approach.

1.4 Method of research

Although a wealth of information exists on the topic, the literature seems to indicate that teachers are having problems with the implementation of the communicative approach and participation in the communicative classroom. New materials, activities, methods of teaching, patterns of participation and motivation are required. The focus is therefore on the provision of guidelines to ensure that teachers perform to the best of their abilities in the communicative classroom.

A descriptive design was used in this study. A total number of 30 teachers, randomly selected, teaching English as a Second Language in the Mmabatho education region in the North-West Province, were included in the study.

A questionnaire, designed by the researcher, was given to the subjects in order to determine the extent of their knowledge of the communicative approach, their attitude toward the approach as well as the manner in which the approach is implemented in their respective classrooms. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions in order to guide teachers as well as to elicit their own ideas and ways of implementation. Interviews were also conducted in order to get first-hand responses from the teachers about their knowledge, etc. of the communicative approach. The data were analysed by means of descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency counts).

1.5 Programme of study

Chapter 2 provides a brief background discussion of the theories of communicative competence.

Chapter 3 provides an outline of the communicative approach.

Chapter 4 focuses on the role of the teacher and learner in the communicative classroom.

Chapter 5 focuses on the methodology employed in this study.

In chapter 6 the collected data are presented and discussed.

Chapter 7 provides guidelines for the implementation of the communicative approach.

Chapter 8 contains a conclusion and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

THEORIES OF COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

2.1. Introduction

The new interim core syllabus for English as a second language of the Department of Education (1995) states communicative competence as its overriding aim. The learner should therefore learn the language in order to use it appropriately when communicating with other learners, with teachers and ultimately, with the wider community.

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general background to communicative approaches, distinguishing the notions of communicative competence and communicative performance. Following this, various theories of communicative competence that have been proposed are discussed.

2.2 A general background to communicative approaches

The origins of Communicative Language Teaching are to be found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s. Until then, Situational Language Teaching represented the major British approach to teaching English as a foreign language. In Situational Language Teaching, language is taught by practising basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities. However, British applied linguists began to call into question the theoretical assumptions underlying Situational Language Teaching. This was partly a response to the criticisms of the American linguist Noam Chomsky. British linguists also emphasized a fundamental dimension of language that was inadequately addressed in approaches to the language teaching at that time - the functional and communicative potential of language.

2.2.1 From grammatical competence to communicative competence

What does it mean to be proficient in a language? What does one have to know in terms of grammar, vocabulary, sociolinguistic appropriateness, cultural understanding, and the like in order to know a language well enough to use it for some real-world purpose?

The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (1992) defines *proficient* as “performing in a given art, skill or branch of learning with expert correctness and facility,” and further specifies that the term implies “a high degree of competence through training.” Implied in this definition, then, is the idea that proficiency refers to a somewhat idealized level of competence and performance, attainable by experts through extensive instruction.

The two terms, competence and performance, were fundamental to Chomsky’s (1965) theory of transformational-generative grammar. In his theory, Chomsky distinguished between an idealized native speaker’s underlying competence (referring to one’s implicit or explicit knowledge of the system of the language) and the individual’s performance (or one’s actual production and comprehension of language in specific instances of language use). Because the native speaker’s performance is so often imperfect, due to factors as memory limitations, distractions, errors, hesitations, false starts, repetitions, and pauses, Chomsky believed that actual performance did not properly reflect the underlying knowledge that linguistic theory sought to describe. Thus, Chomsky felt that, for the purposes of developing a linguistic theory, it was important to make the competence-performance distinction.

Chomsky's competence-performance distinction served as the basis for the work of many other researchers interested in the nature of language acquisition. Campbell and Wales (1970), for example, accepted Chomsky's methodological distinction between competence and actual performance, but they pointed out that Chomsky's conceptualizations of these terms did not include any reference to either the appropriateness of an utterance to a particular situation or context or its sociocultural significance. For Campbell and Wales, the degree to which a person's production or understanding of the language is appropriate to the context in which it takes place is even more important than its grammaticality. They referred to Chomsky's very restricted view of competence as "grammatial competence" (Campbell & Wales, 1970:249). Like Campbell and Wales, Hymes (1972) espoused a much broader view, in which grammatical competence is but one component of the overall knowledge the native speaker possesses. This broader notion of "communicative competence" incorporated sociolinguistic and contextual competence as well as grammatical competence.

Perhaps one of the best-known studies involving the concept of communicative competence in the early 1970s was that done by Savignon (1972). In that study, Savignon sought to compare the effects of various types of practice on communicative skills development. In a later definition of communicative competence, Savignon (1983) outlines the following characteristics:

- Communicative competence is a dynamic rather than a static concept that depends on the negotiation of meaning between two or more persons who share some knowledge of the language.

- Communicative competence should not be thought of as only an oral phenomenon. It applies to both written and spoken language.
- Communicative competence is context-specific, in that communication always takes place in a particular context or situation. The communicatively competent language user will know how to make appropriate choices in register and style to fit the particular situation in which communication occurs.
- It is important to bear in mind the theoretical distinction between competence and performance. Savignon (1983:9) states that: "Competence is what one knows. Performance is what one does. Only performance is observable, however, and it is only through performance that competence can be developed, maintained, and evaluated."
- Communicative competence is relative and depends on the cooperation of all those involved.

Savignon's view of the notion of communicative competence emphasizes the negotiative nature of communication. In order to determine how one might best design communicative approaches to language teaching, Canale and Swain (1980) felt it was necessary to clarify further the concept of "communicative competence".

According to Canale and Swain (1980) communicative competence includes four areas of knowledge and skills. They are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence includes all aspects of language dealing with vocabulary and mechanics as well as with morphology and syntax. It is further argued that grammar is teachable even though it is impossible to alter developmental sequences in the acquisition of grammar. The optimum development of grammatical

competence requires that grammar be presented in meaningful, authentic language contexts rather than in isolation.

It is a frequently expressed opinion that grammatical competence is not a good predictor of communicative competence. Even though grammatical competence is argued not to be a sufficient condition for the development of communicative competence, it would however be inappropriate to conclude that the development of grammatical competence is irrelevant to or unnecessary for the development of communicative competence.

Sociolinguistic competence addresses the extent to which sentences are produced and understood appropriately (Swain, 1983). It centres on the way second language learners acquire the rules and norms governing the appropriate timing and realization of speech acts. Such competence enables speakers to vary their language appropriately according to the addressee. It allows speakers to signal levels of politeness, formality and to establish their credibility.

Discourse competence consists of the knowledge of the rules needed to produce a unified text as opposed to sentences in isolation. It enables speakers to start a conversation and keep it in process. It includes the knowledge of rules of cohesion, which relate sentences and clauses to one another, and rules of coherence which dictate the order in which various kinds of information are presented.

Strategic competence refers to the mastery of the communicative strategies that may be called into action, either to enhance the effectiveness of communication, or to compensate for break-downs in communication due to limiting factors in actual

communication or to insufficient competence in one or more of the other components of communicative competence (Swain, 1983).

Although Canale and Swain refer to their theoretical framework as a model of communicative competence, they acknowledge that the term “communicative competence” itself may be problematic, since there has been so much disagreement and confusion about what it means. Canale (1983) stresses, however, that his use of the term “communicative competence” refers to both underlying knowledge about the language and communicative language use and skill, or how well an individual can perform with this knowledge base in actual communication situations.

2.3 Some theories of communicative competence

Canale and Swain (1980: 9) classify the different theories of communicative competence according to the emphasis which each places on grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence and other areas of competence. Basic to all theories of communicative competence, however, is a view of language as a means of communication.

2.3.1 Theories of basic communication skills

Canale and Swain (1980:9) define a theory of basic communication skills as one that “emphasizes the minimum level of (mainly oral) communication skills needed to get along in, or cope with, the most common second language situations the learner is likely to face.” It is therefore concerned with the skills that are needed to get one’s meaning across, to do things in the second language, to say what one really wants to say (cf. Savignon, 1972).

It is not always clear what skills are included in theories of basic communication skills. Savignon (1972) makes explicit reference only to grammatical skills such as pronunciation and vocabulary, communicative tasks such as greeting and information giving, and often factors such as willingness to express oneself in the second language. Van Ek (1976) provides perhaps the clearest statement of basic communication skills. His model emphasizes language functions and notions, and considers only in second place what language forms must be known to give expression to these functions and notions.

As concerns the theoretical bases of theories of basic communication skills, it is important to consider that these theories can be said to specify a minimum level of communication skills, and that more effective second language learning takes place if emphasis is put, from the beginning, on getting one's meaning across, and not on the grammaticalness and appropriateness of one's utterances. With respect to emphasis on meaning and grammaticalness, it is reasonable to assume that since in acquiring a first language the child seems to focus more on being understood than on speaking grammatically, then second language acquisition might be allowed to proceed in this manner.

It is also argued by different linguists that there is no clear sense in which any theory of language specifies what minimum level of skills is necessary to communicate in a given language. The notion of a minimum or threshold level as used by Van Ek (1976), for example, is in no way clearly related to the notion of a threshold level as it is understood by psycholinguists. It is furthermore suggested that there may be threshold levels in the native language that the learner of a second language must attain in order to avoid cognitive disadvantages, and that

must be attained in the second language to allow the potentially beneficial aspects of bilingualism on cognitive development and educational achievement to develop.

Researchers (e.g. Canale & Swain, 1980; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992) seem to suggest that aspects of grammatical competence should be taught in the context of meaningful communication. It would seem that unless a basic communication approach is adopted for the classroom, there is little reason to expect that learners will acquire even basic communication skills in a second language.

2.3.2 Sociolinguistic perspectives on communicative competence

Research on communicative competence from sociolinguistic perspectives has been of a more theoretical and analytical nature than work on basic communication skills. The work of Halliday and Hymes in particular has inspired many of the communicative approaches that have been proposed.

The theory of communicative competence that Hymes' (1972) suggests is comprised of knowledge of four types:

- Whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible;
- Whether (and to what degree) something is feasible in virtue of the means of implementation available;
- Whether (and to what degree) something is appropriate in relation to a context in which it is used and evaluated;
- Whether (and to what degree) something is in fact done, actually performed, and what its doing entails.

In a critical analysis of Hymes' model Canale and Swain (1980) conclude that grammatical competence is equally weighted with the other components of Hymes'

model of communicative competence. Grammatical competence, then, seems less peripheral in the sociolinguistic perspective of communicative competence than in theories of basic communication skills.

Halliday (1978) views language essentially as a system of meaning potential. He views language as sets of semantic options available to the language user that relate to what the user can do in terms of social behaviour to what the user can say in terms of the grammar. It is agreed that meaningful communications should be emphasized as a means of facilitating the acquisition of grammatical competence from the beginning.

The sociolinguistic perspectives of both Hymes and Halliday thus assign an important, though not central role to grammar as their views of communicative competence concern the interaction of social context, grammar, and social meaning.

2.3.3 Integrative theories of communicative competence

An integrative theory of communicative competence is the one in which there is a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical principles, knowledge of how language is used in social contexts to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse (Canale & Swain, 1980). It is argued (cf. Canale & Swain, 1980) that integrative theories focus on speaking, listening, writing and reading rather than on a subset of these skill areas.

Widdowson (1978) defined a set of contrasting categories which contribute to linguistic theory by distinguishing between language as a formal system and

language use as communicative events. The shift of emphasis from teaching second language as a formal system to teaching second language as communication is clearly illustrated in Widdowson's (1978) linguistic and communicative categories:

Linguistic categories	Communicative categories
correctness	appropriacy
usage	use
signification	value
sentence	utterance
proposition	illocutionary act
cohesion	coherence
linguistic skills	communicative abilities

However, Canale and Swain (1980 : 22) point out the danger of an overemphasis in many integrative theories on the role of communicative functions and language functions, and a lack of emphasis on the role of grammatical complexity. They question the validity of Widdowson's assumption that one is concerned with aspects of language use and not with aspects of grammatical usage. Canale and Swain (1980 : 24) reason that the beginning second language learner will most likely not be able to attend to the task of how to use language until the learner has mastered some of the grammatical forms to be used.

2.3.4 Communicative language ability

The Canale and Swain (1980) model has had a great deal of influence on the thinking of many scholars who are working towards a better understanding of what communicative language proficiency entails. Bachman (1990) has proposed a model for a theoretical framework of "communicative language ability" that

incorporates some of the same components identified by Canale and Swain, but arranged and explained in a somewhat different fashion.

Bachman's (1990) framework consists of three major components: (1) language competence, (2) strategic competence, and (3) psychophysiological mechanisms. The first component is made up of various kinds of knowledge that we use in communicating via language, whereas the second and third components include the mental capacities and physical mechanisms by which that knowledge is implemented in communicative language use. Bachman (1990:85) identifies the first component - language competence - as "knowledge of language", and relates it to other frameworks of communicative competence such as those described by Hymes (1972), Canale and Swain (1980), and Canale (1983), in that it recognizes that the ability to use language communicatively involves both knowledge of or competence in the language, and the capacity for implementing, or using this competence.

In Bachman's description of language competence, two major types of abilities are included. The first is organizational competence, which relates to controlling the formal structure of language (grammatical competence) and knowing how to construct discourse (textual competence). The second type of ability is called pragmatic competence, which relates to the functional use of language (illocutionary competence) and knowledge of its appropriateness to the context in which it is used (sociolinguistic competence). Each of the four subcomponents of the model is further defined. Grammatical competence includes control of vocabulary, morphology, syntax, and phonemic and graphemic elements; textual competence includes cohesion and rhetorical organization. Illocutionary competence comprises control of functional features of the language, such as the

ability to express ideas and emotions (ideational functions), to get things done (manipulative functions), to use language to teach, learn and solve problems (heuristic functions), and to be creative (imaginative functions). Finally, sociolinguistic competence includes such things as sensitivity to dialect and register, naturalness (or native-like use of language) and understanding of cultural referents and figures of speech (cf. Bachman, 1990:87-98).

It would seem as if Bachman's framework extends earlier models, in that it attempts to characterize the processes by which the various components interact with each other and with the context in which language use occurs. Bachman's framework, therefore, represents a promising development for looking at communicative language ability and for addressing the question: "what does it mean to know language?"

2.4 Conclusion

A review of the literature on communicative competence indicates that the term "communicative competence" itself may be problematic, since there has been so much disagreement and confusion about what it means and what its various components are. Most researchers seem to agree that communicative competence is composed of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. As a result, one of the primary goals of a communicative approach to language teaching should be to facilitate the integration of these types of knowledge.

There appears to be some reason to emphasize getting one's meaning across (or communicating) over explicit concerns about accuracy at the early stage of the second language study. Proponents of this view argue that in the first language

acquisition, the child focuses more on being understood rather than on speaking grammatically. Parents and peers seem to be more interested in finding out what a child or friend has to say than how he or she says it. For the second language teacher, it is suggested that a similar role where emphasis is on meaning should be followed, and in such an instance, the aspects of grammatical competence will be taught in the context of meaningful communication.

CHAPTER 3

AN OVERVIEW OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

3.1 Introduction

Whatever the situation may be as regards actual teaching practices, communicative language teaching is well established as the dominant theoretical model in English language teaching. There have been recurrent attempts to take stock of communicative language teaching and to identify its characteristic features (e.g., Richards & Rodges, 1986). However, despite this apparent unanimity, many teachers remain somewhat confused about what exactly communicative language teaching is. The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to give an overview of the main characteristics of the communicative approach.

3.2 Characteristics of the communicative language teaching approach

3.2.1 Aims

It is generally acknowledged that the ultimate aim in language learning is to acquire communicative competence (Widdowson, 1983:67). Communication is a highly complex skill involving far more than the sub-skill of “being grammatical”; the utterances must also be appropriate on many levels at the same time; it must conform to the speaker’s aim, to the role relationship between the interactants, to the setting, topic, linguistic context, etc. (Johnson & Morrow, 1982:11).

Communication, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986:66-71), may be of many different kinds. What is essential in all of them is that at least two parties are involved in an interaction or transaction of some kind. In real life, communication takes place between two (or more) people, one of whom knows something that is

unknown to the other(s). The purpose of the communication is to bridge this gap (Johnson & Morrow, 1982:62) and to convey meaning (Richards & Rodgers, 1986:71). It is likely, in fact, that many aspects of language learning can take place through natural processes, which operate when a person is involved in using the language to communicate. Littlewood (1981:19) points out that learners are likely to feel motivated to learn if they can see how classroom learning relates to the aim of communication and helps them to achieve it with increasing success.

The communicative approach, therefore, aims at teaching the learner to communicate with others. He should be able to express meaningful information which should have transfer value to his everyday life. Seeing the sense of what he is learning will serve as motivation. The learner should use language which is grammatically correct, natural and appropriate in the circumstances. However, teachers very often translate "encourage communication" to mean that teacher talking time is to be reduced, and student talking time is to be maximized - chiefly by putting students into pairs and telling them to talk to their partners (cf. Thompson, 1996:12). While this does represent a useful goal for teachers, it is also important to recognize that communication does not only take place through speech. Learners reading a text silently to themselves are taking part in communication just as much as if they were talking to their partner. Thompson (1996:12) states that: "Perhaps, rather than student talking time, we should be thinking about the broader concept of student communicating time."

3.2.2 Content

3.2.2.1 The needs of the learner

A frequently cited dimension of communicative language teaching is that it is learner-centred and experience-based (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Content is, therefore, determined by the needs of the learners. According to Van der Walt (1988:7) basing the content of a course on the needs of learners is not a simple matter as the needs would almost certainly differ from pupil to pupil. It is easy, for instance, to determine the needs of a doctor working in a foreign country, but the principle of needs analysis is not so easily applied to general school courses. Van der Walt (1988:7) states that pupils and the teacher have to agree on what is “useful” in their own context. The teacher has to aim for maximum efficiency and economy in his pupils’ learning. It therefore makes sense to engage them in a large proportion of situations which bear as direct a resemblance as possible to situations where they will later need to use their communicative skills. The situations must be capable of stimulating learners to a high degree of communicative involvement (Littlewood, 1981).

3.2.2.2 Grammar vs functional-notional content

One of the first models for communicative language teaching was the notional syllabus proposed by Wilkins (1976). It specified the semantic/grammatical categories (e.g., frequency, motion, location) and the categories of communicative function (requests, denials, offers, complaints) that learners need to express. Consequently, syllabuses were developed (and are still in force in many places) which expressed the teaching aims purely or predominantly in terms of what the learners would learn to do (e.g., make a telephone call to book a hotel room); and which ignored or minimized the underlying knowledge of the language that they would need to actually perform those tasks (cf. Thompson, 1996).

However, the exclusion of explicit attention to grammar was never a necessary part of communicative language teaching. It is certainly understandable that there was a reaction against the heavy emphasis on structure at the expense of natural communication. But there have always been theorists and teachers pointing out that grammar is necessary for communication to take place efficiently, even though their voices may for a time have been drowned out in the noise of learners busily practising in pairs (Thompson, 1996:10).

According to Thompson (1996:11) there seems to be consensus that an appropriate amount of class time should be devoted to grammar. However, this has not meant a simple return to a traditional treatment of grammar rules. The view that grammar is too complex to be taught in that over-simplifying way has had an influence, and the focus has now moved away from the teacher covering grammar to the learners discovering grammar. Wherever possible, learners are first exposed to new language in a comprehensible context, so that they are able to understand its function and meaning. Only then is their attention turned to examining the grammatical forms that have been used to convey that meaning. The discussion of grammar is explicit, but it is the learners who are doing most of the discussing, working out - with guidance from the teacher - as much of their new knowledge of the language as can easily and usefully be expressed. Ellis (1992) argues that while looking explicitly at grammar may not lead immediately to learning, it will facilitate learning at a later stage when the learner is ready to internalize the new information about the language.

3.2.2.3 Types of learning and teaching activities and techniques

The range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises enable learners to obtain the

objectives of the communicative approach, engage learners in communication, and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction.

Littlewood (1981) distinguishes between “functional communication activities” and “social interaction activities” as major activity types in communicative language teaching. Functional communication activities include such tasks as learners comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences; working out a likely sequence of events in a set of pictures; discovering missing features in a map or picture; following instructions; and solving problems from shared clues. Social interaction activities include conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, simulations, and debates.

Thompson (1996:12) states that teachers should be aware of using certain techniques (e.g., pair work) in a “too narrow” way. Consider the following example:

One of you is the shopkeeper; the other is the customer. Act out the conversation.

It is important to note that pair and group work are far more flexible and useful techniques than the above example suggests. One of the constant themes of communicative language teaching is that learners need to be given some degree of control over their learning. Learners must be given the opportunity to develop their own ideas (cf. Thompson, 1996).

3.2.2.4 The integration of skills

The integration of skills in the language classroom can be defined as a series of activities or tasks which use any combination of the four skills, listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in a continuous and related fashion (Read, 1988:72).

Skills should not be practised in isolation but in a closely interwoven series of tasks which mutually reinforce and build each other. It is likely that listening will precede speaking, and reading will precede writing. Writing is often a good way of concluding and giving final reinforcement to the activities that have gone before. An integrated approach helps to ensure that there is input before output. Learners cannot be expected to perform a task without orientating and motivating them with the linguistic means that will enable them to be successful.

A theme-based approach is ideally suited for the integration of the four skills. The teacher may talk about a specific topic and ask the learners what they know about it. In this way listening and speaking are introduced. The passage about the topic is read and the theme is concluded with the writing exercises. The use of such a framework helps to promote an awareness not only of how the different skills relate to particular communicative needs, but also of how they may integrate naturally into each other in real life. After having read a brochure in which a holiday resort is advertized, a telephone call is made to obtain further information. The telephone call involves both speaking and listening. Eventually a letter will be sent to confirm the reservation. Learners should be made aware of how language functions in an integrated way in everyday situations.

3.3 Conclusion

The phenomenon of the structurally competent but communicatively incompetent student more than anything else led to the evolvement of the communicative approach. However, the communicative language approach is by no means the final answer - no doubt the next "revolution" in language teaching is already underway somewhere. But whatever innovations emerge, they will do so against the background of the changes brought about by communicative language teaching (e.g., the view of language as structured to carry out the functions we want it to perform) and will need to accommodate or reject those changes. In order to ensure that these changes are not pushed aside in future developments, it seems essential that teachers should have an "accurate" knowledge of what the communicative approach entails.

CHAPTER 4

THE ROLE OF THE TEACHER AND LEARNER IN THE COMMUNICATIVE CLASSROOM

4.1 Introduction

In the communicative approach, teaching is a dynamic process involving teachers and students in meaningful, collaborative efforts. Instruction arouses and maintains the interest of all students so that they are motivated to become successful, self-directed learners. The communicative approach, therefore, involves a different way of looking at teaching and learning, one in which teachers are viewed as professionals involved in reflecting upon their own teaching and where learners are actively involved in constructing meaningful interaction in the classroom. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to reconceptualize the roles of teacher and learner in the ESL communicative classroom.

4.2 The role of the teacher

In the past, the role of the language teacher was to teach learners the rules that govern the structure of the language and the vocabulary of that language. In doing so the teacher dominated the talk in the classroom in quantity, range and degree of control. In most of the classrooms studied by Sinclair and Brazil (1982) they found the teacher-student ratio of speech to be about 3 to 1. According to Ellis (1994) IRF exchanges are prevalent in teacher-centred classrooms; the teacher stands in front of the class, conducting instruction by means of lengthy initiation moves, interspersed with questioning. Pupils, therefore have a very restricted range of verbal functions to perform.

However, during the last twenty years researchers' ideas on how a second language should be taught have changed greatly (cf. Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). Researchers are stating that a language is learned when the learner becomes involved in real communication so that he is a user of the language rather than a detached observer who analyses and rehearses the language for later use. According to Widdowson (1979:49) students have difficulty coping with language in its normal communicative use. Students frequently remain deficient in the ability to actually use the language and to understand its use. Students must possess the ability to use the language appropriately; they must know the right thing to say at the right time.

It is therefore clear that both teachers and learners need to be doing things differently in the communicative classroom. The following sections give an indication of what teachers should be focussing on in the communicative classroom.

4.2.1 Preparation and presentation

Lesson preparation and presentation are very personal matters and are determined, amongst other things, by the teachers' personality, the teaching-learning environment, the age, gender and the interests of the learners, the available learning resources and so on. Teachers should nevertheless, remember that it is often the teaching-learning approach and not necessarily the subject content which facilitates successful learning.

Good classes are the result of careful planning. To achieve what the teacher wants to achieve in the classroom, the teacher must plan in advance activities that will make the learners forget that they are in a classroom. The teacher should plan his

lesson in such a way that at the end of it, the learner should be able to see clearly that he can do something which he could not do at the beginning of the lesson - "and that the something is communicatively useful" (Morrow, 1981: 61).

It is clear that preparation for the communicative class is demanding. Lessons tend to be less predictable; teachers have to be ready to listen to what learners say and not just how they say it, and to interact with them in as "natural" a way as possible; they have to use a wider range of management skills than in the traditional teacher-dominated classroom (cf. Thompson, 1996).

4.2.2 Language - in - action

Language - in - action refers to the ability of learners to apply the system of language (vocabulary, grammatical structures, etc.) in real situations. Gebhard (1982) argues that learning to converse in a second language requires frequent practice in speaking and listening.

Gebhard (1982) further argues that even though the learners' native language should be used sparingly in the classroom, the teacher should not hesitate to use it in order to clarify instructions, to ensure that essential information has been understood and, most important, to maintain the learners' sense of curiosity. Moving between two or more languages or dialects (code-switching) should be done constructively in order to facilitate learning. For example, during the course of an English Second Language lesson, it may be appropriate to allow group discussion in an African language followed by summary and re-statement in English.

4.2.3 Understanding language acquisition

Diller (1978) states that learners bring with them expectations and attitudes from past learning experiences. They may have studied in programmes which stressed that language learning is a habit-forming process where "correct" language should be drilled into them.

The following will be evident from learners who have experienced this type of learning:-

- they will not be willing to speak a great deal
- they will expect the teacher to lead the exercises
- they may not be aware that they can learn from their mistakes
- they won't be aware that they can learn from their classmates

(Gebhard, 1982: 211).

To counteract such tendencies the teacher must teach learners that to acquire the language, the following are important:-

- speak the language
- speak a lot
- initiate the process and raise the questions within yourself and search out the answers for yourself
- go through a process that includes making mistakes
- share the use of language with other people.

(Gebhard, 1982: 211)

4.2.4 Talking about the language

It is argued that learners who for many years have heard the teacher talk about the language, and have studied texts about how to use the language, cannot

communicate even simple ideas. The argument is that "there is little point telling people about English, give them the chance to try it out for themselves" (Educational Supplement to City Press, 1995).

The classroom ideally needs to be filled with opportunities to experiment. The learners must discover how to use the language through their own experience. Such an approach assumes that exposure to suitable models and the chance to work with others in communicative situations are more helpful than formal classwork with feedback in red ink. It does however, not mean that the teacher should say nothing. The teacher can introduce functions, wisely correct usage, and guide the learners through exercises. If this is done simply in few words, the learner will gain a great deal, but if it is done in an overly detailed manner, the learners will only gain more passive knowledge (cf. Gebhard, 1982).

In response to their learners' ever changing needs, teachers should constantly collect information about learners, analyse their language behaviour, and observe ongoing interaction. The teacher should select, mark, present, and practice language items and communicative expressions in a systematic, logical manner that will facilitate the learners' restructuring and subsequent acquisition of them.

The knowledge teachers have about the learning theory and educational practice allows them to plan flexible learning experiences and to respond sensitively to learners of differing language ability levels and varying backgrounds, interests and needs (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

4.2.5 Learner involvement

The role of the teacher in a communicative classroom is to organise and facilitate communication between learners or between learners and material rather than to do all the talking. Learners should be kept actively involved with one another or with a variety of texts.

To get the learner involved, the teacher needs to "do exercises where the learners are actively searching out, discovering, and depicting" (Stevick, 1976: 25). Learners can do exercises in which they speak much more than the teacher. To fulfil this purpose many types of approaches and exercises can be used. As to which approach the teacher should choose, Mullins (1980) suggests that the successful second language teacher, who is self-confident professionally, will choose his techniques on the basis of his own personality, the learners' personality, and the local situation.

McLean (1980: 19) argues that the teacher should try to make the learners' passive knowledge active. Since many learners have studied the language in a passive setting, they often enter an English class where the focus is on conversation being unprepared to express themselves. However, they usually have an abundant store of knowledge about grammar and language in general, and their own unique experience. The teacher can draw on these assets by giving the learners as many chances to speak as possible (Gebhard, 1982).

The strengths of older learners may be utilized while giving them the feeling that they are responsible human beings. The learners may help one another in the numerous tasks of the classroom, such as preparing instructional materials, assuming the roles of group leaders, recorders, or reporters at different times, and

helping fellow learners who may have been absent or who have fallen behind in some aspect of the work (Gebhard, 1982).

4.2.6 Control of the exercise

Our job is not only to present information, exercises, and a means for the learners to get feedback, but it is also to help them learn as quickly as possible. The way the teacher presents an exercise has much to do with how easy it is for the learners to acquire the language.

The most soul-destroying approach to teaching or learning a second language is to do it merely because it is time-tabled without any attempt to relate it to some goal (Morrow, 1981). According to Cook (1992), learners study the second language in order to pass a test, obtain a degree, get a job or go abroad for university study. Often these far-off goals lack immediate relevance for learners.

A model for facilitating an exercise so that it is clear for the learner consists of three stages; brief, do, and debrief (cf. Pfeiffer & Jones, 1972). It is suggested that to brief means to frame the exercise or define exactly what task is expected of the learner. This includes direction, time limits, rules and so on. In English Second Language, it is important that the learners know exactly what they are to do. They should also know whether the exercise is designed to teach them how to apologize and how to write a letter of request or complaint.

According to Gebhard (1982) “to do” means to carry out the instructions given. It is important for both the teacher and learners to comply with the instructions. To “debrief” means to go over what happened during the exercise. If the exercise was a problemsolving one for instance, with only one possible solution,

the teacher will get the opportunity to help the learners discuss how well they did and the reasons for their success or failure. This will act as a catalyst in helping learners realize their abilities, their weakness and what they need to learn within themselves. It will also serve as an opportunity for the teacher to maintain his authoritarian role as well as provide motivation for the learners.

4.2.7 Differentiation and classroom atmosphere in a communicative classroom

Teachers should always bear in mind that learners are different with respect to their age, gender, background, culture, personal interest, ability, language level, exposure to the target language, and so on. Although all learners should be exposed to the target language in all its richness and complexity, it would be educationally unsound to expose all of them to exactly the same material, the same teaching methods and the criteria throughout the year. However, teachers should be committed to the notion that all normal people can learn.

Teachers should attempt to create a climate within which learners can use the target language with interest, purpose and enjoyment. Every effort should be made to create a nurturing, stress - free environment since stress, ridicule and embarrassment are known to inhibit learning.

Creating a community spirit in the sense of having the learners help one another acquire the language, is not an easy task for the teacher. Gardner et al. (1977) believe that learners who are integratively motivated, tend to help one another more by providing feedback, raising questions and generally encouraging one another.

Ellis (1994: 48) states that an "integrative" motivation is based on factors such as general interest in the language, attitudes toward the teacher, and ability to strive toward goals. Ellis (1994) further argues that the talented teacher, through his own personality, can help to encourage learners to become more integratively motivated. If the teacher creates a favourable and realistic image of himself, of the language he is teaching and the culture to which it relates, the learners will tend to be more attracted toward the language and its culture than if these are presented in an unfavourable way. The teacher can also make the language as interesting as possible through the types of exercises he uses.

There is a perception that if learners are not at ease and don't feel good about their language class, there will be no communication. It is therefore the teacher's responsibility to establish the proper atmosphere so that learners can relate to the teacher and to each other in a positive and constructive way. To achieve a good social climate, it is also important for the teacher to learn all of the learners' names. There is also a need for the learners to become acquainted with one another as soon as possible. Sometimes the solution to a discussion - group problem calls for the discussion of learners' personal values. In these cases, the teacher should show and encourage sensitivity to all opinions and cultural values (Williams, 1984).

4.2.8 Caring for the learners

Caring for learners involves stepping out of one's personal frame of reference and considering the learners needs and expectations. Caring begins with an attitude of openness and receptivity. Caring teachers are aware of who their learners are, what their strengths and weaknesses as learners are, and what is conducive to their language development (Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

Scarcella and Oxford (1992) further argue that responsive teacher behaviour develops when teachers and learners collaborate to overcome teaching and learning difficulties in a committed way. It is further suggested that the teacher must be willing to become involved with the learners, and to show a positive regard for them. He should provide learners with emotional support just when it is required and help learners feel secure, loved and respected. In chapter 6, guidelines which the teacher can follow when implementing the communicative approach are provided.

4.3 The role of the learner

In traditional terms, a learner's primary role is to know how to combine words in the order and fashion prescribed by the rules before producing sentences (Odendaal, 1987). It is further stated that imitation, repetition and mastery of grammatical rules for recall and use during tests and examinations played a prominent role in language learning. The language teacher using communicative techniques may find himself challenging the students many years of ingrained habit (Deckert, 1987).

The following sections give an indication of what learners in the communicative language classroom should be focussing on.

4.3.1 Learners must perform active roles in the classroom

Language development seems to take place most effectively when learners are actively involved in a variety of activities which demand that they apply their listening, reading and writing skills in an integrated manner. Since the communicative approach emphasizes creative construction, careful reflection and

self-correction, learners should be actively involved in shaping their own interaction with and through the language.

Littlewood (1992) states that learners must make choices and decisions which affect their own learning activity. However, the teacher should still determine what activity the learners should perform and what their roles should be within it. But once the activity is in progress, the teacher does not intervene unless the interaction cannot proceed without help.

Deckert (1987) further mentions that the learner must be motivated to correct and modify his own language performances to the standard of his own level of proficiency. A learner must see that his own language skill and general knowledge is his own 'most contact helper.' Particularly in written work, the learner can monitor his own errors or areas of uncertainty. He must be made to use his own knowledge of the language, familiar social situations, and the world at large to attempt improvements before turning to a teacher.

The communicative approach offers a form of interaction that is often frustrated by more traditional, teacher-directed patterns. Barnes (1976) is of the opinion that learners must also be given an opportunity to reevaluate and reinterpret what has been presented to them. He states that they must be given an opportunity to talk things over and explore in order to relate the teacher's knowledge to their own world.

According to Stubbs (1976), activities that will keep learners active in the class must be clearly understood by learners. If teachers fail to define the task and how

to accomplish it, learners will not communicate effectively. They will only sit and say nothing.

For learners to think aloud and explore both form and content in diverse ways, Ward (1979) suggests the use of the following questions and expressions:-

- what do you mean?
- I don't understand
- please explain
- please summarize what you mean
- can you sum up this conversation?

In project-based activities, for example, Littlewood (1992) maintains that a group of learners may be assigned a topic by a teacher, but be free to distribute amongst themselves the various sub-tasks that the project involves, such as reading brochures, interviewing native-speakers, and so on. However, chaos can result when a teacher gives learners a greater degree of freedom than they are so far able to cope with.

Littlewood (1992) argues that the readiness to accept responsibility has three main aspects, each of which the teacher can aim to develop by gradual stages. He states the first as the matter of how learners perceive their own roles in the classroom. Learners who are accustomed to seeing the teacher's role as to choose and dictate, while their own role is to accept and follow, may resist an attempt to change this balance and even perceive the teacher as weak or incompetent. In this case the teacher will need to re-shape the role - relationship gradually, beginning by asking the learners to make small choices within an otherwise controlled framework.

The second aspect concerns the knowledge and skills that are required in order to exercise choices. Littlewood (1981) suggests that it is meaningless to ask learners for example to express preferences about learning activities when they know nothing about the alternatives. At any particular state, then, any alternatives presented to the learners must be of kinds which are familiar to them. He further suggests that before allowing learners to interact independently, the teacher must ensure that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to cope not only with the language but also with the task that has been assigned.

The third aspect is whether the learners have sufficient confidence in themselves. In the traditional teacher-dominated classroom, the typical exchange pattern is "teacher initiates - - - - ->learner responds ----->teacher evaluates" (Ellis, 1994). This pattern demands little initiative from the learners and protects them from the need to make any but the lowest-level choices.

The learners' confidence needs to be nurtured gradually. The teacher needs to increase gradually the level of the choices which they are required to make, so that they never feel they have been thrown into an unstructured environment without enough support to survive.

It is worth mentioning that the emphasis on active roles for learners can be justified not only in terms of the demands of the learning processes and of the independent use they must later make of the language. It is also related to the learner's broader personal development.

As they become able to accept more active roles in the social context of the classroom, learners will also become better able to take responsibility for

organizing their own learning in later life and to develop greater autonomy as individuals in other situations of life.

4.4 Conclusion

Language, first or second, does not develop in a vacuum. Seliger and Long (1983) argue that the learner must have access to a social environment in which language is used as a tool for communication. This environment for language use can exist inside or outside the classroom. They also maintain that the second language learner, whether young or old, has the need to use the language as a tool for communicating with others.

To teach communicatively, the teacher should accommodate and allow for a heterogeneity of learner expectations. To help learners become better managers of their learning, teachers must try to make sure that they are not getting in the learners' way. However, most learners will probably need training so as to be efficient and effective managers of their own learning. The communicative approach therefore depends on teachers who understand second language development, know effective teaching techniques and make appropriate use of the curriculum and materials. To achieve these, they should be encouraged to attend professional conferences and workshops and to read relevant journals and books.

Littlewood (1992) maintains that even though we can create contexts which facilitate learning as teachers, we have no direct control over the actual process of learning. Learning depends on the learners themselves. They must feel motivated to engage with the specific experiences and materials which teachers offer them. The language classroom where communication is the objective would have to include at least as many learner-centred as teacher-centred activities. What happens

in the classroom must involve the learner and must be judged in terms of its effects on him (Morrow, 1981).

It is now widely accepted that education must be ultimately concerned not just with teaching but learning. Learning becomes to a large extent the learners' responsibility. The teacher can help, advise, and teach, but only the learner can learn. It has been suggested that you learn to do by doing. Only by practising communicative activities will the learner learn to communicate.

CHAPTER 5

METHOD OF RESEARCH

5.1 Introduction

The methodology in this study is discussed under four main headings: design, subjects, instrumentation, data collection procedure and analysis. The aim of this chapter is, therefore, to discuss:

- the design used for this study;
- the characteristics of the subjects;
- the instruments that were used as well as their validity;
- how the data were collected, and
- the statistical techniques used in this study.

5.2 Design

A descriptive design was used in this study, which means that the aim was not to generalise the findings beyond the confines of the study (cf. Ary et al., 1990). The aim was merely to describe how the communicative approach is implemented and perceived by teachers in the Mmabatho education region of the North-West Province. The design can also be regarded as a cross-sectional one-shot study.

5.3 Subjects

A total number of 30 teachers (N=55), randomly selected, teaching English as a second language in the Mmabatho education region of the North-West Province were included in the study. Fifteen of these teachers were also randomly chosen to participate in interview. The researchers is convinced that the study satisfied the basic sampling procedures in that the area to be covered was clearly demarcated, the test population was identified, and the random sample selected was representative of

the total accessible teacher population in the rural areas of the North-West Province.

5.4 Instrumentation

A pilot study indicated that the teachers were capable of expressing their attitudes and ways of implementing the communicative approach. A questionnaire, designed by the researcher, was given to the subjects at the beginning of the second semester in 1995 in order to determine the extent of their knowledge of the communicative approach, their attitude toward the approach as well as the manner in which the approach is implemented in their respective classrooms. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions in order to guide teachers as well as to elicit their own ideas and ways of implementation. The questionnaire has content and face validity.

Interviews were also conducted with fifteen teachers in order to consolidate the findings and conclusions reached. The aim of the interviews was the illumination of issues raised in the questionnaire, namely an assessment of the teachers' knowledge of the communicative approach, attitudes and perspective of their classroom practice. The questions were kept as few and as short as possible to avoid boredom.

5.5 Data collection procedure and analysis

Having secured the permission of the District Manager and the principals of schools, the researcher circulated the questionnaire in person (to ensure a 100% return rate) during the beginning of the second semester in 1995. The interviews were conducted with the selected teachers, chosen randomly, approximately a week after they had completed the questionnaire.

The data were analysed by means of descriptive statistics (e.g., frequency counts) for the closed-ended questions. A descriptive summary of the open-ended questions as well as the answers to the interviews was also included (cf. Tables 1-4).

5.6 Conclusion

According to researchers (cf. Abraham & Vann, 1987; Bachman, 1990) the design of a study is very important because many have "failed" as a result of methodological failure (e.g. inappropriate use of statistical techniques, failure to define concepts, inappropriate data collection procedures).

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter is devoted to the presentation and discussion of the results of the analysed data. The aim is to provide an overview of the second language teachers', in the Mmabatho education region of the North-West Province, knowledge of the communicative approach, their attitude towards the use of the approach as well as the manner in which the approach is implemented in their respective classrooms.

6.2 Results

The results are presented according to four main categories, namely knowledge, attitude, implementation and problems experienced (cf. chapter 1). In order to ensure a logical discussion the closed-questions are addressed first, and this is followed by a discussion of the open-ended questions and the responses to the interviews.

6.2.1 Knowledge

Table 1 presents the results (closed questions) of the assessment of the teachers' knowledge of the communicative approach.

Table 1: Teacher responses - knowledge

Closed questions	Percentages	
	No	Yes
1.1 Do you know what is expected of you when using the communicative approach?	40	60
1.2 During your teacher training course, do you think that the content you were taught was relevant to what is now expected of you?	55	45
1.3 In your English class, do you always insist upon grammatical accuracy during the learner's communication process?	15	85
1.4 In your view should language teaching be more oriented towards communication than formal instruction and error correction?	35	65

An analysis of the closed questions revealed that 60% of the teachers were sure they knew what was expected of them when using the communicative approach. However, 85% of the teachers also indicated that they insisted upon grammatical accuracy in their class, while 65% indicated that they thought language teaching should be oriented towards communication. The results seem to indicate a slight discrepancy in the knowledge of the teachers in that although they believe communication is important, they still focus heavily on grammar (rules and drills). It is also clear that these teachers felt

that their training courses did not adequately prepare them for their tasks in the communicative classroom.

An analysis of the open-ended question and the interviews indicated that the teachers were not really sure, in the opinion of the researcher, what the communicative approach entails. This is in direct opposition to the results found on the questionnaire where 60% of the teachers indicated that they knew what the communicative approach entailed. For example, some of the responses included the following:

When using the communicative approach there should be no focus on grammar.

Teachers should do less talking.

Students must participate in role plays and dialogues.

Students must play games in the class.

We should focus only on teaching speaking.

In essence, most of the answers are not too far off the point. However, the use of the communicative approach does not mean that explicit grammar teaching should be avoided. The focus is on **discovering** grammar. Behind this strategy lies the recognition that the learners may well have "understood" more about the language than they, or the teacher, can put into words. If the new language were introduced in the form of an apparently all-embracing rule from the teacher, this would convey the unspoken message that the learners had nothing further to understand about the language point and simply needed to practise it. If, on the other hand, talking about grammar is postponed until the learners themselves can contribute by bringing to light

what they already in some sense "know", the unspoken message is that the process of acquiring the new knowledge is one which takes place inside them and over which they have some control (cf. section 3.2.2.3).

When using the communicative approach it does not mean that the teacher should only focus on teaching speaking only. Communicative language teaching involves encouraging learners to take part in, and reflect on, communication in as many different contexts as possible (cf. section 3.2.1).

The results of this section seem to indicate that most of these teachers have a fairly "limited" and "narrow" view of what the communicative approach actually entails. An understanding (i.e., knowledge) of the communicative approach and its characteristics is imperative if teachers are to implement the approach effectively.

6.2.2 Attitude

Table 2 focusses on the attitudes of the teachers toward the use of the communicative approach.

Table 2: Teacher responses - attitude

Closed questions	Percentages	
	No	Yes
2.1 Do you support the idea that pupils should be encouraged to talk to each other in the classroom?	60	40
2.2 Do you like using the communicative approach	50	50
2.3 Do you think that it is possible for the teacher who is comfortable with the traditional audiolingual approach to shift to the communicative approach?	75	25

The results of the closed questions seem to indicate that the teachers have a fairly mixed attitude with regard to the use of the communicative approach. The responses to question 2.1 indicate that most teachers are still apprehensive in terms of allowing students to communicate freely with each other in the language classroom. This might be as a result of their fear of losing control and also the fact that most of the teachers felt that it meant that they were not doing their work properly. The responses to question 2.3 are interesting in that they indicate that the teachers who were comfortable with their traditional way of doing things (i.e., using traditional grammar exercises and focusing only on structure) felt that they would have a difficult time adopting the use of the more communicative approach, where the focus is

more on meaning and naturalistic communication. It seems as if teachers like to stick with an approach that works for them and with which they feel comfortable.

The results of the open-ended questions as well as the interviews indicate that many of the teachers disliked using the communicative approach, because they felt they couldn't cope with the unpredictability of the interactions that can occur when students are given a free reign in terms of what they are allowed to say and also how they say it. For example, the teachers indicated that they couldn't respond to all the questions immediately. They needed time to think, because they wanted to translate from their mother tongue.

These responses seem to indicate that proficiency in the target language may be an important requirement for teachers using the communicative approach. They need to feel at ease, be able to communicate with ease, and to cope with discussing a broader range of facts about language use than they are accustomed to.

6.2.3 Implementation

Table 3 reflects the responses to two closed-questions which were aimed at establishing the actual implementation, if any, of the communicative approach in the classrooms of these ESL teachers.

Table 3: Teacher responses - implementation

Closed questions	Percentages	
	No	Yes
3.1 Do you ever ask questions which encourage reference skills?	95	5
3.2 In your English class, do you ever use the learners' mother tongue to explain or clarify a point?	45	55

An analysis of the closed questions revealed that 95% of the teachers do not encourage the use of reference skills and that most of them make use of their mother tongue to clarify points for the students. This once again seems to indicate that the teachers have a problem with their command of the target language and that they are afraid or apprehensive to use activities which requires students to give or formulate various different answers.

Their responses to the open-ended questions (cf. Appendix A) as well as the questions formulated during the interviews revealed a "narrowness" in terms of what was expected of them when implementing the communicative approach. For example, one of the responses is worth quoting: "I ask students to recite a dialogue which they had to memorize at home". Teachers also mentioned that they use the "communicative activities" (e.g., dialogues, etc.) they find in the textbooks. However, when one looks at the activities provided in the textbooks it is immediately noticeable that the content of

what is said by the learners is controlled at every point by the book: make a question using these prompts; answer these questions about the text; read this dialogue, and so on. Even when pair work is used, the learners never choose **what** to say, they simply work out how to say what they are told to say.

Responses to the question types used in their classes showed that the questions were intended to test knowledge about the language and did not reflect the learner's ability to use the language. The questions asked included the following:

- * change the sentences into past tense;
- * fill in the missing words;
- * underline the wrong words and give the correct meaning, and
- * what is passive voice?

It is clear that most of these teachers still seem to test traditionally, while attempting to teach communicatively.

6.2.4 Problems experienced

Table 4 focusses on the perceived problems of the teachers with regard to the use and implementation of the communicative approach.

Table 4: Teacher responses - problems experienced

Closed questions	Percentages	
	No	Yes
4.1 Are your learners always willing to participate in the classroom activities such as discussions and debates?	90	10
4.2 Is there any relationship between what learners learn in your class and what they experience outside the classroom?	75	25
4.3 Do you think that the present classroom seating arrangement where learners sit in rows allows for effective communication?	80	20
4.4 Does it take you long to prepare for your class when the communicative approach is to be used?	5	95

An analysis of the closed questions indicated that most teachers (e.g., 95%) felt that because it was so time consuming to prepare for the class (e.g., group work had to be planned, role cards had to be prepared, etc.), they would rather stick to what worked easiest for them. The students lack of participation in communicative activities is another aspect which supports these teachers' point of view that it is time consuming and doesn't work. However, implicit in these responses it would seem as if there is also a lack

of persistence on the part of the teachers (i.e., if something doesn't work once, it will never work).

An analysis of the open-ended questions and the interviews also highlighted the following aspects as potential hindrances to the use and implementation of the communicative approach:

- * overcrowding in classrooms,
- * lack of teaching aids,
- * unwillingness of students to participate in discussions,
- * teacher unpreparedness,
- * lack of parental support in terms of using the second language at home, and
- * no relationship between what learners learn in class and what they experience outside the class.

Overall the results seem to indicate that most of the teachers in the rural areas of the North-West Province have a very "basic and inaccurate" view of the communicative approach, what it entails, how to implement it and especially how to prepare for communicative classes. Various reasons for this may be given. However, among the most common seem to be the lack of information and assistance for these teachers. Many of them don't have tertiary training and as a result don't have access to the newest information. They merely receive a syllabus which gives an outline of what they have to cover. No information is given on how to teach and test communicatively. These teachers need to be re-trained and guided in their efforts toward the successful and correct implementation of the communicative approach. Perhaps most importantly, teachers may have to bring to light deeply-buried preconceptions about language teaching (mostly based on their own language

learning experiences at school and university), and to compare them openly with alternative possibilities that may be less familiar but perhaps make better pedagogic sense.

6.3 Conclusion

The research has shown that the teaching approach employed by most teachers in the rural areas of the North-West Province does not foster the development of communicative competence. The situation is unfortunate and is likely to result in a huge waste in terms of time, money, and effort as the desired innovations laid down in the Interim Core Syllabus do not become a reality.

Although some of the responses may appear simplistic and perhaps naive, they reflect these teachers' understanding of the communicative approach, their genuine feelings and attitude toward it and the manner in which they implement it in their classrooms.

CHAPTER 7

GUIDELINES FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

7.1 Introduction

The results of this study indicate that teachers in the rural areas of the North-West Province have disparate perceptions of what the communicative approach entails. It is also clear that the communicative approach is not implemented "adequately" and "accurately". The purpose of this chapter is, therefore, to provide some guidelines on how the most important problem areas identified with regard to the implementation of the communicative approach (cf. chapter 6) can be addressed by the teachers in their English classrooms.

7.2 Communicative activities

Richards and Rodgers (1986:76) state that the range of exercise-types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises enable learners to engage in communication, and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing, negotiation of meaning and interaction.

Before discussing some communicative activities, the following two English Second Language lessons are worth considering.

Lesson A

Teacher: Class, repeat: I am tall

Class: I am tall

Teacher: Substitute short

Class: I am short

Teacher: A mango

Class: I am a mango

Teacher: A banana

Class: I am a banana

(Ward, 1979:203).

Lesson B

A group discussion about corporal punishment has been underway for about ten minutes.

Student 1: You don't think corporal punishment in school is right but it's OK at home, right?

Student 2: No, I didn't say that. I said I am against hitting students too often.

Student 1: I don't understand you.

Student 2: The cane I am against, the slaps I am for.

Student 1: I think I'm beginning to see now

(Ward, 1979:204).

Of the two classrooms, in which lesson does the teacher promote true communication? In which lesson do learners discuss, initiate, clarify and expand on their ideas? Indeed, Lesson B offers learners the genuine opportunity to communicate in English.

It is however, tragic to realize that the situation in Lesson A is very common in rural schools of the North-West Province in spite of the fact that the Interim Core Syllabus for English Second Language is concerned with English as a means of communication.

Odendaal (1987) is of the view that if learners are going to learn by means of communication, the teacher must create the need to communicate, create a situation in which true communication can take place and give learners the language in which to communicate.

If, for example, the teacher wants learners to learn how to greet one another, he would greet them and let them greet one another. This suggests that in addition to acquiring the structures and language forms that will enable them to form correct sentences, learners must also learn how to use these forms appropriately in order to communicate with people. They should learn to recognize the speaker's intention and reply appropriately (cf. Odendaal, 1987).

As stated in chapter 4, learning is most effective when the learner is the initiator of the learning process. There is, therefore, a clear need for the

content of language teaching materials to involve the learner, to relate to his needs, interest, and moral concerns (cf. Scarcella & Oxford, 1992).

Ward (1979) recommends activities which build group spirit. He further points out the importance for learners to know each other in the classroom. To obtain this, he argues that learners can be paired where a list of both serious and humorous questions is used with one learner asking questions while the other answers them. Later on learners may exchange roles and the one who answered will have a chance to ask questions.

Ward (1979:24) gives the following samples of questions:

- * if you could be an animal, what kind will you be and why?
- * tell me three activities you are good at.
- * tell me three things wrong with your country today.

Lewis and Hill (1985) assert that once an activity has been introduced, the teacher must be prepared to keep quiet. Learners should not be interrupted unnecessarily while they are preparing something.

It must not be forgotten that silence also has a valuable part to play in language lessons. The silent struggle to understand or recall, is a natural part of language learning. When learners are silently thinking, collecting their thoughts and the teacher speaks, it is argued that their concentration becomes disturbed. On the contrary, Lewis and Hill (1985) further mention that carefully organized "noise" does not mean disorder or time wasting. This suggests that a concerted effort should be made to increase the amount of learners talking time in the classroom.

In conducting a discussion group, Williams (1984) mentions that the teacher may present a problem to the learners. In small groups, learners discuss the possible solutions which they then present to the class for comparison or further discussion. During the small-group interaction, the teacher should act as facilitator and at the end may summarize group comment or give other possible solutions.

The following discussion group questions, which could be given to advanced learners, are found to be thought provoking.

THE CHEATING LEARNER

(Use to practise modals should, must, and so on).

Each learner is to imagine himself as a teacher at a school. The school policy is that any learner caught cheating will be expelled. While he is giving a final examination to a large class, the teacher sees a learner copying from notes on paper concealed in his hand. The learner is a friend of the teacher. The learners (as imagined teachers) are limited to five courses of action:

- * ignore the cheating learner
- * quickly ask him to stop cheating
- * take the notes and announce to the class that someone has been cheating and say that if it happens again the learner will be expelled
- * remove the learner from the test and explain to the class the reason for doing so.
- * proceed as in 4 and report the learner to the principal, which means expulsion from the school

(Williams, 1984:193).

Williams (1984) further suggests that after the learners understand the problem, they should vote by secret ballot for the course of action they would choose. The results should not be released until later. The group is then divided into small discussion groups to arrive at a consensus in the usual way, and finally, the presenter explains to the class the rationale for the group's decision. The teacher as a facilitator should circulate and assume an opposite, negative or unpopular position for the sake of argument during the discussions.

7.3 Improving learner participation

The results of this study indicate that one of the problems experienced by teachers when trying to implement the communicative approach is the unwillingness of learners to participate in class discussions and debates.

Ward (1979) argues that learners readily accept the convention of speaking to their teacher in the second language, but to talk to their friends and classmates in a language which none of them speaks at home, is to most of them acutely embarrassing and ridiculous.

Boshoff (1977) recommends that in order to get around this understandably awkward situation, the teacher should divide his class into a number of heterogeneous groups consisting of those who are weak, average and good. By getting every alternate couple sitting in their chairs to turn around and face the couple behind them, the class is quickly and almost soundlessly divided into pairs of learners facing one another. The teacher will seat the learners beforehand in such a way that a heterogeneous grouping system is possible. Later in this chapter (cf. section 6.3.1) group work is discussed in detail.

Lewis and Hill (1985) argue that when the teacher spends some time at the end of the lesson asking learners if they enjoyed the lesson or not and, more importantly, why they have, or have not, can be very rewarding. They assert that such questions demonstrate to the learners that they are important in the learning process, and that the teacher is interested in them both as language learners and as people.

Long explanations of classroom activities should be avoided, but teachers should constantly be alert to the fact that learners will work more happily and effectively if the purpose of the activity is clear to them. The more the learners feel involved in the process of learning, the more successful and enjoyable they will find it (cf. Lewis & Hill, 1985).

7.4 Integration of skills

According to Littlewood (1981) one of the major activities in communicative language teaching is functional communication activities. He argues that functional communication activities include tasks such as learners comparing sets of pictures and noting similarities and differences, working out a likely sequence of events in a set of pictures, discovering missing features in a map or picture and so on.

Language learning is a complex process, usually involving the interplay of listening, speaking, reading and writing. This means that, even when the focus of a particular lesson is on the development of a specific language skill, the other skills should, whenever possible, also feature in the lesson.

Odendaal (1987) is of the view that within the communicative framework lessons will not be divided rigidly into reading, writing, spelling and so on.

According to Odendaal (1987) the point of organizing will be the function that will be taught, such as apologizing where all the skills will be integrated around that function.

The following plan as proposed by Odendaal (1987) illustrates how all the skills can be integrated in the activities used to teach a function such as apologizing.

Activity	Skill practised
Listen to dialogue of someone apologizing	Listening
Role-play learners apologize to one another - reply to apology	Speaking
Write a note of apology - learn to spell certain words	Writing
Play a game	Speaking

(Odendaal, 1987:28).

The crucial factor in the communicative classroom as stated by Ellis (1990) is the extent to which the learners control classroom discourse. Ellis states that a study conducted found that a group of junior school children produced language marked by a rich vocabulary complexity and a range of grammatical structures when the teacher ceased to control the moment-by-moment progress of discussion.

Cathcart (1986) also notes that situations in which the learners had control of talk, were characterized by a wide range of communicative acts and syntactic structures. However, the situation where the teacher had control seemed to

produce single word utterances and short phrases. This evidence suggests that the where interaction is not restricted to short responses to teachers' questions language ability develops more fully.

It therefore indicates that the teacher should be well versed in theory and proceed to test it in his day-to-day practical activities in the classroom. On the other hand, if teachers remain ignorant of current thought and findings, the chances of success in the implementation of innovations are minimized.

Long and Sato (1983) suggest that the knowledge by itself is no guarantee of successful implementation of communicative teaching. They maintain that even when teachers understand and show commitment to the approach, activities they employ in their lessons are only superficially communicative, but on deeper examination prove to be essentially traditional in orientation.

7.5 Communicative teaching techniques

7.5.1 Group work

Lewis and Hill (1985) argue that in developing strategies for maximising the amount of learners talking time, activities in the language classroom can be performed by learners working in groups. According to them, learners should be able to say what they feel and think in groups in order to share their ideas with others. Used in this way, it is hoped that group work will be valuable for learners in as much as they will be able to see not only the way other people regard information but also how they interpret it.

According to Odendaal (1987) organization of group work is a demanding task for teachers. To avoid group work deteriorating into chaos, the teacher

should plan very carefully, prepare aids and train learners to know exactly what they have to do.

Odendaal (1987:32-33) gives the following guidelines for the organization of groups:

- * Groups should not consist of more than five learners.
- * Clever and weak learners must be spread evenly throughout the groups.
- * Each group should be given a name to make it easily identifiable, and a permanent place in the classroom so that no time is wasted when the class is divided into groups.
- * The furniture should, where possible, be arranged in such a way that learners can quickly form groups.
- * Each group should have a group leader who will act as a link between the teacher and the group.
- * Leadership should rotate so that all learners get a chance to take the lead.

Pair work as a form of group work on small scale is easier to organize and control than large groups (e.g., 80). The other advantage is that it produces more learner communication because instead of one out of five, one out of two learners have the chance to speak.

7.6 Classroom arrangement

The questionnaire also revealed that the traditional classroom arrangement where the teacher stands in front of the class with learners sitting in rows all facing the teacher, inhibits interaction amongst learners.

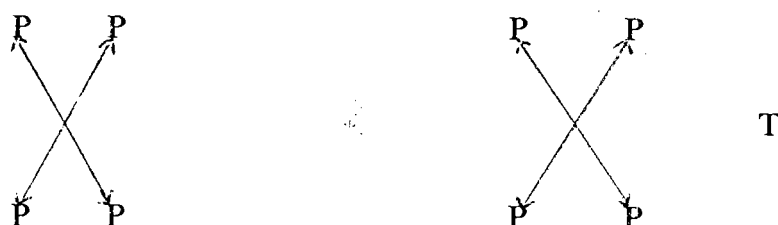
In order to achieve more language interaction, Lewis and Hill (1985) argue that a different classroom management has to be found which will allow learners to communicate with one another easily.

Odendaal (1987:26-27) illustrated classroom arrangements as follows:

The traditional classroom arrangement



Recommended classroom arrangement



The seating arrangement should suggest that learners are encouraged to talk to each other, at the same time, it should allow for the removal of the teacher from a central, dominant role during certain activities (cf. Lewis & Hill, 1985).

7.7 Instructional materials

The questionnaire revealed that one of the problems experienced by teachers, when trying to implement the communicative approach, was the lack of teaching aids or materials at schools. However, lack of learning resources should not serve as an excuse for the teacher not to teach communicatively. The learning material includes anything which can be used to facilitate learning, such as pictures, posters, flash cards, dictionaries, video tapes, and others.

It is very important to note that teaching aids cannot replace the teacher, as the teacher's role in the classroom is very important (e.g., facilitator, councillor, etc.). Lewis and Hill (1985) argue that when properly used, materials will probably influence the quality of classroom interaction and language use. They caution that teaching aids are only aids if they help, and they should not be used only for the sake of using them.

7.8 Conclusion

In this chapter some of the activities and techniques that are used in communicative teaching have been discussed, although not exhaustively. The second language teacher should therefore adapt techniques and activities to suit the needs of his learners and constantly be on the lookout for that which will enable him to achieve his objectives.

Teachers should remember that not all learners learn at the same rate and not all of them work well in groups. Whenever possible they should, therefore, attempt to create situations where all learning styles are accommodated. That is, opportunities for private, individual work should be

provided as well as opportunities for group discussion and other collaborative learning.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

8.1 Conclusion

The objective of this study was to evaluate teachers' implementation of and reaction to the communicative approach to language teaching, with a view to identifying problems experienced in the implementation of the approach by teachers in the Mmabatho education region in the North-West Province.

Believing in the centrality of the teacher's role in the implementation of educational innovations, the study focused on the teachers' knowledge and attitude towards the approach. Insight into these aspects was gained through the random circulation of thirty questionnaires as well as interviews conducted with some of the teachers.

The study found that most teachers living in these areas do not use the communicative approach effectively and appropriately. This suggests that the learners are not being prepared for effective communication in our multi-lingual society as recommended by the Interim Core Syllabus.

The available evidence draws us to the regrettable realisation that the implementation of the communicative approach is failing in the schools of the Mmabatho education region in the North-West Province. Saddening still is the realisation that if this scenario prevails in these schools, the solution to the problem will remain beyond reach for some time in the foreseeable future.

8.2 Recommendations for future research

The immediate challenge facing researchers and educationists is, therefore, to identify the causes and raise suggestions on how to rectify and improve the prevailing disturbing situation in these rural schools before the crisis reaches alarming proportions.

This is made all the more imperative by the choice of English as a medium of instruction in most schools in the Mmabatho region. It has been repeatedly shown that the student's ability in the medium of instruction determines and affects performance in other subjects taken in that medium. Research has also shown that general academic performance is to some measure a product of the language competence of the individual learner. Webb (1986) is of the opinion that poor command of the language invariably implies poor cognitive functioning.

It is significant that more research should be done on the role played by the culture of the target group in facilitating or hampering the implementation of the communicative approach. Learner's participation in class discussions and debates was shown to be a factor in their preparedness to communicate.

From the teachers' responses, it was evident that they perceived learners' resistance as responsible for their lack of communicative competence. It is therefore important also to examine the reasons and effects of a negative attitude towards the acquisition of the second language.

The quotation by Nuttal and Murray (1986 : 22) seems to summarize the situation in the schools in the Mmabatho region:

Pupils in Black Schools in South Africa spend many hundreds of hours over a number of years attending classes in Second Language, and yet the success of these learners in acquiring communicative competence in these languages are extremely modest, and are certainly not commensurate with the time and effort expended on language teaching programmes.

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APPENDIX A

QUESTIONNAIRE TO BE COMPLETED BY ENGLISH SECOND LANGUAGE TEACHERS

1. You are kindly requested to complete this questionnaire as accurately and truthfully as possible.
2. The information you and other teachers give will be used in an English Second Language research study
3. To ensure anonymity and confidentiality, names are not required.
4. When answering the questions, place a cross (X) in the appropriate space and make brief comments where necessary.

PART 1

1.1 Briefly define what you think the Communicative Approach entails.

1.2 Do you know what is expected of you when using the communicative approach?

No Yes

1.3 During your teacher training course, do you think that the content you were taught was relevant to what is now expected of you?

No Yes

1.4 In your English class, do you always insist upon grammatical accuracy during the learners' communication process?

No Yes

1.5 In your view, should language teaching be more oriented towards communication than formal instruction and error correction?

No Yes

PART 2

- 2.1 Do you support the idea that pupils should be encouraged to talk to each other in the classroom?

No Yes

- 2.2 Do you like using the communicative approach?

No Yes

- 2.3 Do you think that it is possible for the teacher who is comfortable with the traditional audiolingual approach to shift to the communicative approach?

No Yes

- 2.4 If you like using the communicative approach can you briefly state the reasons why you like using it?

- 2.5 If you do not like using the communicative approach, can you briefly state the reasons why you do not like using it?

PART 3

3.1 Do you ever ask questions which encourage reference skills?

No Yes

3.2 In your English class, do you ever use the learners' mother tongue to explain or clarify a point?

No Yes

3.3 Mention any kind of activity you use in your English classroom (e.g., learners mechanically repeat in chorus what the teacher says).

3.4 Give examples of the types of questions you include in your English test and/or examination papers (e.g., change the following sentences into passive voice).

- 3.5 What do you think can be done by a teacher who is willing to implement the communicative approach, but does not know how to go about implementing it?

PART 4

- 4.1 Are your learners always willing to participate in the classroom activities such as discussions and debates?

No Yes

- 4.2 Is there any relationship between what learners learn in your class and what they experience outside the classroom?

No Yes

- 4.3 Do you think that the present classroom seating arrangement where learners sit in rows allows for effective communication?

No Yes

- 4.4 Does it take you long to prepare for your class when the communicative approach is to be used?

No Yes

4.5 What do you think are the problems that might hinder the implementation of the communicative approach.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR COOPERATION.

SUMMARY

Whatever the situation may be as regards actual teaching practices, communicative language teaching is well established as the dominant theoretical model in English language teaching. Despite recurrent attempts to identify the characteristics of the communicative approach many teachers remain somewhat confused about what exactly communicative language teaching is.

The purpose of this study was to evaluate teachers' knowledge of the communicative approach, their attitude toward the use of the approach as well as their implementation of the communicative approach.

The results of this study indicated the following:

- * teachers teaching in the schools of the Mmabatho education region in the North-West Province have a very "basic" knowledge of the communicative approach;
- * teachers' attitude toward the use of the communicative approach is mixed; and
- * the implementation of the communicative approach is not done effectively and efficiently.

The results, therefore, highlight the need to raise suggestions on how to rectify and improve the prevailing situation. There is a great need to ensure that content and methods of language teaching are continuously and regularly reviewed for both pre-service and in-service teacher training programmes.

OPSOMMING

Wat ook al die situasie met berekking tot die werklike onderwyspraktyk mag wees, kommunikatiewe taalonderrig is goed gevestig as die dominante teoretiese model vir Engelsse taalonderrig. Ondanks herhaaldelike pogings om kenmerke van die kommunikatiewe benadering te identifiseer, is daar menige onderwysers wat blyk om ietwat verward te wees oor wat presies kommunikatiewe taalonderrig is.

Die doel van hierdie studie was om onderwysers se kennis, hul houding, asook hul implementering van die kommunikatiewe benadering van taalonderrig te evalueer.

Die resultate van hierdie studie het die volgende getoon:

- * onderwysers se kennis van die kommunikatiewe benadering is baie "basies";
- * onderwysers se houding teenoor die gebruik van die kommunikatiewe benadering is gemengd; en
- * onderwysers in die Mmabatho onderwys omgewing in die Noord-Wes Provinsie se implementering van die benadering is nie effektief en doelmatig nie.

Die gegewe beklemtoon die noodsaaklikheid daarvan om voorstelle te maak oor hoe om die heersende situasie reg te stel en te verbeter. Dit is 'n ernstige noodsaaklikheid om te verseker dat die inhoud en metode van ons opleidingsprogramme vir taalonderrig deurlopend en gereeld hersien moet word vir beide die opleiding en die indiensopleiding van onderwysers.