

Communicative Approach in the Teaching-Learning Process of English as a Foreign Language

Enfoque Comunicativo en el Proceso de Enseñanza-Aprendizaje del Inglés como Lengua Extranjera

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Jairo Vicente Sánchez Freire
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador
Sede Ambato
jsanchez@pucesa.edu.ec

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7903-493X>

Osmany Pérez Barral
Pontificia Universidad Católica del Ecuador
Sede Ambato
operez@pucesa.edu.ec

 <https://orcid.org/000-0002-4735-483X>

Summary

This article aims to propose an English language teaching methodology based on everyday contexts, through the communicative approach. Additionally, a theoretical review is made on this topic, comparing it to the grammar-translation method, where the effectiveness of the communicative approach in the English teaching and learning process is analyzed. The research is descriptive and explanatory and determines how teachers develop traditional methods as applied to English teaching. With this, the practical experience observed demonstrates currently that the application of the communicative approach is used minimally, leading to limitations in the development of the process for teaching English language. The method proposed here encourages the use of meaningful activities, where students are exposed to real situations in different contexts within the classroom. The results are associated with a positive change when the communicative method is incorporated into the learning process and teaching of English.

Key words: communicative approach; grammar-translation method; teaching and learning process; teaching methods; foreign language.

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Resumen

El artículo tiene como objetivo proponer una enseñanza del idioma inglés basada en contextos de la vida cotidiana, mediante el enfoque comunicativo. Asimismo, se hace una revisión teórica sobre este tema, comparado con el método de traducción gramatical, donde se analiza la efectividad del enfoque comunicativo en el proceso de enseñanza-aprendizaje del inglés. La investigación es de tipo descriptiva-explicativa, donde se determina que, los docentes desarrollan métodos tradicionales aplicados a la enseñanza del inglés. En este sentido, la experiencia práctica demuestra en la actualidad, que, la aplicación del enfoque comunicativo es mínima, limitándose el desarrollo del proceso de enseñanza del idioma inglés. Este método, fomenta el uso de actividades significativas, donde, los estudiantes están expuestos a situaciones reales en contextos diferentes del aula. Los resultados, se asocian a un cambio positivo a partir de métodos comunicativos en el aprendizaje y enseñanza del inglés

Palabras clave: enfoque comunicativo; método de traducción gramatical; proceso de enseñanza; métodos de enseñanza; lengua extranjera.

Introduction

Education is constantly evolving as teaching methodologies and practices are adapted to constant modernization, where

technological aspects are part of the structural changes that affect both the life of human beings and the ways of teaching today. With this in mind, some teachers have transformed their way of teaching by adopting new methods that involve the student as a participatory entity in the acquisition of knowledge.

In this regard, the use and effective application of teaching and learning methods, allows educational practices to meet the expected results within teacher capacity, given that, teaching is one of the professions that involves a high degree of personal responsibility. Therefore, every academic subject requires a methodology that can be adapted to its reality, and for this reason, teaching English language requires skills and practice so that students can acquire and apply knowledge into effective practice.

In this sense, the authors of this article agree with Bermúdez and González (2011), who corroborate, that communicative competence plays a predominantly strategic role, both individually and socially, and constitutes a requirement to promote not only adequate but also productive relationships. In this way, Likaj (2015); Yurovsky (2018), propose that, without the need of formal grammatical structure, children learn the meaning of thousands of words through daily interaction with their environment and even while running in the street. Furthermore, these authors point out that, since students are not hindered by the obstructive teaching of lexical or grammatical structure, they develop a more

participatory interaction between the teacher and other students.

The above mentioned teaching conundrum, has been sustained from the nineteenth century until the present time (XXI century), since the methodological practices of the object of study (here being English), has varied in accordance with the needs of the teaching and learning process, it should be noted and appreciated that teachers have applied different types of methods and methodological tools in the development of this English learning process, bearing in mind the epistemological and social aspects that may be affecting them.

Methodology

The development of the theoretical study is based on an explanatory descriptive research, since, it allows to describe and explain the different traditional and communicative methods, with the purpose, of reaching the explanation of the diverse skills that can be achieved in the teaching-learning process, using for it, the qualitative approach and the documentary analysis method, proposed by Henández Sampieri, Fernández Collado and Baptista Lucio (2010).

Likewise, the analysis-synthesis method was used, with the objective of deepening the theories exposed by the consulted authors, leaving explicit, the own criterion of the authors of this study. In this sense, the study allowed to give an approach to the proposed topic, from the Ecuadorian context in its teaching-learning process. At the same time, the assimilation

process that students could achieve in each method used by teachers was taken into consideration.

The grammar-translation method

One of the best known approaches is the traditional method or also called the grammar-translation method, which first came about in the 19th century, being the first method used in the teaching of foreign languages. This teaching method is based on the detailed analysis of grammar rules, including their exceptions, and then applies the acquired knowledge to the translation of sentences and texts. Indeed, in the translation method, classes are mostly given in the learner's native language with little use and practice of the foreign language being learned. Vocabulary is also taught in the form of lists, and explanations by the teacher focused primarily on grammar rules (Cabrera-Mariscal 2014).

In addition, Li and Song (2007); Scrivener (2011); Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2013); Richards and Rodgers (2014); point out that, the grammar translation method began in Europe from about the 1840s until the 1940s, and it continues to be used in some parts of the world today. They assert that, this method is characterized by a traditional translation approach due to the abundant use of the student's native language in the teaching and learning process. Additionally, there is evidence of excessive use of reading texts and their translations; where, the exercises and evaluation are mostly about writing skills, limiting the practice of oral and auditory communication skills.

Regarding the above grammar based approach, Cabrera Mariscal (2014), points out that, the main characteristics of the grammar-translation method include: learning the rules of grammar and its application in the translation of words or sentences from one language to another, where, the vocabulary of the foreign language is learned through vocabulary lists of isolated words. Similarly, instead of reading written materials in the foreign language being learned, reading materials are translated directly and then discussed in class. In addition, little attention is paid to pronunciation, as grammar is taught through long explanations in the student's native language and classes are based on reading and writing rather than speaking and listening.

Furthermore, examples of exercises used in the grammar-translation method, are: translating texts into the learner's native language, asking questions in the native language about a text written in English, exercises of antonyms and synonyms, and filling in the missing words in a series of sentences (fill in the blank activities, or cloze activities). Thus, the role of the teacher is to impart knowledge, give the necessary instructions, and correct mistakes made by the students, who play a passive role in their learning and are limited to receiving the knowledge transmitted by the teacher and carrying out the proposed activities individually.

The grammar-translation method in Ecuador

In the literature consulted, it is noted that, in Ecuador there are curricular

reforms aimed at developing English language learning that include characteristics of the grammar-translation method, such as the program called the Curriculum Reform Aiming for the Developing of the Language of English (CRADLE), where, in agreement with the British Council, the obligatory learning of English and other foreign languages (French) for secondary education began in 1992. The main objective of this project was to create a solid foundation of the English language that could continue to be developed in the future.

In addition, the Ministry of Education of Ecuador, in its official document on the new English as a Foreign Language curriculum in May 2015, states that: the English language policy is to be considered as an optional language (starting in grade 2) and compulsory in as of grade 8, with the aim of ensuring that secondary school graduates reach a B1 level. Since the implementation of this most recent curriculum, English has since been considered a subject with a high degree of difficulty for the student.

The studies consulted confirm that Ecuador is ranked 81 out of 100 countries with an average English knowledge score of 46.57/100 (Education First, 2019), demonstrating a very low level of language use and acquisition compared to other Latin American countries, many that stand out for high English scores such as Chile, Argentina, and Uruguay, among others. This corroborates that the curricular-based programs in Ecuador do not integrate fluency and naturalness as part of the development of the language. On the

contrary, the use of traditionalist methods has been the basis of English education, paying greater attention to the memorization of grammatic structures and concepts, which has limited the creativity and spontaneity of students when interacting in different contexts.

In this sense, it can be seen that a mixture of the native language and the foreign language (Spanish) is used, leading to a complex learning process. This is compounded by the fact that most students are not motivated to learn and use English language, which is why the authors of this article agree with Dornyei (2002), when he points out that this is a global problem because English classes have become a requirement in the Ecuadorian educational system.

Within the described framework, the lack of application of motivational methodological strategies related to the explanation and application of English in a real context is perceivable. Contrary to the Ecuadorian methodology, Dornyei (2014), defends the argument that motivation comes from personal and social contexts, requiring an analysis that synthesizes it through developments achieved in socio-cultural aspects. When done so, the communicative approach allows the teaching and learning process of the English language to be motivational, where students face situations related to the language through real communication. In this way, emphasis on grammar structure or memorized formulas is avoided, which is important as they do not reflect the practical use of the language.

The communicative approach

Regarding the communicative approach, Akkas & Coker (2016), explain that it was originally conceived at the end of the 1960s, when situational language teaching started to gain importance in Great Britain. Within the use of the communicative approach, the student becomes the main actor in the teaching and learning process, whereas the teacher becomes a guide (counselor) who stimulates the active and dynamic participation of the student by developing communicative competence in an effective way, based on the involvement and interaction of the student in real and everyday situations.

Consequently, Irmawati (2012), endorses that, the fundamental principles of the communicative approach, include: 1) Effective communication; 2) Learning language by using it to communicate; 3) Emphasis on meaning and appropriate use; 4) Emphasis on fluency and accuracy; 5) Use of authentic materials to reflect the real-life situation; and, 6) Integration of the four skills (speaking, writing, reading and listening). Likewise, Didenko & Pichugova (2016), point out that the communicative approach employs a communicative perspective in language pedagogy.

In response to the above, the communicative approach helps students gain the ability to make contact with others fluently, i.e. they can speak easily and express themselves confidently. In addition, they are able to share opinions on social issues concerning their environment. This is in agreement with Chun (2017), when

she explains that communicative competence can replace the traditional approach within the teaching and learning process.

Given the aspects addressed, the general objective is to propose an English language teaching methodology based on everyday contexts, through the communicative approach, which facilitates the analysis of efficient, and effective learning by students with the application of methodologies that are more contextualized to current events, as well as their use and application in everyday life.

Thus, the writings of Candlin (1976); Wilkins (1976); Widdowson (1978); Brumfit (1979); Keith Johnson (1979); among other linguists, such as the work of the Council of Europe (2011), have contributed significantly to the theoretical basis for the development of the communicative approach in language teaching; At the same time, the rapid application of this knowledge by textbook writers, and the rapid acceptance of these new principles by English language teaching specialists, curriculum development centers and even governments have added international significance to the communicative approach.

Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2014), establish that, there is a progressive demand worldwide for foreign language teaching programs that develop communication skills and competency in both teachers and students. They point out

that language teaching policies and practices, curricula, teaching approaches and assessment need to be regularly reviewed and updated in order to make the teaching and learning process more practical rather than rote.

Regarding what has been said so far, the communicative approach is part of the new teaching and learning methodologies applied in the educational field, since, as some authors stress, this approach differs didactically from traditional teaching, i.e. in direct learning, for the teacher-student relationship. With which it coincides with Canale (1980); Munby (1981); Canales y Swain (1996); Chang (2011); Canale (2014); Casado (2014); Duarte (2014); when they explain, how the communicative approach is based on a procedure or activities for its execution, highlighting some differences with the grammar-translation method (See table 1).

Tabla 1
Approaches To Teaching English

Traditional approach	Communicative approach
Teacher's expository speech, with verbalistic procedures, the learning is limited to repetition and memorization.	Makes real communication the focus of language learning.
The teacher is merely a provider of ready-to-use knowledge.	Provides opportunities for students to experience and apply their knowledge
He or she focuses on the results of learning rather than on the process itself.	Tolerant of students' mistakes, as they indicate that the student is developing his or her communicative competence.
The student is a recipient in the learning process.	Allows students to induce or discover grammatical rules in language practice
The authority of the teacher, who is the center of the teaching process, predominates.	Links the different skills, among them: speaking, reading and listening, since they are the ones that are most present in the real world.
Limited participation in the classroom.	Provides opportunities for students to develop accuracy and fluency

Source: Approaches and Methods in Languages Teaching. Richard and Rodgers (2014)

On the basis of the ideas set out above, Casado (2014), points out that, in order to have real interaction in the classroom, there must be a constant exchange of information between the teacher and the students, or among the students themselves; in other words, there must be practical communication. The author emphasizes that it is necessary to contribute to the creation of situations and participatory contexts through communicative activities, where students can interact and achieve real exchange of information, since the objective of good

communication is that the receiver understands what is being expressed.

Similarly, language can serve as a basis for developing curricula with communicative characteristics for language teaching. In this sense there is agreement with Wilkins (1976), when he states that, a language learner needs to understand and express communicative meanings, rather than memorize the structure of a language through traditional grammar and vocabulary formulas.

Thus, González (2009), states that, teachers should focus more on students

developing listening and speaking skills, so that, they are not afraid to express their ideas and can communicate in a fluent and understandable way, mastering their own discourse. Likewise, Bruner (1977), confirms that in order to express themselves enthusiastically and without fear, it is necessary for students to interact with their surroundings, stimulating oral and written language through the description of images, creation of texts, and interpretation of ideas.

The above is also in agreement with Duarte (2014) and Wan (2017) when they state that the teacher can play an overbearing role in the teaching and learning process, in which case, student participation becomes passive. Furthermore, they consider that, if there is not adequate guidance in the use of strategies that favor oral communication, students do not speak fluently. Thus, teachers who advocate the communicative approach, are expected to promote activities that develop group interaction in authentic situations, as well as communication amongst peers.

In this regard, with the emergence of the communicative approach as an innovative methodology, communication strategies have become the most important topic of research on language teaching, where emblematic figures such as Hymes (1972), Halliday (1975), and Chomsky (2012) stand out; among other recognized linguists, who point out that, the development of communicative knowledge is more important than the language structures themselves.

In turn, Arnold, Dornyei, & Pugliese (2015), indicate that most schools and teachers prefer to apply the communicative method rather than the grammar-translation or audio-lingual method. With rare exceptions, most people who decide to learn another language expect to be able to communicate with others, so adopting this methodology makes more sense with student goals in mind.

Therefore, in the communicative approach, it is fundamental to transmit to the student the contents and functions of the English language. That is, the real situations and places in which this language needs to be applied, for example: banks, airports, supermarkets, cinemas, and laundromats, among other places. That is why, the content that are given and taught, should correspond with the purpose of daily English use like buying clothes, food and other needs. This being said, it allows for the development of specific vocabulary to ask for and give information according to the context in which the student finds themselves.

On the other hand, Piscoya (2017), points out that at Universidad César Vallejo, the teaching of English has been problematic in certain ways, among which the following are of concern: lack of specialization of foreign language teachers, little training in English teaching methodology, and a lack of interest in knowing the learning styles of the student population. Considering these factors, it is necessary to create a proposal of a model that contains a didactic program based on the communicative approach that demonstrates that achievements in the

learning of English language can be reached when activities pertaining to the preferences and needs of the students are created to facilitate the learning of English language in a communicative context.

Communicative approach in writing skill

With regard to writing, Leiva, Pellón and Ferrer (2014), express that writing correctly includes a significant message and good use of language, that is, when writing, one communicates content and generates new ideas. In addition, the text should be organized, the audience is targeted, and it is very clear what effect the writer wants to achieve and manage with the language being used. Therefore, if the written message can be understood and their writing has the above mentioned characteristics, students will be deemed successful in written communication, which will have been achieved as part of an effective communicative approach.

In this regard, the communicative approach according to Bachman (1990), unlike the traditional approach, emphasizes the final product, where students are able to learn and apply the knowledge acquired by texts and teachers. Similarly, Likaj (2015), points out that the communicative approach enables students to develop their writing and then the ability to correct their writing appropriately, i.e. this approach allows the development of student knowledge and, at the same time, refines writing skills in a communicative way, focusing on the student as the creator, writer and transmitter of the message to the reader.

Communicative approach in oral skill

One of the problems in the teaching and learning process of English as a foreign language, is the ability to express thoughts through speech. In this sense, Rico, Montoya & Montiel (2016), consider it necessary to develop confidence in the student so that he or she is encouraged to actively participate in oral interactions. In this regard, González (2009), supports this fact by elaborating on how an infant begins to produce his native language without the intervention of specific grammatical or structural factors; on the contrary, the child must face the world around him, which generates the need to make himself understood and express his needs.

Moreover, the authors of the article agree with Roldán (2016), when he states that developing communicative competence and oral discursive competence or oral expression in students, is a matter that involves all those, who, in one way or another, are committed to the teaching of the language as a means of expressing feelings and ideas, that is, communication.

Additionally, Silva (2017), points out that, language is a tool for communication, since people communicate with each other to express their ideas and to understand the ideas of others as well. In general terms, communicative competence consists of general knowledge and skills underlying the use of the language, which enables native and non-native speakers to know when to speak and when to be silent, about what to speak, with whom, where, when and what to talk about.

The communicative approach in reading skill

In the communicative approach in reading, Piña (2019), states that in the teaching and learning of foreign languages, reading constitutes a fundamental instrument in the acquisition of knowledge, since it not only allows access to diverse sources of information, but also provides the opportunity to practice structures in a real context as well as enabling one to learn and expand one's own vocabulary. Similarly, through reading, students can reinforce the learning of other language skills, such as listening and writing.

In this regard, Brown (2012), states that the communicative approach emphasizes interaction as the means and purpose for learning a second or foreign language. This approach seeks to promote interactions between students in authentic communicative contexts, in order to motivate them to take part in their own learning process through the interaction of reading.

The communicative approach in listening skill

Similarly, Gilakjani & Ahmadi (2011), quoting Mendelsohn (1994), assert that, listening plays a significant role in communication, since, of the total time dedicated to communication, listening skills occupy 40-50%; speaking, 25-30%; reading, 11-16%; and writing, around 9%. In other words, the teaching of listening skills has been a neglected and poorly taught aspect of English in various teaching programs. Also, Tendiami (2017), explains

that, listening is generally shown as an individual activity where students work on their exercise themselves which can cause that students feel bored and decreasing their motivation in learning. In this sense, these authors emphasize that the communicative approach should be increasingly used in the teaching of English, highlighting the importance of developing students' communicative competencies within the teaching and learning process.

The communicative approach in Ecuador

The pedagogical practice of teaching English language in Ecuador, is influenced by the traditional methods of teaching and learning, such as the method of grammar-translation, which has limited the achievement of positive results in the acquisition of this foreign language in students. Therefore, as Soriano (2013) explains: the educational policies to be implemented, must be based on applicable methodologies that are in line with social reality and related to the global world.

What has been said so far, is in agreement with the analysis carried out by the Ministry of Education of Ecuador in 2012, when, within the national curriculum guidelines regarding the teaching of English, it created objectives organized into skills that established components of communicative competence to be mastered by the end of each school year in elementary and secondary education. This analysis considers the communicative approach for the teaching of English as a foreign language to be the only and official one.

Subsequently, Murga, Niama, Quinde, Tixi (2018), point out that, teaching English in Ecuador is an activity that requires unique skills and characteristics, as well as special training, which means that English teachers need permanent learning and constant updating by the Ministry of Education, which would allow, the teaching and learning process to be appropriately adapted to the national curriculum and to the conditions and needs of each school. As such, these adaptations must consider and review the elements within the communication approach and how best to implement them.

Similarly, the authors mentioned above, establish that there are not enough studies in Ecuador on the teaching of English based on the application of the communicative approach. It is evident that most public sector institutions continue to design traditional grammar and vocabulary curricula, where teaching methods do not include information that allows students to use the language in real communicative situations.

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Conclusions

The literature consulted confirms that teachers have to manage the teaching and learning methods of the English language based on daily life context, as well as on the socio-cultural conditions of the individual students being taught. Similarly, that quality in education is affected by policies that are not adapted to social reality, which limits the development of English language skills.

Likewise, English language teaching in Ecuador is influenced by traditionalist methodologies, which rely heavily on rote memorization. In this sense, the communicative approach is presented as an option that could improve the level of the English language being taught, allowing students to increase their ability to interact with the world around them, without the need for such heavy grammar structure based curriculums.

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