

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

# IMPACT OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH ON ADULT LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE; A SPECIAL FOCUS ON THE ADULTS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNING CONTEXTS

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### Abstract

Communicative Approach (CA), the reigning king in current language teaching contexts according to many researchers (Garni,2019), plays a vital role in the contexts of English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) locally and globally since its emergence in 1970s. At this crucial juncture, this study examines the impact of Communicative Approach on adult learners' performance in English as a second language contexts in higher education in Sri Lanka. A sample of 60 adult learners was considered for the case study conducted in an Advanced Technological Institute (ATI) and data were collected through two tests and a focused group interview. Written tests consisted of two individual tests. Data collected was analyzed by using SPSS package and percentages. The quantitative findings were derived from descriptive statistics and correlational analysis. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data collected through the focused group interview. Both quantitative and qualitative results accentuate that CA makes a positive impact on learner performance and communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Communicative approach, communicative competence, English as a second language contexts, English as a foreign language contexts, case study

## 1. Introduction

Communicative Approach (CA), firstly introduced in England in 1970s has been considered as the reigning king in the language learning contexts since its emergence. Scholars like Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson argue that communicative approach can have a positive impact on the learner performance since its main focus draws on developing communicative proficiency rather than other approaches which focus on mere mastery of structures. With the widespread acceptance it gained due to its innovativeness and emphasis on communication, most of the western countries and countries where English is spoken as a second language started to use it in the English language teaching classrooms (Ozevick, 2010). As a result of expansion of the English Language teaching learning practice in Sri Lanka, Communicative Approach gained acceptance rather than the methodologies such as Grammar Translation method, and Direct method which basically focused on practice of grammar structures. The emphasis is given on using it in almost all the teaching learning environments where students encounter many difficulties related to enhancement of performance and competence in English language. With the intention of reducing such difficulties of the students then existed Sri

Lankan Government adopted Communicative Approach to teaching English (National Institute of Education, 2001). And it expanded to higher education and tertiary education as well. Since English has been given prominence in the country's developmental process, educational policies of recent years have placed great importance on the teaching of English (Karunaratna, 1993) using applicable methods such as Communicative Approach. Nevertheless, some contrasting views are put forward by researchers both globally and locally on Communicative Approach through a number of qualitative and quantitative studies on its impact on learner performance and enhancement of proficiency in non-native English language learning environments. Findings of some researchers emphasize that CA is a very innovative methodology, aiming at improving students' communicative competence and performance. (Li, 1984; Liao, 2004; Jin, 2008; Irmawati, 2012; Garni, 2019). Contrastingly, some studies conducted locally and globally have revealed that it is not sufficient in addressing the needs of the ESL/EFL teaching learning environments and it should be merged with the Traditional Methods such as grammar Translation method, Audio Lingual method and etc., (Harvey, 1984; Incecay & Incecay, 2009). Some researchers have revealed that implementation of CA fully is almost impossible especially in Asian countries (Ozsevik, 2010). Furthermore, they have also identified certain barriers in the process of implementing CA in Asian countries (Hiep, 2007; Hu, 2002; Li, 1998) While teaching English for adult learners in advanced Technological institutions (ATII) the researcher observed that the adult learners were neither competent nor performed to the expected level. Therefore, at this crucial juncture, examining whether communicative approach can make a positive impact on learner performance and communicative competence had to be considered. It is an immensely significant question whether CA impacts on adults' performance and communicative competence.

## 2. Research questions

- How does Communicative Approach impact on learner performance?
- How does Communicative Approach impact on communicative competence of learners?

## 3. Methodology

This exploratory research takes a mix method approach which lends itself to both quantitative and qualitative approaches. It is a phenomenological study since human experience is examined. The 60 participants were selected for this case study from Diploma in English in ATI- Dehiwala through a purposive sampling technique. They were taught using Communicative activities such as roleplays, discussions, drama, pair work and group work at a maximum level during a period of one semester.

### 3.1 Two tests

The first individual test from two written tests (pre -test) was conducted prior to the implementation of Communicative Approach at a maximum level and the post-test was conducted at the end of the semester. Both individual tests were conducted to assess the students' individual performance to examine whether each of them has performed more effectively than in the pre -test. The components that were measured in the test included content, organization and language. The marks of all the tests were awarded without informing the students.

### 3.2 Focused group interview

The focus group interview was conducted selecting a group of ten participants from the total participants to examine whether they were able to improve their communicative competency. An interview was conducted to obtain a comprehensive idea of whether the students have gained an implicit and explicit knowledge of rules of grammar and knowledge of the rules of language use.

### 3.3 Data analysis

Data gathered through tests were analyzed using SPSS 16.0 software. The quantitative findings were derived from descriptive and a correlational analysis of the extent to which CA is used to teach students and the level of improvement students gained with regard to learner performance. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics and Pearson's r as a descriptor of the linear association between the two variables. Thematic analysis was used to analyze data gathered through focused group interview. Interview recording were transcribed and coding was done. Transcripts were read several times to generate themes. After reviewing the codes themes were generated and quotes which were congruent with the overarching themes were finalized.

## 4. Results

Descriptive analysis of the mean, median, standard deviation and correlation values are presented to show the difference between the pretest and the post test scores. Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics and of the scores for pretest and the post test. Table 1 describes the difference in the median

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest- 1st year

	Mean	Median	Std. deviation	Correlation coefficient(r)
Pre- test(individual)	3.33	3.00	1.030	0.45
Post-test (individual)	4.56	4.6	1.136	0.75

values between the pre-test and post-test scores obtained by the first years. The median of the total scores for the pre-test is 3.00. There is an increase in the median of the total scores in the post-test with a point average of 4.6. There is a significant difference between the scores of the pre-test and post-test. Correlation coefficient value for the pretest is 0.45 where as it has increased for the posttest with a value of 0.75 Table 2 describes the difference in the median values between the pre-test and

Table 2. Descriptive statistics for the pretest and posttest- second year

	Mean	Median	Std. deviation	Correlation coefficient(r)
Pre- test(individual)	3.35	3.10	1.040	0.46
Post-test (individual)	4.54	4.58	1.137	0.73

post-test scores obtained by the second years. The median of the total scores for the pre-test is 3.10. There is an increase in the median of the total scores in the post-test with a point average of 4.58. There is a significant difference between the scores of the pre-test and post-test. Correlation coefficient value for the pretest is 0.46 where as it has increased for the posttest with a value of 0.73 To answer the second research question results of the thematic analysis were considered. The analysis produced two main themes

- **CA- Enhanced Competence in grammar**

Majority of the participants reported that CA has given them the ability to understand and express meaning by producing and recognizing well- formed phrases and responses.

One participant stated:

SEWWANDI: I am really happy since I have developed my skill in using grammar components somewhat correctly than early days. I think this happened due to more opportunities we received to use grammar in the classroom.

SHAMARA: Now I know how to use parts of speech. I can write sentences correctly.

DILINI: Every day we practice grammar components. I think most of us are capable in using grammar correctly rather than during the last semester

Many participants emphasized that CA provided them with opportunities to practice and use grammatical components during classroom activities and as a result they were able to develop their grammar competence.

- **CA -Enhanced socio linguistic competence**

Many participants reported that Communicative Approach had given them many opportunities to speak in given circumstances related to different socio-cultural contexts and as a result they could use cultural rules appropriately and naturally during communicative acts.

SURANI: we practiced many activities and exchanged ideas with other members about things that take place outside the classroom. Mm..that means we acted out role plays ,drams on real life situations.

HASARANGA: we got to know specific vocabulary related to outside world, some cultural social rules and we felt like we were outside the classroom then.

SAYURI: I think that I developed my fluency to a certain extent. Now I can speak without stammering. I use language outside the classroom too.

CHAMODI: We improved our listening, reading, writing skills too

Participants expressed the way they had used the communicative activities to develop their awareness of cultural rules by practicing activities related different social contexts. Simultaneously they developed their overall skills like reading, writing, listening, speaking and vocabulary skills by engaging in real life activities.

## 5. Discussion

Consistent with the other international and local studies (Venderval,2008; Deckert, 2004, Ozevick,2010) the present study reveals that the Communicative approach is a very innovative methodology (Jin,2008) that can impact positively on learner performance and communicative competence. The present study reveals that Communicative Approach aims at real communication and the focus is on language to develop performance and communicative competence via group work, pair work, teacher facilitation and guide. In addition, CA provides opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency and link different skills such as speaking, reading writing and listening together as they occur in the real world to create a very conducive and effective learning environment. The overall results of three tests revealed that communicative activities had positively influenced the performance of the participants. Each individual obtained more marks from the second individual test conducted at the end of the semester than from the pre-test after participating in communicative activities given during the semester. This shows that there is a positive relationship between Communicative Approach and the performance of the students. After engaging in communicative activities such as roleplays, discussions, dramas, pair work and group work students' level of communicative competency increased. Since students were provided with the opportunities to use language during the above activities they were able to improve their knowledge related to morphology, syntax and other components of grammar. As a result, they were able to acquire grammar competency. Simultaneously, Participants enhanced their socio linguistic competence by engaging in above communicative activities related to different social contexts. These activities increased participant's awareness of cultural rules. Consequently, they were able to develop their overall skills like reading, writing, listening, speaking and vocabulary acquiring communicative competence.

## 6. Conclusion

The findings reveal that Communicative Approach made a significant impact on students' performance and enhancing communicative competence. It is undoubtedly enlightening to recognize the enhancements of these students when it comes to performance and communicative competence they

gained. Even though the participants' performance level was at a lower level at the pretest they were able to score higher marks at the final test conducted at the end of the semester as a result of the higher level of engagement in communicative activities. In addition, communicative tasks enhanced communicative competence of the students. Communicative Approach undeniably creates a learning environment with interaction and engagement. Therefore, it should be implemented widely in English language learning contexts. When students are provided with learning opportunities to use English in the class, they will perform better.

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