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## Communicative Approach in ESL Classroom at the Secondary Level

Mosha.Afroza Sultana, M.A. in English Language Teaching

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This is a copy of the paper submitted to Dr. Rubina Khan, Adviser and Faculty, Department of English, Presidency University, Dhaka. My grateful thanks are due to Dr. Rubina Khan for her supervision and helpful suggestions.

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# Chapter-1

## Introduction

This paper discusses the way teachers can focus the teaching of the foreign language in the classroom in such a way that students can communicate in a conscious way, taking into account their real experiences. Here, the origin of the Communicative Approach as a combination of different methods is clearly explained. The role of the teachers and the students in applying Communicative Approach in English as a Second Language class at the secondary level is also discussed. The article also gives some examples of communicative activities that can be developed in the classes from the communicative point of view. This digest will take a look at the communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages. It is intended as an introduction to the communicative approach for teachers and teachers-in-training who want to provide opportunities in the classroom for their students to engage in real-life communication in the target language. The obstacles and some probable solutions to this problems from both teachers and students are described that can be used with a communicative approach.

### 1. 1 Aims of the study:

In today's Bangladesh, Communicative approach has become an accepted fact. The aim of this study is to find out the probable factors that governing this practice so that we can have an in- depth understanding about the mechanism to promote the secondary level students to be skilled in communicating. This paper attempts to find the views of Bangladeshi students at the secondary level about communicative activities. This approach can be facilitated co-operation and group work as a technique. The ultimate goal of this study is to prepare students for natural language activity in discussion and conversation that stimulate real life situations. This study would also try to investigate if this practice is favorable for secondary level students. The practice of communication has become part and parcel of our modern education. English language has gained its significance among a number of foreign languages in the world as well as in Bangladesh. The importance of English has been realized in Bangladesh as it is considered to play a crucial role on the path of socioeconomic development of the country. That is why I am interested to delve the inside of the mechanism.

I believe that, it can promote Bangladeshi students to engage in communication and develop their communicating skills according their socio- culture perspectives.

## **Chapter-2**

### **2. Literature Review:**

To be skilled in communicating in a language all the four skills-listening, speaking, reading and writing – are important. But at secondary level classrooms in Bangladesh it seems different. Most students and teachers here in Bangladesh consider English as a subject rather than a language skill and hardly pay any attention to listening and speaking skills. Billah (2012) says that the major concern of the students, teachers and guardians is to manage a good grade in English using a commercial or short-cut way avoiding real learning. Billah (2012) also says that, some trained teachers try to practice all the skills in the classroom but they lose their motivation after a certain period as listening and speaking are not directly assessed in the public examinations and the students, guardians and the school authorities do not encourage the point. He (2012) further says that the highly liberal attitude of the government to make the students pass the English examinations regardless of whatever they write in their scripts has further deteriorated the situation.

It is quite necessary to consider the position of English in Bangladesh if we want to apply communicative approach in the classroom's language use and thus try to find out why interaction does not, in general, take place in English. To do so we need to find out the difference between EFL and ESL contexts for teaching English. Both in EFL and ESL contexts non-native speakers are taught English. But ESL takes place in an English-speaking environment for example in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia etc. where English is the primary language for communication. Ellis (1996, P.215) distinguishes between ESL and EFL Contexts and says that ESL is integrative, in that it is designed to help individual function in the community, and EFL is part of the school curriculum, and therefore subject to contextual factors such as support from principal and the local community, government policy etc. For ESL students language learning is part and parcel of survival and growth (Ellis 1996). Another characteristic of ESL situation is that in the ESL classes do not share the same L1, which makes it a must for the students to speak English. On the other hand in EFL context because of possessing the same L1, students most of the time do not feel any urge to speak English and that is what is prevalent in Bangladesh.

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Communicating only in target language, L2, in the classroom can be a very effective way to enable students to speak in English. Kang (2007) says that the continued interest in better EFL pedagogy for elementary students has led to many interesting suggestions, one of which is TETE, Teaching English through English. In order for teachers and learners in input-poor EFL context (Kouraogo, 1993) to cope with their pedagogical difficulties, researchers have suggested diverse remedies including the use of only the target language (henceforth TL) in classrooms for various reasons (Chaudron, 1998; Halliwell, 1992)

The primary purpose of using a language is communication. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001; cited in Barman, Sultana and Basu, 2006, p. 157), there are four characteristics of the communicative view of a language:

1. Language is a system of expressing of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its fundamental and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are functional and notional categories, rather than structural ones.

Both teachers and students in Bangladesh almost all the time use L1 (Bengali) in the classroom. Since the eighties, amongst the variables in educational improvement, the teacher has been considered as being of utmost importance and there has been a strong focus on professional development of the teacher (Hargreaves and Fullan 1992). So, trained teachers can play a vital role in using L2 in the classroom.

To improve students' English, L1 can be used very less frequently and that should be only when there will be no left untouched for the better understanding of the students. The arguments favouring the use of both L1 and L2, meanwhile, have emphasized that L1 should not be overrelied on (Wells, 1999), and should be of secondary importance (Cameron, 2001). In this regard Nation (2001) says that the first language has a small but important role to play in communicating meaning and context.

Teachers and students' level of proficiency in communicating in English and adequate motivation are also very important in using L2 in the language classrooms. A study conducted in Korea on TETE, Teaching English Through English, it has been found that the Korean EFL teachers viewed the practice of TETE as obstructing due to their lack of communicative competence as well as students' low level of proficiency and inadequate motivation (Kang 2007). Teachers' limited proficiency has also been argued to be commonly found in Asian EFL context (Charles, 2004; Kelly, 2002; Shih, 2001)

Teachers' beliefs are also very important in using language, L1 or L2, for interaction in the language classroom. In our country most present EFL teachers did not experience CLT and thereby English interaction in their language classes when they were students. And that may be part of the reason why most teachers do not interact in English in the English language

classrooms. Methodologically, teachers' language use in the EFL or other foreign language classrooms has often been examined via elicitation of teachers' beliefs that determine a teacher's classroom behavior to a large extent (Breen et al, 2001; Gatbonton, 1999).

## **Chapter -3**

### **3. Methodology:**

For the purpose of this study I have used a mixed methodology approach.

#### **3.1 Participants:**

Seven teachers and thirty students were chosen from one secondary high school (Bangla Version). All the teachers except one were experienced. Students were chosen from two classes-nine and ten. Among 30 students 5 were girls. All the students' first language was Bengali. All of them attend two English classes everyday and six days a week- each class lasting for 45 minutes on average.

#### **3. 2 Data Collection tools:**

To collect data two different questionnaires were prepared- one being for the students and the other one being for the teachers. There was a closed ended questionnaire for students, which consisted of 18 different yes/ no questions. For the teachers the questionnaire included five multiple choice questions and two semi-guided questions. By the two semi- guided questions teachers were facilitated to incorporate their practical knowledge regarding problems of and solutions to language classes not being interactive in terms of using L2. There were short informal follow- up interviews with both most of the students and teachers to know something more about the expected findings.

#### **3.3 Procedure:**

The field work took place thrice a week for a total of 10 times between February 20 and March 25, 2013. While collecting the data from the students and the teachers, both the teachers and the students were dealt with non-manipulating way by the teachers so that actual information could be collected. While analyzing the data a Mixed Methodology Approach- qualitative and quantitative- has been chosen.

## Chapter -4

### 4. Findings and Discussion:

It was found that the students attributed their problems in English to their weak foundation, environment, and methods of teaching English in their previous levels. Weak foundation is related to the status of English, the students' motivation to learn English, and the teachers' lack of interest. Environmental reasons include the use of the mother tongue, few opportunities to practice English. On the other hand, methods of teaching English included the medium of instruction, using Bangla in English classes, teachers' low proficiency in English, and lack of speaking practice in educational institutions.

The development of students' L2 speaking can be influenced by multiple factors such as L1 speaking ability, L2 proficiency, and speaking experiences in both languages (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Kubota, 1998). In addition, it can be influenced by L1 in such a way that speakers from different L1 backgrounds tend to speak differently depending on how they learn interacting styles in their L1 culture (Kubota, 1998). Some studies suggest that L2 learners' L1 speaking ability is the primary determinant of their L2 speaking performance (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Kubota, 1998; Petric & Czarl, 2003; Piper, 1989).

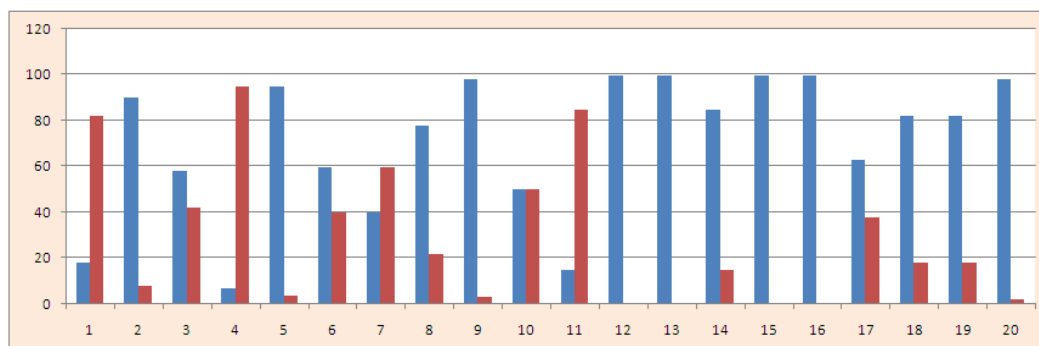
It is often assumed that a speaking- skill transfer can take place between L1 and L2 (Kobayashi & Rinnert, 2008; Kubota, 1998). Thus, L2 speaking difficulties can be closely related to L1 speaking difficulties. Thus, the development of L2 speaking could be more attributable to a combination of performances and experiences in L2 rather than a transfer of culturally preferred rhetorical patterns from L1. The ability to speak is indispensable for the L2 learners in this modern era. Academic speaking not only develops the communicative skills of students but also turns students into more critical and perceptive readers and listeners.

#### 4. 1 Student's Perceptions:

To find out the students' perceptions they were asked to fill in a questionnaire items by just putting tick marks on one of the two options- yes / no. They were made to understand all the points before they chose the potions so that the survey results would become as realistic as

possible. There was also another column other than yes/no in the questionnaire in which they were allowed to write anything they thought would be relevant. (See Appendix-A)

**Graph -1**



The above graph shows the data found from the table in appendix-B

## 4.2 Summary of Findings:

A vast majority of students (84%) agreed that in their language classes interaction does not take place in English. Only a handful of students (16%) said that they interact in English in the language classes. However, in the questionnaire there was an extra column for the students to write any comments if they had any, and there those (16%) students wrote that English is not always spoken in the language classes. But it is optimistic that almost all the students (93%) want the interaction in English classes to be in English classes.

Most students (57%) showed positive notions regarding nervousness. They are of the view that they do not become nervous if the class is taken in English. 93% of students disagreed with the idea that they only want to pass the exam and so they do not need to speak English. Again 97% of students want to learn how to speak English from their English classes.

Most of the students (60%) find it difficult to understand the lecture if it is delivered in English. The same percentage of students thinks that teachers have enough interest in taking the classes in English. And almost three fourths of students (77%) blame their own lack of interest in this regard. Almost all the students (97%) think teachers do not speak English because it is very difficult for them to make every student understand their speech in English. And half of the students think if teachers take the class in English, they might do badly in the exam because of not understanding the lessons.

“Not speaking English in the language classes is good for the students” was the eleventh item in the questionnaire. Only 14% of the students agreed with this. Not surprisingly all the students (100%) agreed that speaking English in the classroom must be started from primary level. One of the most important points in the questionnaire, according to the author, was

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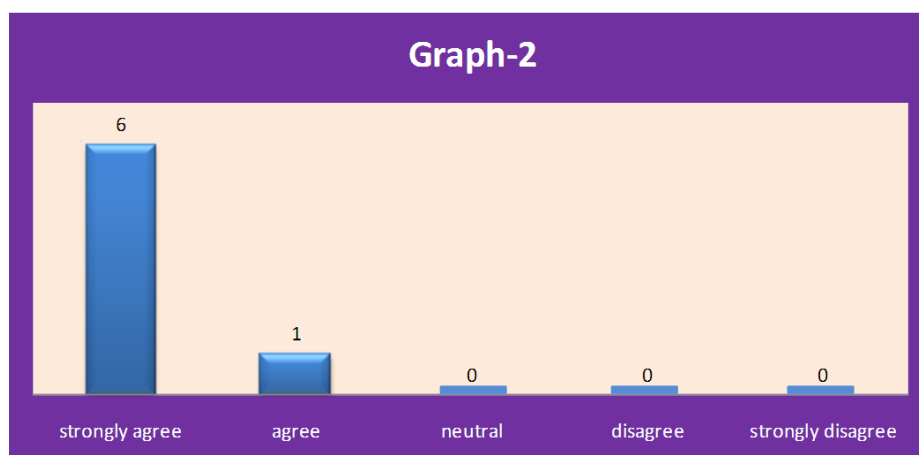


whether they think that if teachers continue speaking English for a few months, students will start better understanding English. And not unexpectedly, again all the students agreed with this statement.

87% students think that teachers should take imitative first to speak English in the class. But interestingly at the same time all the students (100%) think that they should be proactive about speaking English in the classroom. Every respondent welcomed the idea of establishing an English language club in the schools. In terms of motivation the majority of students (64%) think that it is only teachers who can motivate students to speak English. Finally, 86% of students are in favour of attributing the practice of not speaking English in the classroom largely to the present system of Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSC), which does not assess the speaking and listening capabilities of students. Billah (2012) also says that in Bangladesh some trained teachers try to practice all the skills in the classroom but they lose their motivation after a certain period as listening and speaking are not directly assessed in the public examinations and the students, guardians and the school authorities do not encourage the point. In a query to know whether it would be very effective for the students if they had to communicate only L2(English) in the language classroom, 84% of the responded positively. In this regard Kang (2007) says that the continued interest in better EFL pedagogy for elementary school students has led to many interesting suggestions, one of which is TETE, Teaching English Through English. In the last item of the questionnaire students were asked whether an ESL context, instead of EFL, would enhance their English speaking skill. Here almost all the students (97%) chose the option 'yes'. They were very true as Elis (1996) mentions that for ESL students' language learning is part and parcel of survival and growth. To summarize the study, it can be said that in most language classrooms interaction does not take place in English, but the majority of students want the interaction to be in English in their language classes.

### 4.3 Teachers' Perceptions:

To find out the teachers perceptions they were given a questionnaire consisting of three multiple choice questions, two statements accompanied with three options to choose from and two semi-guided questions. (See appendix- C)



The above graph shows the data found from question -1 in appendix –C

**Pie Chart -1**



The above pie chart shows the data found from question -4 in appendix–C

#### **4.4 Summary of Findings:**

First of all it has been found that almost 85% of teachers, 6 out of 7, strongly agreed with the idea that English is, with a very few expectations, not spoken in the secondary level English language classrooms while only the other respondent agreed to it.

In the questionnaire then the Teachers were asked why they thought that teachers and students do not interact in English in the language classes at secondary level. They were given four options- (a) because of exam system (b) lack of students' proficiency because of not having practiced English at primary level (c) students' desire only to pass the examination somehow, and (d) all the above. Five (5) respondents out of seven (7) chose '(d) all of the above' and two others chose (b) and (c). In this regard Billah (2012) implies that teachers, guardians and students all want nothing but a good grade in English. He (2012) also mentions that trained teachers also lose their motivation after a certain period as listening and speaking are not assessed in the public examinations. Most teachers (57%) think that examination system should be redesigned to increase the speaking practice of the students in the classroom while the rest (43%) think that this should be definitely be done.

Again 57% of teachers think that it is teachers who should play the major role in solving the problem. But the rest (43%) think that the government has the key role to play in this regard.

In one of the two semi-guided question the respondents were asked to mention at least two reasons why teachers do not use English in the language classes. They came up with diverse

reasons which, in my opinion, are the facts. Some of the reasons they mentioned including lack of teachers' proficiency, shortage of trained teachers, unwillingness of learners, lack of students' proficiency, inappropriate English syllabus and text books in different classes, and teachers' unawareness.

One respondent thinks that every year many students come from rural areas and enrol in many schools in Dhaka, and they are, in general, much weaker than the existing students in those schools. And that is what makes it more difficult for the teachers to make the language classes interactive. Another respondent thinks that in the usual classes' teachers have to remain very busy completing syllabuses for the semester examinations, and so they do not get enough time to teach students how to speak English. And extra classes may be very helpful in this regard.

After a short informal oral interview with all the teachers it was evident that all of them want to improve themselves by receiving training.

To summarise it can be stated that teachers are well aware of all the problems and they want to improve themselves.

## Chapter-5

### 5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Most Bangladeshi students remain noticeably weak, even at tertiary level, in communicating in English though they have learned English academically for about twelve years before reaching that level. Actually, students should have enough exposure to interactive English from primary and junior levels, and more importantly at least from secondary level, to be able to be fluent speakers of English. In this connection the present study titled **“Communicative Approach in ESL Classroom at Secondary Level”** has been fruitful. It has been able to identify some problems that the Secondary Level students usually face while learning English as a foreign language. Some of the major problems include present public examination systems, lack of both teachers’ and students’ proficiency, shortage of trained teachers, teacher beliefs, and lack of student motivation. Some relevant recommendations have also been suggested.

#### 5.1. Recommendations:

Based on the study findings and discussions above there might be a number of recommendations to overcome the problems prevalent in secondary level classrooms in terms of classroom interaction in English. The recommendations are given in below:

- a) All practicing teachers should be provided with refresher courses at regular intervals.
- b) A language club should be established in every school, and what is more this should be made mandatory by the government.
- c) Teachers should use English in the classrooms at least 95% of the total time regardless of whether students understand or not because if they continue doing it just after a few months students’ receptive power will increase and they will better understand English. On the other hand if it is not done, things will always remain the same leaving students weak in speaking English.
- d) Teachers should always motivate students to speak English.
- e) Teachers should help students fight shy of their shyness.
- f) There should be at least 20-30 marks on speaking and listening skills in the school semester examinations as well as in the public examinations.
- g) The practice of speaking English in the language classes should be started from primary level.
- h) Highly qualified teachers should be recruited in every school by the help of the government, and what is more they need to be given handsome remuneration.
- i) All of the English textbooks should be redesigned so that language learning becomes fun and there are activities fully related to our real life.

- j) As there is no hope for marks being included in public examinations on listening and speaking in near future, teachers should motivate their students to change their mentality regarding only passing the English examinations somehow.

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## Appendices

### Appendix-A

#### Communicative Approach in ESL Classroom at Secondary Level.

##### For the students:

Please give tick mark on the suitable option. Cooperation in providing true information and honest views is appreciated.

Sl.	Questionnaire Items	Total Students-30	
		Yes	No
1.	Communicative approach is applied in our language classes.		
2.	In the English class I want to communicate in English.		
3.	I become nervous to communicate in English.		
4.	I only want to pass the exam and so I do not need to speak English.		
5.	I want to learn how to speak English from my English classes.		
6.	I find it very difficult to understand if the lecture is delivered in English.		
7.	Teachers do not have enough interest in applying communicative approach in English classes.		
8.	Teachers do not communicate because students are not interested.		
9.	Teachers do not speak English because it is difficult for them to make every student understand their speech.		
10.	If teachers take the class in English, maybe we will not understand the lessons and so we will not be able to cut a good figure in the examination.		
11.	Communicating in English in the language classes is good for the students.		
12.	Communicating in English in the classroom must be started from primary level.		
13.	If teachers continue speaking English for a few a months, students will start better understanding English.		
14.	Initiative to communicate in English should be first taken by teachers.		
15.	Students should be proactive about communication in English in the classroom.		
16.	If there is a language club, interested students will get chance to improve their English by practicing.		
17.	It is only teachers who can motivate students to develop communicative skills.		
18.	Exam system can largely be made responsible for students and teachers not speaking in language classes.		

19.	Using only target language in the classroom can be very effective for students.		
20.	If students learn English in an ESL situation, they would be much better speakers of English.		

## Appendix- B

### Communicative Approach in ESL Classroom at Secondary Level.

Sl.	Questionnaire Items	Total Students-30	
		Yes	No
1.	Communicative approach is applied in our language classes.	16%	84%
2.	In the English class I want to communicate in English.	93%	7%
3.	I become nervous to communicate in English.	57%	43%
4.	I only want to pass the exam and so I do not need to speak English.	7%	93%
5.	I want to learn how to speak English from my English classes.	97%	3%
6.	I find it very difficult to understand if the lecture is delivered in English.	60%	40%
7.	Teachers do not have enough interest in applying communicative approach in English classes.	40%	60%
8.	Teachers do not communicate because students are not interested.	77%	23%
9.	Teachers do not speak English because it is difficult for them to make every student understand their speech.	97%	3%
10.	If teachers take the class in English, maybe we will not understand the lessons and so we will not be able to cut a good figure in the examination.	50%	50%
11.	Communicating in English in the language classes is good for the students.	14%	86%
12.	Communicating in English in the classroom must be started from primary level.	100%	0%
13.	If teachers continue speaking English for a few a months, students will start better understanding English.	100%	0%
14.	Initiative to communicate in English should be first taken by teachers.	87%	13%
15.	Students should be proactive about communication in English in the classroom.	100%	0%
16.	If there is a language club, interested students will get chance to improve their English by practicing.	100%	0%
17.	It is only teachers who can motivate students to develop communicative skills.	64%	36%
18.	Exam system can largely be made responsible for students and teachers not speaking in language classes.	84%	16%

19.	Using only target language in the classroom can be very effective for students.	84%	16%
20.	If students learn English in an ESL situation, they would be much better speakers of English.	97%	3%

## **Appendix –C**

### **Communicative Approach in ESL Classroom at Secondary Level.**

#### **For the Teachers:**

[Please give tick mark on the suitable option] Cooperation in providing true information and honest views is very much appreciated.

1. In all English language classes at secondary level, with a very few expectations, English is not used for communication and means of teaching

- a) Strongly agree
- b) Agree
- c) Neutral
- d) Disagree
- e) Strongly disagree

2. Why do you think teachers and students do not interact in English in the language classes at secondary level?

- a) because of the exam system
- b) students are not proficient enough to use English because they have not used it at primary and junior levels.
- c) students only want to get their exams over and done with somehow.
- d) all the above

3. Is there any option for the development of the speaking skills of the students in the syllabus/curriculum set by the education board of Bangladesh?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Not directly

4. Do you think the exam system should be redesigned to increase the speaking practice of the students in the classroom at secondary Level?

- a) Yes
- b) No
- c) Definitely



5. Who should play the major role in solving this problem?

- a) students
- b) teachers
- c) the government

6. Please write at least two reasons why teachers do not use English in the language classes.

- i) In public Examination, there is no system of evaluating speaking of the students.
- ii) Guardians, students and the authority all want nothing but a good grade in English. For these reasons, teachers do not use English in the language classes.

7. What are, in your opinion, three best probable solutions to this problem?

- i) Teachers should interact in English in the language classrooms which can motivate students to speak in English.
- ii) Highly qualified teachers should be recruited in every school by the help of the government, and they need to be given handsome remuneration.
- iii) There should be at least 20- 30 marks on speaking and listening skills in the school semester examinations as well as in the public examinations.

## Teacher's information:

[The information collected will be kept confidential]

Name : .....  
Date : .....  
Name of school : .....  
Designation : .....  
Contact No : .....  
E-mail ID : .....

---



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