

Difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers in teaching New English Communicative syllabuses

الصعوبات التي تواجه المدرسين العراقيين في تدريس مناهج اللغة الانكليزية
التواصلية الجديدة

Dr.zainab Abbas

زينب عباس

Ass.Ins. liqaa habeeb

لقاء حبيب عبود

Methods of Teaching English as a Foreign Language

طرائق تدريس اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية

ABSTRACT

During the last nine years of this century, radical changes in TEFL have taken place all over Iraqi schools. There has been a shift of emphasis from linguistic competence to communicative competence, from frontal teaching to group work, from form to meaning, and from accuracy to fluency ,i.e., there has been a move back from teaching grammar for its own sake. If grammar is to be taught, it has to be used in everyday communication.

Therefore, this research has been talked to shed the light on the areas of difficulty Iraqi teachers may face in teaching this new communicative syllabuses. It also aims at identifying and classifying these difficulties.

To fulfill this aim, a sample of 100 teachers of English at the primary and secondary schools in Diyala Governorate are considered to be the subjects of this research.

A scaled questionnaire as an instrument of measurement is used in this research to be an investigatory tool.

The results of this research proves that the hypothesis of this study is verified and accepted which reads that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in teaching communicative English syllabuse

1.Introduction

1.1 The Problem and its Significance

English as a school subject is granted the same value and prestige as the mother tongue. Its teaching has always been concerned with developing the pupils ability to communicate. It aims at making learners understand and use the language in its spoken and written forms within a particular cultural context, and to built up the pupils communicative competence so that they can use it in their future life (Al- Mutawa & Al-Kailani, 1989:5).

Nowadays, the need for the change of English syllabuses and reshape others become more acute due to the clear development in all life- sides. The intended change must depend on interaction between speakers and provide communicative functions that reflect real life use of language. In Iraq, the RECI is an example of communicative syllabus which include fifth and sixth primary. In addition, the Ministry of Education in Iraq has developed new English courses called "Iraq Opportunities" begin from third primary which is the first level of a ten levels course of young Iraqi learners of English. This new syllabuses supposed to meet the pupils needs and demands and incorporates recent development in the knowledge about the pedagogy of language. Nunan (2002:69) clarifies that challenge now is not to throw out well- established practices, as so often happened in the past, but to incorporate new ways of doing things into existing practice. In this sense, change will be evolutionary rather than revolutionary. In this context, Finocchiaro & Brumfit (1983:207) add that the movement towards communicative syllabuses is not a total revolution, but a revolution of our work towards the needs of the students and the demands of the authentic communication.

Depending on the communicative approach, the teacher and students must engaged in real life contexts and communicative situations that express their real need and wishes. Al- Mutawa & Al- Kailani (1989:22) state that the pupils learn from the beginning that language is communication, that it is something to be used. The implication of this is that we are more concerned with what people do with language than with what they know of it. In other sense, this communicative methodology tries to gear language teaching to the rules we need for communicating appropriately in social situations rather than to the grammatical rules we need for producing correct sentences.

In Iraq, the reality that put itself in such situation is that Iraqi teachers working with limited resources in addition to many areas of difficulty they may face. It is not an easy mission for teachers to deal with new communicative syllabuses as Finocchiaro & Brumfit (1983:105) asserts,

that the task of translating a curriculum specification into materials and of translating materials into effective teaching is never an easy one.

Relating to the same point, Brown(2007:242) asserts that it is difficult for non native speaking teacher who is not very proficient in the second language to teach language communicatively and students don't have sufficient organizational competence, illocutional competence and strategic competence to accomplish a task.

So this research is meant to provide a clear picture about the areas of difficulty the teachers may face in teaching new communicative syllabuses and it tries to answer the following question:

Which aspect of their teaching practice do the teachers find most challenging?

1.2 Aim of the Study

The present study aims at identifying and classifying the difficulties Iraqi teachers may face in teaching new communicative syllabuses.

1.3 Limits of the study

This study is limited to :

1. Communicative syllabuses that used in Iraqi schools (whether primary or secondary) .
2. Teachers of English in Diyala Directorates of Education .

1.4 The Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that Iraqi teachers face difficulties in teaching new communicative syllabuses.

1.5 Procedures

To achieve the aim of the present study, the following procedures will be adopted by the researcher to collect data:

- 1.Choosing a number of teaches from Diyala Directorates of Education (at random) to represent the study sample.
- 2.Preparing an elicitation tool (rating scales questionnaire) under the supervision of a number of specialists who examine its validity and make any comments, suggestions and modifications if necessary.
3. Interpreting the results in the light of the hypothesis by using the proper statistical means that suit the study.

1.6 Value of the Study

- 1.The present study is expected to be of value for Iraqi teachers who will benefit from its details about new aspect that may cause difficulties to

find the possible solutions in the light of the recommendation that will be written in this research.

2.It is going to provide feedback about the new textbook.

1.7 Definition of the Basic Terms

Difficulty: a thing hard to be done or overcome ,something that causes labor or perplexity and requires skill and perseverance in mastering, solving or achieving a hard enterprise (Webster, 1976:630).

Teacher: a person whose job is to teach, especially in a school or college (Oxford Word Power, 2006:712).

Communicative syllabus: it is a syllabus that provides an ideal resources for identifying and selecting the syllabus content relevant to the needs of different types of foreign- language learner (Munby, 1978:1).

2.Theoretical Background

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching

It is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence and which seeks to make meaningful communication and language use a focus of all classroom activities (Richard & Schmidt, 2002:90).

Communicative language teaching began in Britain in the 1960s as a replacement to the earlier structural method, called situational language teaching. This was partly in response to Chomsky's' criticisms of structural theories of language and partly based on the theories of British functional linguists. The emergence of communicative language teaching was as a result of many elements that work hand in hand. Richard & Rodgers(1986:65) clarify that the work of the council of Europe; the writings of Wilkins, Widdowson, Condlin, Brumfit, Keith Johnson, and other British applied linguists on the theoretical bases for a communicative or functional approach to language teaching; the rapid application of these ideas by textbook writer; and the equally rapid acceptance of these new principles by British language teaching specialists, curriculum development centers, and even governments gave prominence nationally and internationally to what came to be referred to as the communicative approach or simply communicative language teaching.

One of the central ideas in the communicative approach is the distinction between linguistic competence and communicative competence. Communicative language teaching aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the communicative approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by

acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication (Freeman, 2003:121).

The basic principles underlying the communicative approach are as Al- Hamash (1985: 88)stated is :

- 1.Language use is an individual process in which the user expresses his individuality and interests.
- 2.Language use is a social phenomenon in which communication takes place in a social context.
- 3.Language use is enjoyable. Enjoyment is present in the use of the language as well as in language learning.

As far as the types of learning techniques and activities is concerned, communicative language teaching uses almost any activity that engages learners in authentic communication. Richards & Rodgers (1986:76) state that Littlewoods has distinguished two major activity types, the first one is functional communication activities that aimed at developing certain language skills and functions, but which involve communication, and social interaction activities, such as conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays.

2.2 Notional- Functional Syllabus

Notional – functional syllabus began to grow in popularity in the United Kingdom in the 1970s. The distinguishing characteristic of the notional –functional syllabus is its attention to functions as the organizing elements of a foreign language curriculum. Grammar is attended to only in that it explains the various forms used to accomplish certain functions (Brown, 1987:214).

Notional- functional syllabus, as the most recent type of syllabus, appeared during the last three decades of the previous century. The first step in designing this type is to specify the learners' needs (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983:47). The linguistic items are not to be taught first (Yalden, 1983:41). Units are arranged around meaning of the functions that language serves rather than around grammatical items (Newton, 1987:51).

One of the useful innovations of the notional- functional syllabus is that communicative value is given priority without neglecting structural material(Al-Khazraji, 1980:150). Brown (1987:215) clarifies that a typical unite in this textbook includes presentation of dialogues, conversation practice with classmate, situations in which the students figures out "what would I say", role-plays, chart work, multiple choice exercises on functional considerations, one- sided dialogs in which the students fills in responses, nonverbal considerations, discussion activities, and community exercises for extra class practice.

2.3 Essentials of Communicative Approach

2.3.1 Communicative competence

Communicative Competence is that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally with in specific contexts (Brown,1987;1991)

Relating to the same point , Savignon(1983:80) States that communicative competence is relative not absolute and depends on the cooperation of all the participant involved.

Communicative Competence then is not only the ability to use grammatically correct sentences or utterances, but also to Know when and where to use these utterances and to whom . It requires Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of the language , Knowledge of rules of speaking , how to begin and end conversation knowing how to use and respond to different types of speech acts such as request ,apologies , thanks , et; recognizing the social settings ; the relation with other persons and the type of language that can be used for a particular occasion . (Longman Dictionary of L.T. and A.L, 1992 :65)

According to Hymes (1972:1101) there are four sectors which make of communicative competence these are:

- 1.What is possible
- 2.What is feasible
- 3.What is appropriate to contexts, and
- 4.What is actuality done

2.3.2 Group – Work

Group- work as Richards &Schmidt (2002) stated is a learning activity which involves a small group of learners working together. The group may work on a single task, or on different parts of a larger task. Tasks of group members are often selectedby the members of the group. They (ibid) add that there are different group arrangements for teaching, include:

- 1.Whole- group instruction: the class is taught as a whole.
- 2.Small- group discussion: A group of between six and eight students working on a discussion topic.
- 3.Tutorial discussion group : A small group of usually less than five students focusing on a narrow range of materials , often to help remedy a learning difficulty.

Group- work is the key element or an integrate part of the communicative methodology. The size of the groups usually ranges from three to eight pupils. This process provide a good chance for the negotiation among pupils .

The success of communicative activities depends on the organization of group-work. Groups may be selected randomly or on certain bases. The latter, requires prior knowledge of the pupils linguistic abilities by the teacher in order to distribute the good pupils over the groups.

Al-Helaly (1987:49) states that in group work, the classroom should be large and suitable for teaching English as a foreign language . It should be supplied with special furniture such as light desks and chairs that can be easily arranged for individual or group- work. This necessitates the use of separate classroom for teaching English.

3. Procedures

3.1 Population & Sample

3.1.1 Population

Al- Samawi (2000:111) defines population as a group of people or documents of special features used for collecting data or represented by a sample selected from among this group. Richards et al ., (1992:282) state that population refers to any set of items, individuals, etc. which share some common and observable characteristics and from which a sample can be taken.

The population of this study comprises the teachers of English at the primary and secondary stages in General Directorate of Education in Diyala Governorate.

The choice is intentional in the selection of the Directorate of Education in Diyala Governorate. In Diyala governorate schools, the teachers were expected to have taught the new syllabuses under investigation at the rate of five lessons a week. And it is random in the selection of a representative number of 100 teachers from the subdirectories of Al- Qalas province and the Center of Baquba.

3.1.2 Sample

Sampling as defined by Al-Samawi (Ibid :112) is selecting a number of individuals to represent the population. Richards et al ; (1992:321) state that the word sample refers to any group of individuals which is selected to represent a population. The logic of using a sample of subjects is to make inferences about some larger population from a smaller one (a sample) (Berg,2004:34).

The size of the whole population of the present study is too large .It is not easy for the researcher to take all the teachers of English in the study because that will take too much time .

The sample of the research consists of primary and secondary schools distributed between the center of Baquba and subdirectorates of Al-Qales Province (50 teachers for each).

Twenty teachers have been randomly chosen for the participation in the pilot study .The participants in the pilot study were excluded from the sample of the final administration of the questionnaire . The sample of the teachers consists of 100 teachers of English .

3.2 Instrument of the Study

To achieve the aim and to verify the hypothesis, a questionnaire was constructed by the researcher, as shown in table (1). At first, the researcher construct an open questionnaire contained the following open question: "what are the main difficulties that face you in teaching the new English communicative syllabuses". The researcher distribute this open question to a sample of twenty teachers. After analyzing the results obtained from the open questionnaire, the researcher construct the closed questionnaire and considered it as the main instrument of the present study. It is consists of 15 items. These items supposed to conclude teachers' difficulties by three rating scales: I agree, I partially agree, I disagree. The items represent the most important difficulties in teaching new communicative syllabuses from the points of view of the teachers. The type of questionnaire that used in this research is rating scales questionnaire. In this scale, people can show how strongly they agree or disagree with the items of the questionnaire, i.e, there is a graduation in attitudes.

(Table 1) questionnaire items

Which of these aspects of your teaching practice do you find most challenging especially with new English communicative syllabuses?

No.	Items	I agree	I partially agree	I disagree
1	The time needed to manage communicative classroom activities is not sufficient.			
2	Teaching grammatical rules communicative may be difficult for non native speaking teachers.			
3	It is difficult to engage students in the pragmatic, authentic and functional use of language.			
4	To make students able to present spontaneity in communicative classes is rather a hard task.			
5	Contending with dialogue ,rehearsed exercise drills and discussions demands providing certain technologies.			

6	Teaching language for communicative purposes requires the teacher to incorporate new methodologies.			
7	It is difficult for most teachers to plan well structured lessons.			
8	The use of authentic materials may cause a burden for the teacher in respect to structures ,functions content and length.			
9	Most Iraqi students who are used to traditional teacher –centered classroom have not been expected to take responsibility in the teaching process.			
10	To develop and assess language skills holistically is a difficult task.			
11	Iraqi teacher s abilities are not suitable to the teaching of the intended syllabuses.			
12	Teachers tend to emphasize wrong and right questions and not focus on communication.			
13	Teaching communicative syllabuses demands a supportive classroom environment in which the students can be engaged in role-play ,pair and group work.			
14	It is difficult for most teachers to assess students performance as they should adopt new forms of informal or authentic assessment.			
15	The focus on fluency not accuracy may cause anxiety among teachers accustomed to seeing error suppression and correction as the major instructional responsibility.			

3.3 Face Validity

The most important quality to consider when selecting or constructing an evaluation instrument is validity. The validity of any examination or test procedure may be broadly defined as the extent to which a test measures what is supposed to measure(Heaton, 1975:135). The purpose of validation in language testing is to ensure the defensibility and fairness of interpretation based on test performance (McNamara, 2000:48).

Face validity refers to the way the test looks to the examinees, supervisors or in general to the people concerned with the education of the students (Al- Juboury, 2000:23). Moreover, it is the surface credibility or public acceptability (Ingram, 1977:18).

To ensure face validity, the questionnaire was exposed to a jury of experts* in the field of English language. They are especially required to determine the suitability of the questionnaire items to the sample of the study, and to propose and make any necessary suggestions for modifications, deletion or addition that enrich and sharpen the test. The jury have agreed that the test and the procedures are suitable except for some modifications which have been taken into consideration.

***The jury of experts consist of the following members whose names are arranged alphabetically:**

- 1.Amthel ,Mohammud ,(Ph.D) College of Education, University of Diyala.**
- 2.Arwa, Abd Al- Rasuel (Ph.D) College of Education, University of Diyala.**
- 3.Khalil I. Al- Hadidi (Ph.D) College of Education, University of Diyala.**
- 4.Fatima, AL-Saddy (ph.D) College of Basic Education University of Meyssan**
- 5.Nakham, Kadwri, (Ph.D)College of Education, University of Tikrit.**
- 6.Salam ,AL-Temimy(ph.D) College of Education ,University of Baghdad**

3.4 Pilot Administration

Before conducting the final administration, it is highly preferred to run a pilot administration and to revise the instrument of the study according to the results obtained from this administration. Pilot study as stated by Tuckman (1972:197)is the attempt to determine whether the test items pass the desired qualities of measurement and discriminability.

The aim of the pilot study are to find out the clarity of the questionnaire instruction. In order to conduct a pilot study, twenty teachers of English were chosen randomly from the Directorate of Education in Diyala.

The findings of the pilot administration revel the following :

- 1.The teachers are able to answer all the questionnaire items.
- 2.There is no serious ambiguity in the instructions of the questionnaire.
- 3.Teachers seem motivated to discuss their difficulties with the researcher.

3.5 Final Administration of the Questionnaire

The Final Version of the questionnaire was distributed to the subjects at the beginning of October ,2011.

The teachers were asked to give their views regards the items according to scale of three dimensions finally, the teachers' responses have been utilized by the researcher.

3.6 Overall Performance

In order to investigate the hypothesis of the study which reads " Iraqi teachers Face difficulties in teaching new communicative syllabuses" . The responses of the subjects were investigated by using the mean and the theoretical mean formula. The mean score of the subjects was (48.725) compared with the theoretical mean (30).

This result indicate that the mean is higher than the theoretical mean .This Proves that Iraqi teachers of English face difficulties in teaching new communicative syllabuses. Accordingly , the hypothesis that mentioned above is verified and accepted.

(Table 2)

Item No.	I agree	I partially agree	I disagree	The weighted mean.
1	70	13	17	70%
2	80	10	10	80%
3	40	20	40	40%
4	69	16	15	69%
5	72	11	17	72%
6	29	32	39	29%
7	30	25	45	30%
8	55	23	22	55%
9	65	22	13	65%
10	75	15	10	75%
11	40	20	40	40%
12	38	32	30	38%
13	60	27	13	60%
14	63	20	18	63%
15	28	28	44	28%

4. Conclusions, Recommendations and Suggestion for Further studies

4.1 Conclusions

After presenting the difficulties faced by Iraqi teachers of English in teaching communicative syllabuses throughout the procedures of this study, the researchers considered the weighted mean of the items that ranges from (80% to 60%) as difficult topics. Consequently, seven items were considered to be difficult as it is shown clearly in table (2). Conclusion remarks can be clearly pointed out as follows:

1. Item number (2) which reads "**Teaching grammatical rules communicatively may be difficult for non –native speaking teachers**" constitutes the most difficult item for teachers. It got a weighted mean (80%).

2. Item number (10) which reads "**to develop and assess language skills holistically is a difficult task**" constitutes the second difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean (75%).

3. Item number (5) which reads "**Contending with dialogue ,rehearsed excercies drills and discussions demands providing certain technologies**" constitutes the third difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean (72%).

4. Item number (1) which reads "**The time needed to manage communicative classroom activities is not sufficient**" constitutes the fourth difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean (70%).

5. Item number (4) which reads "**To make students able to present spontaneity in communicative classes is rather a hard task**" constitutes the fifth difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean (65%).

6. Item number (9) which reads "**Most Iraqi students who are used to traditional teacher-centered classroom have not been expected to take responsibility in the teaching process**" constitutes the sixth difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean (63%).

7. Item number (14) which reads "**It is difficult for most teachers to assess students performance as they should adopt new forms of informal or authentic assessment**" constitutes the seventh difficulty for teachers. It got a weighted mean (63%).

8.Item number (13)which reads " **Teaching communicative syllabuses demands a supportive classroom environment in which the students can be engaged in role-play ,pair and group work**" constitutes the eighth difficulty for teachers .It got a weighted mean (60)

4.2 Pedagogical Implications and Recommendation

In the light of the findings achieved and conclusions derived , the following pedagogical implications and recommendations are drawn :

1.Communicative language teaching needs applying different activities. Accordingly, teachers need to be experiment with a variety of instructional methods. A good way of learning activities and techniques is to keep up-to- date through reading the various teachers' magazines, books and websites that contain good description of activities.

2.Training courses for teachers are necessary to bridge the gab since they are not used to teach communicative syllabuses.

3.Teachers are recommended to keep focus on incorporating authentic material in the leaning process and in particular audiovisual component. Such material can create a learning environment that is rich in linguistic and cultural information and allow teachers and students to explore the non- verbal, intonation, gesture, mime, facial expression and so on.

4.Achieving an ideal atmosphere for teaching communicative syllabuses needs time, supportive classroom environment, providing certain technologies .i.e. schools should be provided with technical equipment in order to simplify the teaching process and implement the new course successfully.

5. The number of supervisors should be increased to follow the application of the new syllabus precisely.

6.The hope remains, that, despite some obstacles, teaching communicative syllabuses support a richer and more open –ended curriculum.

4.3 Suggestions For Further Studies

1. **A similar** study is needed to investigate the difficulties faced by Iraqi students in learning communicative syllabuses.

2. A study may be carried out to assess the new communicative syllabuses according to the teachers' professional qualifications.

المخلص

خلال السنوات التسع الماضية من القرن المنصرم ،حدث تغيير جذري في تدريس اللغة الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية في المدارس العراقية اذ أصبح هناك تحول في الأهمية من المقدرة اللغوية إلى التواصلية ومن التدريس التقليدي (اذ يقف المعلم إمام التلاميذ لإلقاء الدرس بدون تفاعل مع المادة والتلاميذ) إلى العمل الجماعي ومن الشكل إلى المضمون ومن أدقة إلى الطلاقة ،هذا يعني ،عودة إلى الوراء من تدريس النحو لأهميته الى تدريسه لأجل استخدامه في التواصل في الحياة اليومية. لذلك ألقى هذا البحث الضوء على نواحي الصعوبة التي ربما يعاني منها المعلم العراقي في تدريس مناهج اللغة الانكليزية التواصلية الجديدة ويهدف أيضا إلى تعريف وتصنيف تلك الصعوبات. لتحقيق هذا الهدف ،اعتمد الباحثان عينة مكونة من 100 معلم ومدرس في المدارس الابتدائية والمتوسطة في مديرية التربية في محافظة ديالى لتكون عينة البحث استخدمت الباحثان الاستبانة المدرجة بعدها وسيلة بحثية وإحصائية في هذا البحث. أظهرت النتائج ان فرضية البحث قد أثبتت وتم قبولها والتي تنص على "إن المعلمين العراقيين يواجهون صعوبات في تدريس مناهج اللغة الانكليزية التواصلية".

Bibliography

-Berg, B.(2004) Qualitative Research for the Social Sciences Methods(5th ed). Boston: Pearson Education Inc.

- Brown, D. (1987)Principles of Language Learning and Teaching.Prentic-Hall:Jersey.

-Brown,D.(2007)principles of Language learning and Teaching .Sanfrancisco :Pearson Education,Inc.

-Finocchiaro, Mary and Brumfit, Christopher (1983)The Functional Notional Approach from theory to Practice. Oxford: OUP.

-Freeman, L.(2003)Techniques and Principles in Language Teaching. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-Al- Hamash, K. (1985)Principles and Techniques of Teaching English as a Second Language. Baghdad: Al-Rusafi Printing Press.

-Al- Helaly, Zeinab El- Said (1987)"Teaching English to Children" Teaching English Forum vol. xxxv, No.(2), April.

-Hymes, Dell (1972)"On Communicative Competence" in Pride, J.B. and Holmes,H. (eds.) Sociolinguistics . Harmondsworth: Penguin Books.

-Ingram, E.(1977)Basic Concepts in Testing. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

-Al-Juboury, Nejat (2000)A Language Teachers' Guide to Assessment University of Baghdad, College of Education for Women.

-Munby, J.(1978)Communicative Syllabus Design. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

-Al Mutawa, N. & Kailani, T. (1989) Methods of Teaching English to Arab Students. Hong Kong :Longman.

-Nunan, D.(2001)Second Language Teaching and Learning .Bosten :An International Thomson Publishing Company.

-Oxford Wordpower (2006)Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Richards, J.C & Schmidt , R.(2002) Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied linguistics . Fakenham : Fakenham Phorosetting Ltd

-Richards, J; Platt, J. & Weber, H. (1992) Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics. London: Longman.

-Richards, J.C & Roggers ,T.(1986) Approaches & Methods in Language Teaching .Cambridge: Cambridge University press.

-Savignon, Sandra J. (1987)"What in Communicative Language Teaching" English Teaching Forum vol. xxv, No.4, October.

-Al- Samawi, Ahmed, M. (2000) An Introduction to Research Techniques in Linguistics and Literature. Sana'a : Sana'a University.

-Tuckman, B. (1972) Measurement Education Outcomes. NewYork:Harcourt Brace Javanovich.

-Yalden, Janice(1983) The Communicative Syllabus:Evaluation, Design and Implimentation. London: A. Weaton Co. Ltd. E