

# Communicative Language Teaching In Virtual Classrooms - An Overview

<sup>1</sup>Dr.R.V. Jayanth Kasyap

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, Yogi Vemana University, Kadapa, A.P India .

Mail : rvjayanth@gmail.com

## **Abstract**

*The Pandemic situation warranted the teachers to take a relook at the approaches of teaching and learning. The concept of communication crucial in English Language teaching is conspicuously missing. Today the fraternity of English teachers as they deal with digital natives needs to fine tune their pedagogical tools banking on technology. But it is also pertinent to safeguard their role and its sanctity amidst swarming sources. The concept of CLT has certain useful insights for ELT practitioners which are worth following considering the current trend of virtual teaching. The coral aspect of building competencies also demands attention. The web sources which exist in plentitude often confuse the teacher affecting the learner outcomes. The present paper Communicative Language Teaching in Virtual Classrooms – An Overview endeavors to discuss the relevance of CLT offering insights on the need to build communicative competence.*

*Key words : Competence, Motivation, Approach, web sources , learning , teaching*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Theories and concepts of ELT, whether new or old, remain beacon lights for the teachers. No postulate practiced earlier is obsolete if it is used purposefully by the practitioner. Pandemic situation pushed us into deep crisis affecting every walk of life and every domain of work. Teachers today are in a precarious situation where in digital teaching has become indispensable jeopardizing the essential feature of one to one interaction which is the soul of teaching- learning processes as far as Teaching of English is concerned. Time has arrived to revisit ELT notions and apply them in accordance with the current situation. In fact its a sorry state as it goes against the cherished dictum for English Teachers, *If you are Teaching John English, you must know John , you must know English, and you must know how to teach John English.* Unfortunately in today's scenario neither John nor the teacher meets and John sits before a gadget listening or pretending to be listening to the class. But as virtual classrooms have become order of the day, it is pertinent to devise the pedagogical tools by utilizing the resources especially web sources optimally sometimes optionally and ensure that the learning is fruitful. The paper titled **Communicative Language Teaching in Virtual Classrooms - an Overview** is an attempt to bring into context the concept of Communicative Language Teaching whose fundamental aim is to build communicative competence a term coined by Hymes in 1966. It examines the utility of the characteristics of CLT in the wake of the present conditions which facilitate only virtual interactions.

Before initiating discussion the application of CLT concepts in virtual classrooms it is important to examine the impediments for a teacher in carrying out the transaction of teaching in the absence of the student. The physical presence of the teacher in the classroom

amidst students makes a huge difference. The following factors are worth reckoning before devising or revising teaching strategies in the virtual mode.

1. The presence of teacher whose language, body language and dynamics in the classroom are keenly observed by the students and whose influence inspires them to emulate.
2. Lack of one to one and one to many interactions making the class dull and insipid
3. Lack of sufficient attention and focus on the learners to identify their linguistic needs and address them appropriately.
4. No opportunities for peer group discussion and vibrant competitive ambience.
5. Minimum scope for group activities and participative learning.
6. Difficulty in Teaching and Testing of productive skills.
7. No adequate room beyond the text interaction considering the slot and usage of data.
8. Lack of monitoring on one to one basis which may affect the discipline and behavior.
9. Teacher in the class and teacher on the screen for the learners is not always the same.
10. Advice, Assistance, Support and Counseling which learner requires cannot be extended in the manner it should be provided.

Swimming with the current is unavoidable. Considering the above factors, the teachers need to initiate their own approaches to keep things in tact and maintain the tempo of teaching and learning.

Embracing technology and new ideas has become indispensable. Novel ideas have to be created and that zest for novelty enthuses the teacher to be more creative. The following observation of M. Greene is worth quoting in this context. A teacher, "willing to create a new perspective on what he has habitually considered real, his teaching may become the project of a person vitally open to his students and the world" ( M. Greene 1973:270).

Virtual teaching has its own drawbacks and while contemplating the lesson plan a few things are to be taken into account to ensure learner centered teaching. The following points surely deserve attention

- ◆ Are you aiming at building competencies viz., grammatical, socio-linguistic, discourse and strategic?
- ◆ Is it facilitating the teacher to provide exposure and motivation which are quintessential for second language learning?
- ◆ Do you find opportunities and for elicitation and interaction?
- ◆ Are you totally banking on the web sources or tailor made material?
- ◆ Is virtual teaching generating interest in the learner the required curiosity for language learning?
- ◆ Teaching and Testing are inseparable, is it possible to test the learner and assess the learning outcomes?
- ◆ Are you providing opportunities for the learner to create language on the basis of trial and error?
- ◆ Is it possible for you to offer tangible or intangible rewards for the learner which motivate him?
- ◆ Does the virtual mode offer the real integrated motivation required for language learning.

Communicative Language Teaching which is activity based approach is feasible in true sense in a conducive teaching-learning classroom environment. But the features of the approach can guide the teachers conducting virtual classes minimizing the possible damage to best instructional practices. No teacher wants mode of learning which deprives both the teacher

and the taught the real tempo. An attempt is made here to examine certain features of CLT and their utility in virtual mode of teaching. The Communicative Language Teaching focuses on the learner therefore all the activities and tasks meant for building competence are learner centered. The target group and the level of learning are to be taken into account.

In CLT information gap tasks are used and to fill these gaps, activities such as role plays, mind games, Jigsaw, games, pair and group work are conducted by the teacher. Learner's evince keen interest in the task and perform them enthusiastically. The meaningful noise in the class is well and good. In a virtual class such fun has no room. But these activities can be conducted virtually and it is not difficult for a resourceful teacher with sufficient computer literacy to plan them as per the requirement. Without dumping the sources from the web the activities can be prepared and displayed and shared. Excessive use of borrowed web tools and sources doesn't give scope for the teachers to create and they develop sense of complacency which affects their own creative thinking. It is like going back to the olden times of using OHP's to display flip cards, Jig Saw cards, fuzzy felts clippings and flannel boards in the language classroom. One positive aspect of virtual learning is that learner is placed in a relaxed atmosphere which is partially eliminating the psychological barriers. The concept of desuggestopedia (Lozonav) calls for stress free learning for better outcomes.

For a learner or a teacher, as far as language teaching is concerned, 'understanding is enhanced through experiencing' (Loughran, p.26). The question is whether the virtual mode providing a scope for experiencing. The current practice is to conduct lab sessions for science students virtually. The experiment, observation and inference may become things of the past. The behavioral, constructive and cognitive dimensions of language learning deserve utmost attention in both the processes of understanding and experiencing.

CLT concept promotes and accepts any device which helps learners. However in any mode of teaching it cannot be taken for granted. As aforementioned the level and motivation of the learner are vital in designing the devices. Today the learners from urban areas are mostly digital natives and learning through devices is a pleasure for them. The fact that gaming skills are considered important for employability cannot be ignored. The screen time spent by learners today and mushrooming of learning apps bears testimony to the fact that the activity of classroom teaching is conspicuously dwindling. The teachers of English are bound to embrace technology and at the same time respect the important of principle of creativity which is heart and soul of language.

As far as materials and methodology for CLT, linguistic variety is the coral aspect. Overdose of web material may be counterproductive. Teachers should bear in mind that those tools merely supplement teaching and learning. The variety dimension can be taken care of by the teacher by consulting, interacting and collaborating with peers besides drawing material from his own experiences. The plethora of open sources often tempt the teacher to use them extensively, however such efforts kill their originality in developing material. It is important to know that learners too have the access to many sources and they may develop an unfavourable impression about the teacher if too many web sources are used. What needs to be checked thoroughly is whether the web tools promote individualized learning giving scope for the learner to use the language. Sources such as [www.grammargames.com](http://www.grammargames.com) and [www.eslgames.com](http://www.eslgames.com) and [www.funenglishgames.com](http://www.funenglishgames.com) can supplement teaching and provide additional help to the learners.

Developing semantics is the task before the teacher and CLT is vocal about it. For the teachers who use texts and paraphrase them there are sufficient opportunities to build the competence of understanding the meanings. Textual sources even in virtual mode can be explored to serve the purpose by giving tasks like interpreting the poem or piece of prose. It

is through wide reading learners over a period of time develop the skill comprehending and deciphering the meaning. Teachers can endeavor to develop teaching material for texts which grab their attention providing them audio – visual experience. For Discourse Competence which reflects the ability to interpret in a larger context literary texts can be used purposefully. The example of interpreting Robert Frost's *Mending Wall* is worth mentioning here where in it is possible to explain literal, figurative and symbolic meanings. CLT redefines the role of a teacher and gives him the status of a facilitator and manager. They are expected to *manage the environment and materials* ( p.46 , Geetha Nagaraj) efficiently. Therefore given the current situation, it is pertinent to honestly use the web material and sources for teaching-learning transactions for efficient management. Further management is also needed to ensure whether the learning is molding the behavior, whether the learner is using his cognition and whether the student is rewarded. As managers of online teaching with its limitations and limitedness the onus lies on the fraternity of English teachers to safeguard the sanctity of the pedagogical business by protecting the traditional approaches and embracing the new with a positive approach.

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