

EFL Learners' Involvement in the Process of Learning: A Plea for an Active Classroom through Communicative Activities

Damien IFALAMBANGA MUBIKABALA

Département d'Anglais-Culture Africaine

Abstract

English has become an international language among nations and serves as a “lingua franca”. For that reason, English is nowadays spoken, studied and even understood in countries where it is not the first language. There is an increased interest regarding the importance of that language around the world. Therefore, many want to learn and study it.

However, one of the needs in the learning and teaching of a foreign language aims at developing the four basic skills that is listening, speaking, reading and writing. But speaking has a crucial importance like all the other skills. These competencies are not well developed because of factors such as the number of pupils in a class, lack of learning resources, and lack of opportunities which lead pupils to not communicate, the exaggerated use of grammar and classroom language centered by the teacher, which does not motivate pupils in the learning process. I also emphasize the teacher's attitude and the choice of techniques, strategies and methods that can help learner to master the language.

Therefore, this work gives the importance of communicative activity as a way to help pupils acquire communicative competence in the learning of English as a Foreign Language by pupils in our secondary schools in general and particularly those of Bandundu town secondary schools.

Key words: *Communicative activities, Active Classroom- Communication, learning process*

Resume

L'anglais est devenu une langue internationale, et parmi les nations elle sert de «lingua franca». Pour cette raison, l'anglais est de nos jours parlé, étudié et compris même dans les pays où il n'est pas la première langue (langue maternelle). De nos jours, il y a un intérêt grand vu l'importance et l'influence que revêt l'Anglais dans le monde, beaucoup de gens veulent l'apprendre. En effet, une des besoins de plus grandes nécessités dans l'apprentissage et l'enseignement de la langue étrangère vise le développement de quatre compétences de base, écouter, parler, lire et écrire, mais le parler est d'une importance cruciale comme toute autre compétence langagière. Ces compétences de la langue ne sont pas assez développées en à cause de certains facteurs tels que le nombre d'élèves par classe, le manque de ressources d'apprentissage, le manque d'occasions donnant à l'élève le temps de communiquer, l'usage exagéré de l'approche déductive à la grammaire et le monopole de la parole par l'enseignant qui conduit l'apprenant au manque de motivation dans l'apprentissage de la langue anglaise. Nous soulignons aussi l'attitude de l'enseignant et la sélection de techniques et méthodes utilisées pouvant aider l'apprenant à assimiler la langue. En effet, l'apprenant et plus particulièrement les élèves de nos écoles secondaires de la ville de Bandundu (RDC), éprouvent beaucoup de difficultés dans la communication orale, même ceux qui finissent le graduat. Pour ceux qui peuvent parler, ils peuvent tout simplement se limiter au niveau de la salutation pendant que dans leur programme le cours d'anglais est inscrit de la première jusqu'en sixième année des humanités. C'est la raison pour laquelle je me donne l'occasion de survoler cet aspect en montrant comment l'apprentissage de la langue étrangère notamment l'Anglais en classe, doit être accentué pour viser la communication. Ce travail propose l'importance de l'utilisation des activités communicatives dans l'apprentissage de l'anglais comme langue étrangère et comme moyen pouvant aider les apprenants en général et les élèves de nos écoles secondaires de Bandundu-ville.

Mots-clés: Activités communicatives, Classe active Processus d'Apprentissage

1. Statement Of The Problem

Language learning is a complex structure that includes many aspects to be learned in order to inquire the communicative competence in the target language. One may not pretend to communicate in a language if he does not possess required skills. There are through various learning an activity embodies in such different lessons as grammar, vocabulary, reading, conversation and the like. In this regard, through these lessons the teacher can help the learners develop their communicative skills.

Considering the importance of communicating and interacting and the fact that language is primarily spoken not written, it is important to find ways of training the secondary school learners of English until they develop oral abilities. Communicating and interacting seem to be an essential activity to achieve the above practical aim of EFL in our secondary schools.

Learners in general and secondary school pupils in particular hardly communicate fluently in English even though they have opportunity to study or learn English. During many years as a teacher of English at secondary school, I noticed that teachers do not give enough opportunities to pupils during the lessons to communicate, to speak. This way of teaching the foreign language does not enable learners to communicate fluently. I also observed that teachers of English think that they are the ones who should talk more than the learners in the classroom. The teacher should expose learners to more open classroom discourse, i.e to involve learners in classroom activities that will generate output as close as possible to naturally occurring talk (Cullen, 1998).

In this regard, it shows that pupils or learners face difficulties to communicate easily. Though they have English classes in their program, most of the time they only utter single and isolated words or mere greetings which is common. Communicative activities such as pair work, group work, role-play, debating, problem solving can play a large role to get pupils or learners develop communicative competence. Furthermore, research on second language acquisition (SLA) suggests that more learning takes place when learners are in relevant tasks within a dynamic learning environment rather than traditional teacher-led classes (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003) www.cal.org...Part 2-41 Interactions

2. Working Methodology

This investigation on EFL teachers' use of Communicative Activities helps to get learners to be fully involved in the learning process of English as a foreign language, a questionnaire was administered to teachers of English in fifteen secondary schools of Bandundu town.

This paper is divided into four points. The first point provides us with some definition of the key concepts. The second deals with the research methodology used for the data collected. The third presents the data analysis and interpretation and findings. The fourth and last point provides some suggestions. A conclusion recapitulates the present paper.

3. Definition of Some Key Concepts

3.1. Communicative activities

Communicative activities include any activities that encourage and require a learner to speak with and listen to other learners, as well as with people in the program and community. They are also those activities that find information, break down barriers, talk about self, and learn about culture. Even when a lesson is focused on developing reading or writing skill, they should be integrated into the lesson.

4.2. Active Class

An active class is a classroom which provides opportunities for physical activity to learners throughout the school day as part of activities. This can be incorporated into daily lessons or other school classes in order to help learners break or reduce seat and dead times during the teaching. It can also be understood as a class which participates fully during the teacher's instructions. <http://www.heart.org/ide/groups/heart-public/@wcn.publichealthlawcenter.org/>

4.3. Learning process

The language is used for communication, therefore to communicate in a given language this obliges one to acquire that particular language. Then acquisition is also used in the context of learning a foreign language. In this context, acquisition is sometimes opposed to learning. Learning process is defined by *A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics* (2008:8) as an instrumental process which takes place in a teaching context, guiding the performance of the speaker. Since language is an individual process, the instructor cannot do it for the learner. Learner can learn only from personal experiences; therefore, learning and knowledge cannot exist apart from a person. (<http://www.dynamicflht.com/avcfibook/learning-process/>)

4. Research Methodology And Data Collection

The sample of population of this study thirty-five teachers was mainly concerned with the teachers of English in fifth form of Bandundu Town. They were selected from some secondary schools in Bandundu town.

A questionnaire of eight questions was given to teachers of English teaching in fifth form. The questions were multiple choices or yes/no and only one question was aiming to discover teachers' innovation and creativity (see questions in appendix 1). It was administered to teachers from October to November 2016. This forms were collected back and collected them only thirty-five out of sixty who submitted back (58.3% rate of return).

When a research paper in English Language Teaching (ELT) is undertaken, it aims at bring solution to an important problem encountered in the EFL teaching/learning. To reach our objective, a questionnaire was set in order to see how the teachers make learners fully involved in the learning process. That questionnaire was an appropriate way and instrument used to collect data on the subject under study. According to Kirk Patrick (1980:581) a "questionnaire is a written list of questions to be answered by a large number of people to provide information for survey or report". In these schools we were mostly interested in giving a questionnaire to teachers and the answers provided help us to have a synthetically idea on how teachers help their pupils to become fully involved during the English classes.

5. Instrument

This questionnaire can be explained as follows: The first question was asked with the objective to find out whether the teacher of English in the fifth form take care to make good use of the all lessons in teaching English as a foreign language.

The second question aimed at checking if the teacher uses the methods with the aim to arouse interest in learners in the process of learning the foreign language. This second question also sought to know whether the methods used by the teacher when teaching English aimed at developing the learner desire and interest to be active class activities.

Through the third question, I want to make sure that the teacher uses the communicative activities to help learners to be fully participant in the process of learning the foreign language.

The fourth question seeks to know whether the techniques used during the TEFL help learners to develop their communicative skill. In the same vein, I wanted also to know the different techniques used by the teacher to foster participation during the process of teaching English as a foreign language.

With the fifth question, I sought to check whether the teacher considers the learners' attitudes towards English in order to help them to like or to have interest in the teaching of English as a foreign language.

The sixth question aims at checking if the role plays by the learner during communicative activities hinder the teacher's ability to push the learner to promote participation in the language learning process.

Through the seven question, I wanted at the same time to know whether the teacher's attitudes during the Teaching of English as a Foreign Language allow or do not allow learners to overcome fear, to take the risk learn English.

The eight and the last question was simply to remind the teacher what his role look like in the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language. Through this role he helps learner to master the English language.

I used a questionnaire to collect data on the subject under study. As mentioned earlier, the questionnaire which was administered to thirty-five teachers selected from fifteen schools in Bandundu Town. The questionnaire contained eight questions and was made of multiple choice questions. The teachers were asked to tick the right answer according to what they usually do during the teaching of English as a foreign language. They also had the opportunity to give their own view about the other techniques they use in order to help learners to develop their communicative skills.

The questionnaire was given to teachers personally to ensure that it did not reach the target teachers. I moved myself from school to school in order to make sure that I met teachers. Though many of them seem to be busy, I went several times to the selected schools to collect the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was distributed to the teachers in order to make a research on how through communicative activities the teachers help the learners to be fully participant in the process of learning and teaching English as a foreign language. The information from teachers that are answers is analyzed and interpreted as follows:

After the collection of the questionnaire which was administrated to thirty-five teachers of English selected from fifteen schools in Bandundu. The questionnaire included eight questions which aimed at knowing whether the teacher helps pupils to be fully involved in English classes through communicative activities.

6. Data Analysis And Discussion

6.1. Sample characteristics data

Table 1: Teachers' qualification

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Gradué	10	28.57%
Licencié	25	71.43%
Total	35	100%

The above table shows that ten teachers (or 28.57%) out of thirty-five (100%) answered that they were “Gradué”, and twenty-five teachers (or 71.43%) wrote that they were “Licencié”. This demonstrates clearly that, all the teachers who responded to the questionnaire completed their studies from Teacher Training Colleges and were qualified with a specific objective to teach English as foreign language.

Table 2: Teacher's seniority

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
One year	0	0%
Two years	0	0%
Three years	7	20%
Five than five years	10	28.57%
More than ten years	10	28.57%
More than fifteen years	5	14.29%
More than twenty years	3	8.57%
Total	35	100%

The teachers who responded to the questionnaire had a good professional experience. It is clearly seen that out of thirty-five (0%) none of the teachers answered to have been teaching English for less than one or two years; seven teachers (20%) mentioned that they had a teaching experience of more than three years; ten teachers(28.57%) said that they have been teaching English for more than five years; ten teachers (or 28.57%) answered that they had a professional experience of more than ten years; five teachers (14.29%) revealed that they have been teaching English as a foreign language for more than fifteen years; and three teachers (8.57%) responded that they have a long professional experience of more than twenty years.

Question 1: What types of lessons do you often teach in English?

- a) Reading Aloud b) Reading Comprehension c) Conversation
 d) Reading vocabulary e) Listening Comprehension f) All lessons
 g) Grammatical structure h) If not any, specify

Table 3: Types of lessons often taught

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Reading Aloud	0	0%
Reading Comprehension	1	2.85%
Conversation	0	0%
Reading vocabulary	0	0%
Listening Comprehension	0	0%
Grammatical structure	0	0%
All lessons	34	97.15%
If not any, specify	0	0%
Total	35	100%

The analysis of this question revealed that six lessons are not often taught by most of the teachers; one teacher (or 2.85%) answered that he often teaches reading comprehension; and thirty-four teachers (97.15%) mentioned that they often teach all types of lessons in English.

6.2. Other research interest variables

Question 2: What methods do you use while teaching?

- a) Direct method b) Suggestopedia c) Total Physical Response
 d) Audio-Lingual e) Grammar Translation f) Silent Way
 h) Community Language Learning.

Table 4: Methods used in teaching

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Direct Method	9	25.7%
Suggestopedia	5	14.29%
Total Physical Response	15	42.8%
Audio-Lingual Method	0	0%
Grammar Translation Method	0	0%
Silent Way	0	0%
Community Language Learning	6	17.1%
Total	35	100%

The above table shows that all the methods are not used by the teachers only some; nine teachers (25.7%) responded that they used Direct Method while teaching English as a foreign language; five teachers (14.29%) mentioned that since they are teaching English they use suggestopedia; fifteen teachers (42.8%) answered that they often use Total Physical Response method; and six teachers (17.1%) revealed that they make good use of Community Language Learning.

3. a) Do you resort to communicative activities?

Yes NO

b) Which one?

1. Task based 2. Role-Play 3. Debating/discussion
 4. Pair work 5. Group work

c) In which type of lesson?

Table 5: Communicative Activities

a) Resort communicative activities Yes - No

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Yes : 35 No: 0	35	100%
Total	35	100%

To the questionnaire if the teachers resort to communicative activities, all respondents' i.e. thirty-five teachers (100%) responded to this question. This shows that during the teaching of English in the fifth forms the teachers resort communicative activities.

b) Which one

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Task based	0	0%
Role-Play	0	0%
Debating/Discussion	5	14.29%
Pair Work	10	28.57%
Group Work	20	57.14%
Total	35	100%

It can be seen from the above chart, twenty teachers out of thirty-five (57.14%) answered that the very often make use of group work; ten teachers (28.57%) answered that they often use pair work; and five teachers (14.29%) replied that they sometimes use debating or discussion. None of them (0%) said that they neither use task based nor play role.

Question 4: What are the teaching techniques that you use in order to promote your learners' participation?

Table 6: The teaching Techniques used to promote participation

Summary of main Ideas	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Visual Aids	20	57.14%
Communicative approach	1	2.85%
Pair Work	13	37.14%
Question answer technique	1	2.85%
Total	35	100%

To this question, all the respondents (100%) gave a technique used to promote his learners participation; twenty teachers (57.14%) said that the use Visual Aids to help pupils to be fully participant; one teacher (2.85%) mentioned that he solely uses communicative approach; thirteen (37.14%) find Pair Work most appropriate to promote participation in their English classes.

Question 5: What are your learners' attitudes during the communicative activities?

- a) Fear b) Lack of risk-taking c) Lack of interest
d) Laziness e) Lack of motivation f) Anxiety g) All answers.

Table 7: Learners' attitudes during communicative activities

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Fear	10	28.57%
Lack of Risk-Taking	7	20%
Lack of interest	5	14.29%
Laziness	1	2.85%
Lack of motivation	8	22.85%
Anxiety	3	8.57%
All answers	1	2.85%
Total	35	100%

This chart demonstrates that among the thirty-five teachers who responded to the above question, ten teachers (28.57%) revealed that learners have fear attitude during the communicative activities; seven teachers (20%) showed that pupils lack of Risk-Taking; five teachers (14.29%) answered that their pupils lack interest during communicative activities; on teacher (2.85%) has demonstrated that pupils have laziness attitude during communicative activities; eight teachers (22.85%) mentioned that there is a lack of motivation from pupils during communicative activities; three teachers (8.57%) responded that pupils have anxiety; and only one teacher (2.85%) showed that pupils experience all the above attitude during communicative activities

Question 6: What is the role of your learners during communicative activities?

- a) Imitator b) Jar/recipient/receiver c) Producer/parroting
d) Listener e) Observer

Table 8: The role of the learner during communicative activities

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Imitator	30	85.71%
Jar/recipient/receiver	0	0%
Producer/parroting	5	14.29%
Listener	0	0%
Observer	0	0%
Total	35	100%

Concerning the role of the learners, thirty teachers (85.71%) revealed that pupils are mainly imitators during the communicative activities; five teachers (14.29%) responded that pupils play the role of producer/parroting during the communicative activities; and finally none of the teacher (0%) shows that the other role are also play by the pupils during communicative activities.

Question 7: What is your attitude during the teaching process?

- a) Enthusiasm b) Sympathy c) Warmth d) Tolerance
e) Flexibility f) All answers

Table 9: Teacher's attitude during teaching process

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Enthusiasm	0	0%
Sympathy	0	0%
Warmth	0	0%
Tolerance	8	22.85%
Flexibility	2	5.71%
All Answers	25	71.42%
Total	35	100%

The above table reveals that eight teachers (22.85%) report to have tolerance attitude during the teaching process; two teachers (5.71%) mentioned that teachers are flexible during the teaching process; and twenty-five teachers (71.42%) answered that teachers combine all the range attitudes during the teaching process.

Question 8: What is your role as a teacher of English during the teaching/learning process?

- a) Counselor b) Coach c) Facilitator d) Coordinator
e) Arouser of interest f) Manager g) Guide h) Leader
j) All answers i) If none specify

Table 10: The teacher's role during teaching/learning process

Alternative	Number of Teachers	Percentage
Counselor	3	8.57%
Coach	0	0%
Facilitator	21	60%
Coordinator	0	0%
Arouser of interest	0	0%
Manager	0	0%
Guide	1	2.85%
Leader	0	0%
All answers	10	28.57%
If none specify	0	0%
Total	35	100%

To this question, all the teachers who responded, three teachers (8.57%) mentioned that teacher's role during the learning/teaching process is a counselor; twenty-one (60%) answered that teacher is mainly a facilitator during the teaching process; one teacher (2.57%) showed that the teacher's role is seen as a guide during the

teaching/learning process; and finally ten teachers (28.57%) qualified the teacher as the one who plays all the above role mentioned in that question.

6.3.1 Findings About The Sample

After a thorough analysis of the data, it was noticed that the investigation was done in some Bandundu schools, among the thirty-five teachers who received and responded to the questionnaire twenty-five (71.43%) were male and “licencié” and ten teachers (28.57%) were female and “gradué” (22%). As shown above in the first table, the teaching profession or the teaching experience seems to be male-dominated in all schools we investigated. As far as the types of lessons often taught were concerned, all of the teachers of the thirty-five teachers who were questioned, thirty-four (97.15%) often teach all the lessons and explore well all the type of lessons in their teaching of English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, only one teacher (2.85%) who often teaches the reading comprehension. This clearly shows that all the lessons are taught in English classes. It was also clearly demonstrated that Total Physical Response (TPR) is the most used method, fifteen teachers (42.8%) and nine teachers use Direct Methods, Community Learning. We bitter noticed that the Audio-Lingual method, Grammar Translation Method and Silent Way are not used at all. As far as communicative activities are concerned, I noticed that pair work, group work and debating/class discussion were used specially when doing classroom activities involving dialogues, practices, classroom debates whereas role-play does not appear at all.

6.3.2. The interest variables

Considering the teaching techniques used to promote learner’s participation, more than twenty teachers among the thirty-five use visuals aids to help their pupils to be fully participant in the teaching and learning process. But there is also the use of pair work that some teachers use in order to help their pupils to be fully involved and enhance their communicative competence. It was also observed that the learner’s attitude have a great impact on the teaching and learning process, therefore fear was one of the attitudes that learners have during the communicative activities which implies that learners will not be fully participant to teaching/learning process.

There is also the lack of Risk-Taking from learners; most of them do not want to try to give a wrong answer. Besides, there is also a lack of motivation from learners, interest laziness and anxiety which probably do not help the pupils to participate in the teaching/learning process. Moreover, about the learner’s role during the communicative activities, it is demonstrated positively that most of the learners are imitators during the communicative activities; which shows that the teacher try to help their pupils to be immerge in their learning process. At the same time it showed that most of the teacher’s attitudes help the learners during the teaching process.

My findings have demonstrated that twenty-five teachers (71.42%) attitudes’ help the learners to promote participation. Concerning the teacher’s role, almost all the respondents pointed out that the teacher’s role is a facilitator during the teaching/learning process. Besides, ten teachers make use of all the roles during the teaching/learning process. They also underlined that the teacher should be a guide in order to help pupil to participate to their learning process.

7. Difficulties Encountered

The designed questionnaire was submitted to the teachers of English in the fifth forms expecting to get answers from them within three weeks. Unfortunately, the collection of data took so much time because of lack of interests from some teachers who pretended to be busy. Several times I went to some schools and the expected answers not ready for some reasons that the teachers gave, either they forgot the questionnaire at home or they have not yet finished. In some schools I was not welcomed by the teachers simply they did not want to do such work. In addition, in some of the papers returned few teachers did not want to reveal their identity.

All through this section, I have been concerned with the inquiry in some schools in Bandundu Town. It has been proved that the teachers of English in fifth form do not explore the communicative activities to increase their learner’s participation in oral interactional activities to enhance their communicative competence. The answers provided by the teacher shown that English as a foreign language is taught by most of the teachers not with the objective to develop learners’ participation through communicative activities. This can be clearly seen through unsatisfactory result from the answers to the question which shown that not all the

techniques are not used, the Role-Play technique does not appear and some of the learner's attitudes do not develop participation.

What can be advised to the teachers of English in fifth form is the use of communicative activities throughout all the lessons and make intensive use of different techniques to give great opportunity to each learner to participate actively in order to foster cooperative rather than being passive in the learning/teaching process. A very efficient way to help learners will be to encourage them to overcome fear, to engage to take risk of mistaken. In so doing, the teacher helps learners to develop their communicative competence in the use of debate, discussion, role-play, pair work, group work. The use of these techniques in the learning process of English as a foreign language helps to maximize learner's participation.

Conclusion

All through this work, I have been dealt with "EFL learners' involvement through communicative activities" in learning process, I have brought my research in the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language. This work has been an investigation on the teachers' of EFL to deal with learners' whole involvement in the learning process, with a particular sample of teachers of Bandundu Town. After the investigation, it has been discovered that more than half teachers are for the use of Communicative Activities.

Besides, the search demonstrated that English should not be taught for marks purpose, but first of all to be spoken. In order to bring forth these communicative activities, the teacher should avoid to be too talkative rather aims at promoting communicative competence. Actually the lack of Communicative Activities constitutes somewhat a big obstacle to Democratic Republic of Congo secondary schools learners to speak English fluently. Since a great number of EFL teachers do not often or do not at all use this available method, we heartily claim and advice its usage while teaching English as a foreign language.

To promote learner-learner involvement during English classes i.e. role-play, class discussion or debate, pair work, group work, group discussion should be encouraged. In so doing, the teacher is encouraged to use these activities in different types of lessons.

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