

## ATTITUDES OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHERS TO THE COMMUNICATIVE LEARNER - CENTERED APPROACH

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**ABSTRACT:** This study aimed to determine the attitude of the teachers to the communicative-learner centered approach in foreign language teaching process. For the purpose of the study, an attitude scale was administered to the teachers to get their opinions on the issue. The results were computed in percentages. It was observed that in general, teachers had favourable attitudes towards this issue discussed. Besides, some recommendations were made for the language teachers on this approach.

**KEY WORDS:** *Communicative Approach, Learner-centered, Attitude.*

**ÖZET:** Bu çalışmanın amacı yabancı dil öğretim sürecinde öğretmenlerin öğrenci merkezli iletişimsel yaklaşıma olan tutumlarını belirlemektir. Çalışmanın amacı gereği öğretmenlere konu ile ilgili bir tutum ölçeği verilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonuçları yüzdelik çalışması ile değerlendirilmiştir. Çalışma sonucunda öğretmenlerin öğrenci merkezli iletişimsel yaklaşıma olumlu tutumlar içinde oldukları görülmüştür. Ayrıca konu ile ilgili bazı öneriler verilmiştir.

**ANAHTAR KELİMELEER:** *İletişimsel Yaklaşım, Öğrenci merkezli, Tutum.*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

There have been various methods and approaches of language teaching developed in the process of foreign language teaching. However, no one can claim that one is the best of all and superior to others.

Of those approaches, the communicative approach has various syllabus realizations, but just one ultimate aim: the development of learners' communicative competence, Karavas reports [1].

### 2. PROBLEM

Research conducted up to now indicates that researchers have dealt with the learner's factors in foreign language education, from the learner's strategies to their psychological features, but not with the teacher's factor on this issue. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the attitudes of foreign language teachers to the communicative learner-centered approach since teacher attitudes are seen to play a significant role in determining the implementation of an approach.

Dingwall claims that the research on the teachers' attitudes can shed light on the difficulties they face when implementing curricular innovations in the classroom situations [2]. Furthermore, Breen agrees with the fact that it can help in establishing the most appropriate kind of support that is needed in in-service teacher development [3].

### 3. METHOD

#### Setting and Subjects

This study was conducted at the University of Gaziantep and TÖMER Language Center of the University of Ankara, Gaziantep Branch. Twenty-three teachers were included in the study. The reason for restricting the subjects to the ones at the University of Gaziantep and TÖMER was that it was easy for the researchers to keep the study under control.

#### Tools

The tool used to collect the data for the purpose of the study was adopted from Karavas, The

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attitude scale is the one indicative of the most favourable attitudes towards the communicative learner-centered approach [1]. The highest possible score is 110 (by scoring 5, the highest mark on all 22 statements), while the lowest and the one indicating the least favourable attitude towards the communicative approach is 22. Respondents' scores can therefore fall within a continuum from 22 to 110, the middle (neutral) point of continuum being 66. The neutral point is not necessarily the mid point between the extreme scores, Oppenheim states [4]. The respondent can obtain such a score either by being uncertain about many items, or by holding inconsistent or strongly favourable or unfavourable attitudes towards the attitude object in question, Karavas explains [1].

The statements in the attitude scale were in five groups;

1. Group/pair work (4 statements:2, 9, 12, 21),
2. Quality/quantity of error correction (4 statements:10, 11, 13, 14),
3. The role and contribution of learners in the learning process (6 statements: 4, 5, 8, 14, 17, 19),
4. The role of the teacher in the classroom (4 statements:7, 15, 18, 20),
5. Place/importance of grammar (6 statements:1, 3, 6, 11, 16, 22).

#### 4. DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The subjects of this study were given the questionnaire (the attitude scale) and asked to answer the items on it. The expected responses were based on a 5-point scale, ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree).

On receiving the questionnaires, the scores were ranged in order to see if the respondents had favourable or unfavourable or neutral attitudes towards the communicative learner-centered approach.

#### 5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

After the application of the attitude scale, the average attitude score was found 73. This result indicated that, in general, the instructors had mildly favourable attitude towards the communicative learner-centered approach. It can be speculated that most of the teachers may not completely be aware of the general principles of the communicative approach. 19 instructors seemed to have favourable attitudes towards the communicative approach whereas only four instructors had unfavourable attitudes (S1:61, S7:63, S16:65 and S19:64).

##### Group/Pair Work

The second question is concerned with if group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students. While 8.70 % of the instructors think that they are uncertain, 30.43 % of them feel that they agree. Moreover, 60.87 % of the instructors strongly agree with this item.

When instructors are asked whether group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some measure of control over their own learning which is therefore an invaluable means of organizing classroom experiences, 60.87 % of them answered this question positively. 30.43 % of them are uncertain and 8.70 % of the instructors disagree with this idea.

More than 52.18 % strongly disagree with the idea that group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time. On the other hand, more than 34.7 % who reported 'Yes' to this question is about 13.04 %.

Most of the instructors (56.52 %) think that group work activities do not have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue. 8.70 % of them are uncertain. However, 34.78 % agreed on the 'little use' of group work activities, because of its difficulties.

### **Quality and Quantity of Error Correction**

The aim of the tenth question is to learn if the teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make and if errors are ignored, this will result in imperfect learning. Only 4.35 % of the instructors are uncertain, 73.91 of them mentioned that they disagreed. The percentage of the instructors who strongly agree with this question is 21.74.

Instructors' percentage who disagree with the question 13 in which errors are thought to be a normal part of learning and much correction is a waste of time is 21.74. The percentage of the subjects who are uncertain about this item is 8.70. Moreover, 69.56 % of the subjects strongly agree with this idea.

### **The Role and Contribution of Learners in the Learning Process**

Instructors' responses are generally negative on the question of the learner who comes to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of the language. S/he is in no position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her. 71.74 % of the subjects disagree. The percent of the subjects who agree with this item is 27.28.

More than 78.2 % of the instructors do not think that training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is futile. The percent of the instructors who agree with this item is 21.74.

As an answer to the question, if the learner-centered approach to language teaching encourages responsibility, self-discipline allows each student to develop his/her full potential. 78.26 % of the instructors declare that they are not against this idea. On the other hand, more than 21 % of the instructors mention that they do.

A majority of the subjects (39.13 %) are uncertain about the question related with the communicative approach to language teaching produ-

ces fluent but inaccurate learners. However, 42.48 % say that they disagree with this idea. 17.39 % of them agree that the communicative approach produces fluent but inaccurate learners.

As for language acquisition, it is acquired most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct or explicit way. For this item in the questionnaire 4.55 % of the instructors disagree, 22.73 % of them are uncertain whereas 72.73 % of them agree with this idea.

86.96 % of the instructors think that tasks and activities should be negotiated and adopted to suit the students' needs rather than being imposed on them. The rate of the subjects who are uncertain is 8.70 and 4.35 % of them disagree with this item.

### **The Role of the Teacher in the Classroom**

Question seven is about if the teacher as 'authority' and 'instructor' is no longer adequate to describe the teacher's role in the language classroom. It appears that 52.17 % of all the instructors agree with the idea mentioned before, but 17.39 % of them are uncertain. For the same question 30.44 % of the subjects disagree with this idea.

The sixteenth question is about the 'teacher's role,' which can be defined as 'transmitter of knowledge.' The researchers asked whether this role is only one of the many different roles s/he must perform during the course of a lesson. An overwhelming rate of the instructors (86.86 %) have a positive attitude to this question. On the other hand, 13.05 % of them think different and say 'No.'

More than 52 % of the instructors mention that the role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation and writing. 21.74 % of them are uncertain. On the other hand, 26.9 % of the subjects disagree.

According to 36.36 % of the subjects, students do not do their best when taught as a whole class by the teacher. Small group work may not occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but it can never replace formal instruction by a computer teacher. 27.27 % of them are uncertain whereas the rest (36.36 %) disagrees with this idea.

### **Place/importance of Grammar**

The first question in the questionnaire is about 'grammatical correctness.' As it is known, this concept is regarded as the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged. As seen in Table 2, in the first choice, 4.35 % of the instructors strongly accept 'grammatical correctness.' In the second option, 39.13 % of them state that they agree. 17.39 of the instructors are uncertain, 30.43 % disagree and 8.70 % of them strongly disagree.

The third question inquires whether grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end itself. Interestingly enough 56.52 % of the instructors strongly agree and 34.78 % of them agree whereas only 4.35 % of the instructors strongly disagree and the same ratio of them are uncertain.

The subjects (78.26 %) think that by mastering the rules of grammar, students do not become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker. 13.04 % of the instructors are uncertain about this issue and 8.70 % disagree.

The instructors were asked whether the teachers' feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not on the linguistic form of the students' responses, more than 73.9 % of the instructors acknowledge the truth of the issue whereas 26.09 % reject this view.

The eleventh question is concerned with the knowledge of the rules of a language does not guarantee the ability to use the language. The obtained results indicate that nobody disagrees with this

truth, but only 4.55 % of them are uncertain. However, 95.45 % of the instructors strongly agree with the idea indicated here.

The final question in our questionnaire is whether the direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential and students are to learn to communicate effectively, 34.78 % of the subjects strongly agree with this idea, whereas 26.09 % are uncertain and 39.13 % reject this view.

## **6. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Under the highlights of the findings in the study the following recommendations can be made for foreign language teachers;

1. Group work activities are essential for communication to promote interaction among learners. Teachers should provide a variety of group work activities for the learner to bring the real life situation in the classroom.

Furthermore, it is believed that group work allows the learners to explore and control their own learning experiences. Therefore, the teachers of a foreign language must always be prepared well in advance with different activities to be implemented in the classroom to monitor their learners' performance.

2. It is widely considered that the correction of grammatical errors will not result in imperfect learning. Therefore, teachers should review and make the necessary explanations once more as a whole in the classroom not to waste a long time on correction.

3. Communicative activities should be developed and implemented in the classroom to make the learners both fluent and accurate in communication in the target language.

4. Tasks and activities to be prepared should be negotiated and adopted to suit the learners' needs.

5. The teachers of a foreign language should be a transmitter of knowledge in the classroom through such activities as oral explanation and writing.

