



## DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE THROUGH INTERACTIVE LEARNING MODEL IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ESL TEACHING

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### Abstract:

The authors in this paper research discuss about the characteristics of students' communicative competence in English language teaching. The purpose of the research was to examine and establish the possible influence of interactive learning on developing the students' communicative competence in English language teaching. The essential premise was that the English language acquisition at an early age most powerfully occurred with the application of interactive learning model, through the communicative approach. What is further on emphasized is the significance of a holistic approach to learning, where each student needs to be approached individually, and then, as such, integrated in the class. The obtained results of the research point out that the interactive learning in English language teaching has a significant influence on developing first and foremost verbal communication among the peers, then the students' social expressiveness in communication, their empathy, non-verbal communication and flexibility, and the ease in communication.

**Keywords:** interactive learning, students' communicative competence, English language teaching

### 1. Introduction

The notion *communicative competence* refers to the ability of the speaker to use language in order to communicate successfully. It represents the ability of participants in a social interaction to choose an adequate communicative behaviour to achieve their own interpersonal goal, and to maintain the full contact with other participants in a conversation in the context of a limited situation (Wiemann, 1977). It is also seen as the ability of an individual to accomplish, to a certain extent, his goals imposed by a social

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situation, however, without jeopardizing the participants' ability to accomplish their other, personally much more important goals (Parks, 1985), or, the ability of the interlocutor to behave and speak in accordance with the situation, at the same time successfully with respect to his individual and relational goals (Spitzberg and Cupach 1998).

The reference to the relevant bibliography suggests that the communicative competence is understood as the degree of individual ability to adapt their behaviour to specific situations, and realize the individual and relational goals, i.e., the communicative competence is a relative value, a variable, whose amount varies from person to person (Reardon, 1998). The communicative competence is seen as the individual ability to successfully communicate, to be precise, concise, coherent, effective, competent and appropriate in communication (Spitzberg and Cupach, 1998). According to Wilkinson (Wilkinson, 2001), the communicative competence is the skill to apply language and non-verbal behaviour with the aim of communicating ideas and realizing effective communication in social relations. Furthermore, Trenholm and Jensen (2004) define the communicative competence as the individual ability to communicate in an effective and appropriate manner in the context of a specific communicative situation.

Some authors, such as Zlatić and Bjekić (2007) emphasize that the communicative competence plays an important role in the research about functional characteristics in social context. It has been established that the term *communicative competence* represents a more specific term in comparison to *social competence*, more precisely, that it is comprised in the very centre of what *social competence* represents. It is therefore questionable whether these two types of competence might be equalled. According to the above-mentioned authors, the overlapping of social and communicative competence springs from the fact that the language competence has been aided by non-verbal signs of omnipresent social interaction. As Zlatić and Bjekić (2007, p. 127) suggest, „*the field of interpersonal relations is built of symbolic interchange, therefore the communicative competence itself represents a central and most investigated aspect of social competence*“. As already mentioned, the communicative competence represents a more specific term compared to the term *interactive competence*, which comprises a greater number of various capabilities and dynamic dispositions, e.g. knowledge, intellectual capacity, social intelligence, communicative competence, language competence, individual interests, attitudes, value system etc. (Havelka, 1994). Taking all the aforementioned into consideration, in this paper the authors argue that any identification of social and communicative competence is unacceptable.

On the other hand, since no communication whatsoever is possible outside of the social context, what is unquestionable here is that, in the research of the influence of interactive model in learning English as a foreign language, it is necessary to consider both the social and pragmatic context. In this research, that spatial dimension is found in the form of classroom in elementary school. The development of communicative competence itself, as a more specific term, has been generated and comprehended

within a more general term of interaction. The central point of the research in this paper is developing the communicative competence in English as a foreign language teaching, which, within this research, represents the most specific form of communicative competence development.

What we hold as the most relevant approach in the context of developing communicative competence in elementary school teaching English as a foreign language, is the communicative approach. Within the approach itself, the very significant method for the level of elementary school teaching is, among others, the Content-Based Teaching (CBT), which, actually, "*...can be regarded as a logical development of some of the core principles of Communicative Language Teaching, particularly those that relate to the role of meaning in language learning. Because CBT provides an approach that is particularly suited to prepare ESL students to enter elementary, secondary, or tertiary education, it is widely used in English-speaking countries around the world. Task-Based Teaching can be regarded as a recent version of a communicative methodology and seeks to reconcile methodology with current theories of second language acquisition*" (Richards and Rodgers, 2001: p. 151).

Task based learning implies using authentic language tasks, focusing on authentic language and putting the students in various social contexts by setting meaningful tasks. This helps the students to imagine themselves in realistic situations, where they would need to use target language structures applicable in each particular situational context. The success of this method is easily predictable, since the students in elementary school (especially in the early grades) still have a very vivid imagination, which makes it easier for them to visualize themselves in particular situations.

Now the question is what the task is in this sense, and how to use it. As Nunan states, (1989: 10), "*...the communicative task [is] a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right.*" It is by far most important that the teacher himself aims at advancing himself to become as skillful as possible in choosing the right tasks and administering them in the classroom.

Larsen-Freeman (2008: 137-158) further on emphasizes the effectiveness of Content-based, Task-based and Participatory Approaches in the classroom. The importance of content in teaching and learning English is that it helps the non-native speakers to understand the task and the context it relates to. The Participatory Approach also emphasizes the task, but what is different with it is that its content is based on issues of concern to students. It thus helps in creating a holistic approach in teaching, and, presumably, help or may trigger the effective language learning.

## 2. Method

### 2.1 The aim

The aim of this research study was to investigate and analyse the influence of interactive learning on developing the students' communicative competence in English language teaching in elementary school.

### 2.2 The essential hypothesis

The essential hypothesis was that the interactive learning and its models have a positive impact on developing the communicative competence in English language teaching.

### 2.3 The sample of the research

The research was carried out with a sample of 224 students in total: 112 students in the experimental group and 112 students in the control group. While choosing the sample, we premised that the ninth year elementary school students are characterized by numerous changes in their phycho-physical, intellectual and social growth and development. Namely, their living space is being widened and differentiated, the number of available social roles is increasing. Moreover, the possibility of active experimenting with various social roles occurs together with their emotional development (increasing autonomy, seeking out emotional sources out of the family). The research was carried out with the randomly selected ninth grades that were not distinguishable in school success and conduct in either positive or negative context; with the aim of their being similar according to sex, achievement and motivation (statistical variations of the arithmetic means are negligible here).

The teachers used in the experiment were of the same sex, level of education, approximate age, and years of service. They participated in a wider experimental research study on the application of the interactive teaching of literature, and are practically trained for the application of interactive teaching.

### 2.4 Methods and Techniques

Methods and Techniques used in the research were the experimental method and the method of scientific analysis and synthesis, along with the testing technique.

### 2.5 Instrument

In the research of this study, we used the Scale assessment of developing the students' communicative competence in foreign language teaching. The scale itself comprises five sub-scales that measure the following parameters: 1) developing the students' verbal communication, 2) demonstration of the students' social skills in communication 3) students' empathy, 4) non-verbal communication, and 5) the students' flexibility in communication. We used the Likert-type scale (implying parameters *always, often, occasionally, seldom, never*), and the relevant items in the final version were those whose correlations were equal to or higher than 0,35, while the items with the correlation equal

to or higher than 0,34 were eliminated. The reliability of the instrument was calculated using alpha Cronbach coefficient. The resulting coefficient of reliability was  $r = 0,82$ , and can be taken as a satisfactory reliability.

## 2.6 Process of Research

The experiment was realized in two elementary schools: *Saint Sava* and *Pale* in East Sarajevo (in eight classes – four of which were experimental, and the other four controls). The experimental and control groups were working under similar circumstances. The difference is reflected in the fact that the experimental group was introduced to the experimental program, i.e., interactive learning in foreign language teaching.

## 2.7 Techniques of statistical data analysis

The parameters calculated were: the arithmetic mean, standard deviation and t-test.

## 3. Results and Discussion

The results of the students' communicative competence in the initial research are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1:** The students' communicative competence in initial assessment

Group	No. of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	p
E	112	86,26	11,29	1,02	1,86	0,07
K	112	83,81	10,25	0,97		

The statistical indicators suggest that the difference among the means in the experimental and the control group is insignificant. The resulting t-value (1,86) is statistically insignificant at either level of reliability, i.e., is not significant either at level 0,05 ( $1,86 < 1,96$ ), or level 0,01 ( $1,86 < 2,58$ ).

After the experimental factor was introduced, the results of the final assessment have shown a statistically significant advantage in favour of the experimental group. The results of the final assessment have been presented both in table form and in graph form.

**Table 2:** The students' communicative competence in final assessment

Group	No. of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	p
E	112	90,84	9,56	0,90	6,79	0,00
K	112	82,88	10,58	1,00		

The comparison of the final results presented in the table leads to the conclusion that, in the overall results of the students' self-concept, the arithmetic means in the experimental group was 7,96 higher than in the control group. The difference is

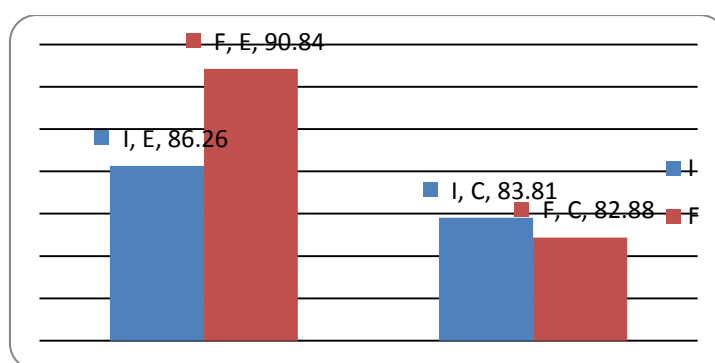
statistically significant at both levels of reliability, i.e., the obtained t-value is significant at both the level 0,05 ( $6,79 > 1,96$ ) and level 0,01 ( $6,79 > 2,58$ ), in favour of the experimental group. On the basis of the calculated t-value, it can be argued, with the probability of 99% and with the risk of 1%, that interactive learning in the English language teaching process contributes to higher efficiency in developing communicative competence than in traditional model of English teaching.

On each sub-scale of competence assessment, the experimental group was more efficient in developing communicative competence than the control group.

The overall results obtained in both the experimental and control group of the students in the initial and final assessment are presented both in table form and in graph form.

**Table 3:** Overall results of the initial and final examination of communicative competence development with the students in both the experimental and control group

Group	is	No. of Students	Arithmetic Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard Error	t	P
E	I	112	86,26	11,19	1,07	8,45	0,00
	F	112	90,84	9,56	0,90		
K	I	112	83,81	10,25	0,97	0,85	0,40
	F	112	82,88	10,58	1,00		



**Graph 1**

The graph shows that the students of the experimental group made a significant progress in comparison to their results at the beginning of the experiment. The difference between their arithmetic means before and after the experiment is 4,58; the t-value (8,45) is statistically significant at both levels of reliability, i.e., is significant at level 0,05 ( $8,45 > 1,96$ ), and 0,01 ( $8,45 > 2,58$ ). On the other hand, the control group made negligible progress. The difference in arithmetic mean at the beginning and the end of the assessment is statistically insignificant at either level of reliability, i.e., is not significant at either level 0,05 ( $0,85 < 1,96$ ), or 0,01 ( $0,85 < 2,58$ ).

The experimental group students were given the opportunity to evaluate themselves, to give a valid assessment of their behaviour without the fear of being sanctioned. The free communication between the teacher and the students, among the students themselves and the students and environment have contributed to a proper

attitude of the students towards learning. The interactive learning in English teaching triggers the gathering and using of the students' overall mental capacity to perform various activities in the process. Each student is given the opportunity to prove themselves, not to escape responsibility, i.e., to attempt at doing the job in collaboration with his peers and the teacher. The possible obstacles, mistakes or errors, are being corrected in the group with the aid of the teacher.

In the English language teaching process, the students' communicative competence implies their capability to communicate with the teacher and among themselves in a proper way, i.e., to accommodate their role and behaviour to particular situation, to successfully achieve their goals in collaboration with the others, but at the same time to be careful not to jeopardise the realization of the goals of others, either the teacher or the students. Therefore, some new roles that are set as a task in front of the communicatively competent students are: active listener, presenter, researcher, helper, enticer, summariser, grader, examiner, recorder, manager (Suzić, 2003).

What is evident from the results of this research is that, with some of the students, the level of communicative competence development was sufficient, whereas a number of the students demonstrated an amazing ability to behave in accordance with the created situation. Furthermore, the communicative competence ensures the success in realising individual goals in an interaction. It builds up the capability of an individual to show empathy in striving for the other participants to achieve a certain level of pleasure in communication. Finally, even more important thing than the achieving individual goals in the interaction is creating and cherishing valuable interpersonal relations (Reardon, 1998).

#### **4. Concluding Remarks**

The results of the carried research have indicated that interactive learning in the English teaching process provides the opportunity for the student to feel free to ask questions, be inquisitive, to contemplate and make conclusions, to socialize in accordance to their own interests on any particular occasion, minding all their rights and duties in the process. It is of vital importance that the teacher is competent to manage the behaviour and actions in all the phases of the English teaching process, to be able to carry the responsibility for the welfare of all the participants in communication, to tolerate and respect different opinions, as well as similarities, to entice cooperation and non-violent settling of the matters. The teaching style of this sort implies the readiness for free communication from both the teacher's and the students' part, as well as presenting new ideas, teaching and learning with respect to social, cultural and ethnic differences.

The mode and quality of teacher's communication with the students is highly influential in the student's personal development, the final learning outcome and the communicative competence development. Contemporary and innovative teaching and education is and needs to be characterized by the learning process based on various communicational systems, designed and implemented by the teacher himself. The

transmission, reception, understanding and acquisition of the relevant information are directly dependent on the proper functioning of the system and each of its factors. Therefore, the tasks and requirements set by the teacher of English need to be accommodated to age and the students' intellectual capabilities. Furthermore, the communication in the classroom and the teacher's relation with the students' needs to be pedagogically articulated and highly ethic, based on mutual acceptance and agreement, along with the respect of the students' dignity and personality.

The corresponding bibliography offers many different models, procedures, workshops and other modes of communicative competence development in the English teaching process. However, it is necessary for the models to be in accordance with specificities of the given social, cultural and pedagogical environment. Following Jovanović (2006), it is clearly evident that developing the student's communicative competence cannot be understood, researched or implemented on its own, out of educational environment. The most important role in a successful teaching process is played by the teacher himself, and it is his attitudes and relation with the students, be he aware of that or not, that determine the student's position and the role in the relation. This is due to the fact that teachers with their attitudes and behaviour are the models imitated and identified with by the students, which is all permanently acquired by them (Шевкушић, Мандић, 1991). The greatest part of responsibility for organizing and achieving a successful communication in teaching process falls on the teacher, and for that reason, there is a constant need for the proper teacher's training and capacity building.

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