



**THE PROMOTION OF ONLINE STUDENT-CENTERED CLASSES TO
ACHIEVE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING WITH THE HELP
OFFERED BY TECHNOLOGICAL TOOLS**

ESTUDIANTE

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**The Promotion of Online Student-Centered Classes to Achieve Communicative
Language Teaching with the Help Offered by Technological Tools**

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Abstract

Nowadays, teaching virtually has become a challenge due to the COVID 19 emergency. However, with the help of technological tools, English as a foreign language (EFL) classes can be directed towards a student-centered perspective for students to be active in the class and participate orally. Furthermore, the implementation of technological tools became highly essential in the classes. This paper aims to explain the importance of a student-centered class and Communicative Language Teaching. Also, the importance of both working together in the class with the help offered by some online resources. Also, some online tools are explained that were applied in an EFL class. Moreover, this paper concludes that teachers should continuously innovate their classes by investigating and implementing new online tools that allow them to put into practice Communicative Language Teaching in a student-centered class.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, foreign language teaching, online resources, student centered learning, technological tools

Resumen

Hoy en día, enseñar virtualmente se ha convertido en un desafío debido a la emergencia del COVID 19. Sin embargo, con la ayuda de herramientas tecnológicas, las clases de inglés pueden dirigirse hacia una perspectiva centrada en el estudiante que puede ayudar a los estudiantes a ser más activos en la clase y participar más oralmente. Ahora, la

implementación de herramientas tecnológicas se volvió muy imprescindible en las clases. Este artículo tiene como objetivo explicar la importancia de una clase centrada en el estudiante y la enseñanza del lenguaje comunicativo. También, la importancia de que ambos trabajen juntos en clase con la ayuda que ofrecen algunos recursos en línea. Además, se explican algunas herramientas en línea que ya se aplicaron en una clase de inglés como lengua extranjera. Además, este artículo concluye que los profesores deben innovar continuamente sus clases investigando nuevas herramientas en línea que les permitan poner en práctica la enseñanza del lenguaje comunicativo en una clase centrada en el alumno.

Palabras clave: aprendizaje centrado en el alumno, enseñanza de una lengua extranjera, método comunicativo, herramientas tecnológicas, recursos electrónicos

Introduction

The situation that the world is facing due to COVID-19 has brought many changes. For instance, nowadays, face-to-face classes needed to be replaced by virtual classes as a

strategy to avoid the spread of the virus. Because of this change, teachers need to update themselves by finding new technological tools that better suit the virtual class modality. Moreover, I have heard from my coworkers at SAMAGU² high school that have said that virtual classes do not allow students to be active participants since there is no physical interaction. Therefore, some classes have become more teacher-centered which is not encouraging communicative language learning.

Nevertheless, virtual classes can become a good resource of knowledge to enhance a student-centered environment that encourages communicative learning because virtual classrooms assist the process of communication among learners and teachers (Arman, 2019). Likewise, technological tools can help teachers to interact with students face-to-face learning. Student-centered learning is possible in online classes which at the end helps to have a communicative language learning class. Moreover, I have seen that in my classes Student-Centered Learning and Communicative Language Teaching should work together since the student-centered approach encourages communicative learning.

A student-oriented class sees the teacher as the facilitator and students as active participants in their learning process. Moreover, Student-Centered Learning can be also implemented in virtual classes along with communicative learning. Based on my experience teaching at CEIC, EFL virtual classes have become a challenge for teachers that may state that is more complicated since students are not really present in the class due to the fact that they can turn off their camera and microphone, but this may not justify that the class can become a teacher-centered one.

Thus, it is possible to lead the classes towards a student-centered perspective that engages students to become active participants and inspire communicative learning among

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them. As Jeyasala (2014) agreed, “teachers should help students to develop communicative competence every time and should provide spaces to interact with others through oral activities in order to use the target language” (p. 111). Nowadays, since virtuality has become a daily aspect for teachers to work with, online resources can help them to promote student-centered classes following the Communicative Language Teaching approach.

Some teachers have guided the virtual modality towards a teacher-centered perspective. The reason might be this is the lack of knowledge of tools to use. Teachers are not aware of the technological tools they can use to enhance students communicatively. Nevertheless, virtual classes have the same potential as face-to-face classes. With the proper technological tools, teachers can direct the class towards a student-centered one that promotes communicative language teaching. There should not be any excuse to engage students communicatively because the technological tools exist, but what is needed is just to put them into action. For this reason, this paper intends to examine the technological tools that help teachers to apply a student centered learning within the communicative language teaching approach. It is important to examine each aspect separately in order to understand how a student-centered class engages communicative learning using technological tools.

Student-Centered Learning

As Larasati (2018) claimed, “Student-centered learning is an approach to education focusing on the needs of the students, rather than those of others involved in the educational process, such as teachers and administrators” (p. 154). This approach sees learners as active participants in the class; students are not passive learners. For this reason, the teacher is the facilitator that engages students to learn independently; the teacher provides the material and explains the subject, but the students are the ones that use the content, activities, and material.

The teacher planned the classes and created information, so students can use these activities and information to learn.

The student-centered perspective sees the teacher as a helper and the students as autonomous learners. According to Khadidja and Sari-Mitchel (2014), “The teacher is expected to be the first facilitator in such experiments in order to be followed by his fellow students. His role is determinant as he has to minimize the difficulties of learning in such a different environment” (p. 70). An important aspect about this learning approach is that students are free to participate when they desire; they have the freedom to decide upon their learning.

As Emaliana (2017) stated, “students centered learning considers the needs of the students as a group and as individuals; students are active participants in the learning process (p. 61). Student-centered learning sees the students as the protagonists in the class; the classes are planned towards the students; they are the doers in the class. Likewise, the teacher provides students with the opportunities to learn independently and from one another and coaches them in the skills they need to do effectively. Furthermore, this student-centered environment helps students to be autonomous learners, enhances communicative participation, and provides dynamic classroom activities. Student-centered learning goes hand in hand with Communicative Language Teaching because my experience working with virtual classes have shown me that when students are placed as the protagonists in the activities created, they become more independent learners and they are more willingly to work in the class; hence, student-centered learning is primordial in order to include communicative learning. Then, it is important to examine Communicative Language Teaching continuously;

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is understood, according to Richards (2006), as “the knowledge we have of a language that accounts for our ability to produce sentences in a language. It refers to knowledge of the building blocks of sentences and how sentences are formed” (p. 3). Also, CLT includes cooperative activities rather than individual ones, as well as the fact that the information discussed and communicated has a meaning and purpose. Richards (2006) mentioned “ Instead of making use of activities that demanded accurate repetition and memorization of sentences and grammatical patterns, activities that required learners to negotiate meaning and to interact meaningfully were required” (p. 13). Moreover, students are independent learners, so they take ownership of their learning.

Also, CLT is not only about communicating topics without meaning; in fact, CLT has a relationship between meaning and communication. It is not only speaking the target language, but it also emphasizes the meaning that the students communicate. This approach provides students with the chance to share their ideas, thoughts with others. Isakova (2018) mentioned that “Communicative competence is developed through modelling of communicative situations and developing training, which help develop self-confidence, self-esteem, assertiveness, personal and social activity” (p. 2). Communicative Language Teaching is the key to engage students to critically discuss the subject.

Furthermore, CLT is primordial for EFL classes since students communicate with each other and practice the language, so they prepare themselves to talk outside the class. Similarly, Communicative Language Teaching allows students to work more independently; therefore, they can be autonomous in their own learning; they can identify their errors, provide feedback and help each other. As Toro et al. (2018) said, “Students are provided with metalinguistic and elicitation feedback to improve their communicative skills which allow

learners to be aware of their mistakes while receiving input from the teacher through oral interaction” (p. 118). The students in this approach share real meaning; it is not only speaking the target language but also communicating real meaning in the target language.

Communicative and Student Centered (CLT)

According to Richards (2006), “CLT proposes that teachers now had to assume the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error-free sentences” (p. 5). This means that CLT proposes student centered learning as part of its model. As I have seen in my classes, CLT should work together with student centered learning because CLT needs to be in a student centered environment to allow students to be active learners and share their ideas with the others in the class.

It is important to understand that without student centered learning; it is not possible to have communicative learning in a class. If the class is based on teacher centered learning, there is no opportunity to have a communicative learning perspective. As Isakova (2018) said, “The fact that classes in communicative approach are student-oriented does not rule out the importance of the teacher, who, in this case, is defined as a facilitator of language learning and an independent participant within the learning-teaching group” (p. 2). The classes engage the students’ speaking proficiency and allow them to practice it at the same time.

The teacher is the facilitator; as Richards (2006) proposed, the teacher, “creates a classroom climate conducive to language learning and provides opportunities for students to use and practice the language and to reflect on language use and language learning” (p. 23). Therefore, CLT comprises a student centered perspective because it emphasizes the role of

the teacher as helper in the learning process. Students are aware of their own learning and they are in charge of it; students are the protagonists of their learning process. The teacher is always present in case students need assistance, but the attention is guided towards the student.

A learner-centered class allows a communicative learning environment.

Communicative learning helps EFL students to interact in the target language. Toro et al. (2018) stated that learning is more productive when students are engaged in a dynamic learning environment. This also is applied for the virtual class modality; a dynamic learning environment should include a student's learning perspective directed towards communicative learning. Arman (2019) mentioned that "In a learner-centered class, students work in pairs or groups to compare and discuss their answers, or reading and responding to each one's written assignments and propose possible improvements" (p. 45).

Communicative Language Teaching and Student-Centered Learning in the Class

As previously stated, CLT and student-centered learning may aid each other.

Therefore, student-centered classes help to achieve CLT. However, in online classes, teachers need the help of technological resources to apply these two correctly. In this section, we will explore the technological tools to implement in order to promote online student-centered classes to achieve communicative language teaching. Since EFL virtual classes have become the new modality in education today, it is important to mention and explore resources that teachers can use to learn how to teach a virtual class.

Moreover, virtuality should not be an impediment to allow students to communicate orally. For example, in a study from 2019, Al-Qahtani explained that virtual classes seem to raise positiveness in regards to teaching and learning; the majority of participants of his study

agreed that there is no difference among virtual classes and face to face classes (Al-Qahtani, 2019). Although virtual classes are new for many teachers, these ones are not an impediment to allow students to communicate actively.

As Al-Qahtani (2019) proposed, “virtual classes enhance comfort and engagement in dialogue, a teacher should try to motivate and improve students ‘communication skills” (p. 237). Even though people may think virtual classes complicate the educational system, it is the opposite since classes can enhance communicative learning in a student-centered environment. As was stated, technology is a useful tool for teachers to enhance CFL along with student centered learning. Therefore, there are many websites, applications, among others to apply. Some of these tools will be described above:

Flipgrid

Flipgrid is a free-access website that allows teachers to create group discussions about a topic they desire. Some of the main features that include this website are: upload a clip, record, record screen, feedback, effects drawer, music, sticky notes, among others. The students can discuss the topic with recordings, written text, and video. Then, the teacher can reply to the students’ answers, and also the students can reply to the other students. This website engages students orally. Also, it motivates students to participate using their speaking skill; some students feel embarrassed when they have to speak in front of everybody, which makes it difficult for the teacher to assess students. I have used this website in my classes at CEIC³. I have found that Flipgrid helps my students gain confidence speaking the language since when they are recording they are just interacting with the website. Therefore, they may

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feel more comfortable and secure. Moreover, this one also allows all students to participate since sometimes in synchronous discussions not all students participate.

Flipgrid also allows CLT learning since this website promotes self-assessment and reflection in students; this website includes students in their learning process; as active participants, they can visualize their recording so they can identify their areas of improvement. Flipgrid is also compatible with other learning platforms, so teachers are able to set assignments that automatically directs students into the website. As Stoszkowski (2018) stated, “Custom integration means Flipgrid can be embedded into a range of other platforms in the students’ learning ecosystem (e.g. Blackboard, Google Classroom and Microsoft Teams)” (p. 2). Furthermore, Flipgrid offers the opportunity to integrate CLT along with SCL since it gives the student the opportunity to become the owner of their own learning.

Padlet

Padlet is “an online tool that provides a virtual wall and collaborative space accessible from any Internet Enabled device” (Fisher, 2017, p. 163). This tool allows students to add information in real time; it is an interactive board in which students can add images, videos and recordings. As Fisher (2017) said, “Any number of participants can simultaneously view, add, and rearrange content on a Padlet, including text, images, and links to other web pages, videos, or documents” (p. 163). With the help of this platform, teachers can encourage students to actively participate in the class and also they become the center of it since they are the ones interacting with the platform.

The teacher may explain how to use the website, but the students are the ones that participate actively with the platform. Padlet can create communicative activities in which a

topic is posted in the interactive board and the students can comment on it. They can record a response, write it and also hear the other classmates' responses. Fisher (2017) affirmed that “Padlet is a very easy to use technology that can be applied to engage students in a large number of ways both inside and outside of the classroom” (p. 165). Overall, padlet is a tool that promotes communicative learning and self and collaborative feedback; padlet gives students the chance to comment on the other posts, so they can contribute with feedback to other classmates.

Genial.ly

To finish, Genial.ly is a website in which teachers can create interactive content such as board games, live worksheets, oral games, presentations, among others. However, there is not much research nor studies conducted since it is a new website. Moreover, some authors have confirmed that Genially is an unknown tool by some teachers. However, if teachers use this one can help interaction and creativity while learning. Also, the implementation of this tool aids the student to be the protagonist of their learning (Tutillo-Piña et al., p. 263).

However, based on my experience implementing this website at CEIC, I can say that students really enjoy the implementation of this one. In Genial.ly, teachers are able to create graphic communication, animated effects, embed videos, audios, images. Also, teachers can use the created templates and modify them according to the class or they can create activities from scratch. This website offers a broad list of activities that teachers can use to engage students communicatively.

For instance, teachers can create a virtual snake and ladders board game, and within this one a set of questions that the students can answer orally. The game includes the dice and the pieces, the teacher just has to add the questions. Also, students can play with quizzes that

have interactive images and music. Students really enjoy these quizzes because these ones caught their attention and make the learning process more dynamic and fun. In fact, in these games the students not only learn but also have fun. Genial.ly has reinvented virtual modality learning and also has provided content that allows ELF teachers to have the chance to guide their classes into a CLT and student centered environment.

Conclusion

Since the virtual modality started, classes have become more guided towards a teacher-centered perspective. The reason for this might be the lack of knowledge of technological tools to implement. However, there are plenty of tools that can be used to promote student-centered classes to achieve communicative language teaching. These tools are explained and revised in this paper. It is important to conclude that many communicative activities can be prepared in the class for students to practice the language; these activities enrich student critical thinking, allow them to receive and provide feedback.

Nevertheless, the virtual modality is not an excuse to continue creating teacher-based classes. Therefore, the class can be moved towards an environment in which students are able to actively participate in the class. Since virtual classes have become a key resource to continue teaching, teachers should continuously research for online tools that promote student centered learning along with CLT. Moreover, EFL teachers should ask and revise if these tools truly meet and accomplish the objectives stated for the specific population. In my opinion, teachers should be autocritical in order to see the effectiveness of each tool applied in the class.

Nowadays, the internet offers numerous websites, applications, and online resources such as Flipgrid, Nearpod, and Genially, which engage students to be the center of the class

and communicate orally. Nevertheless, I believe that students should have the possibility to practice the language with their classmates and also be the owners of their own learning. To conclude, virtuality is an opportunity to reinvent our English classes, it is also an opportunity to experiment with new online resources that might become really useful in our classroom.

Recommendations

After going through the process of teaching online as an emergency measure, I have learned that teachers should innovate their classes; they have to continuously research new tools to use in the class. Teachers should investigate technological tools that allow students to be active in the class. Nowadays, there are many websites that allow students to use the language; virtual classes can be dynamic and engaging with the correct online resources. However, I advise that to try online tools before applying them in the class in order to see the issues that the tools can present. In fact, I have seen that the majority of the new online tools teachers use in the class may present some difficulties. Therefore, teachers should be prepared to provide solutions to students to overcome those issues.

Similarly, I believe I have developed new skills to motivate students to learn. For example, I have seen that it is important that teachers interact as much as possible with the students. This means that teachers turn on the camera all the time, explain all the topics, and clear out doubts. Sometimes students feel stressed, overwhelmed and sad, so teachers should project that are interested to know the students' life outside the class; students are not only students but also human beings that have feelings and they want to share what they feel. Teachers should listen to their students and ask them as much as possible how they are dealing with virtuality. Likewise, I have seen that students because of virtually, students are more stressed and overwhelmed since they are on a computer all day long. Therefore,

teachers should work harder to motivate students. I advise teachers to create activities that the students enjoy and allow them to forget about all aspects they are going through.

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DECLARACIÓN JURADA

Yo, Genesis Valeria Rodríguez Vargas, cédula de identidad 116040043, estudiante de la Universidad Nacional, declaro bajo fe de juramento y consciente de las responsabilidades penales de este acto, que soy autor intelectual del Trabajo Final de Graduación Titulado "The Promotion of Online Student-Centered Classes to Achieve Communicative Language Teaching with the Help Offered by Technological Tools", para optar por el grado de Maestría en Educación con énfasis en la Enseñanza del Inglés.



Firma

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Refrendo

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