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## Communicative Language Approach (CLT) to the Teaching and Learning of Arabic Language in Nigerian Universities

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### KEYWORDS

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### ABSTRACT

*The most recent and effective method of teaching second or foreign language is Language Communicative Teaching (CLT). It*

*Academic Standard (BMAS), Communicative language Teaching (CLT), National University Commission (NUC) Observation method*

*emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as “Communicative Approach”. Moreover, the 12<sup>th</sup> edition of the National University Commission (NUC) encourages Arabic teachers to adopt (CLT) approaches in their methodology of teaching. Therefore, this research intends to find out the level of compliance of lecturers in the Nigerian universities to this instruction. This research is qualitative in nature. Observation and document analysis were conducted to scrutinize the teaching methods as well as the language theories the teachers used in the classroom. The two Lagos State owned universities offering Arabic language as a course of study were selected as a case study. The field notes-based universities on the observation were used to analyze the teachers’ compliance with the CLT principles. The result shows that none of the classes observed adopted CLT approach in their teaching methodology. The study identified the necessary implications of second language teaching without Communicative Approach and suggests ways the approach can lead to an effective teaching of Arabic language in Nigerian institutions of higher learning.*

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## **INTRODUCTION**

The advent of Communicative language teaching (CLT) can be traced back to the beginning of the European Common Market, which had its subsequent influence in America (Rutherford, 2014). It was a response from various disgruntled stakeholders that the then teaching methods, such as grammar translation methods, were inadequate to meet the language communication needs of learners, especially in learning that involved short periods.

Hence, there is need for an approach to language learning that will facilitate interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. This approach can also be applied with other methods in the classroom for effective communication of the target language among the learners. Language learners in environments utilizing CLT techniques, learn and practice the target language through interaction with one another and the instructor. It is a transformation of language

from a discrete knowledge that involves learning grammatical rules in an obtrusive way into a real language practice that makes the target language more attractive to the students in a meaningful interactive way provided by the language experts and practitioners. This is the assertion of (Sabrina 2020, 20) when he says that Communicative Approach regards language learning as a whole learning using various contexts that will allow the students communicate well in the target language. (Richards and Rodgers 2003,27) assert that the goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence that the learner needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. Canale and Swain in (Sreehari 2012,10) break the competence into four dimensions: grammatical competence (sentence-level grammatical forms), discourse competence (cohesion and coherence), sociolinguistic competence (social context understanding) and strategic competence (strategies to cope with various contexts). (Larsen-Larsen-Freeman 2000, 23-24) elaborates that the most obvious characteristic of CLT is that almost everything is done with a communicative intent. He also asserts that authentic materials are also needed to support the teaching and learning practices.

More so, the activities involved are often carried out by the students in small groups

with supervision of the teacher. It can also lead to social interaction between the learners and original speakers of the target language. This idea was greatly influenced by Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory which asserts that an essential feature of learning is that, it awakens a variety of internal developmental processes which are able to operate only when child is in the action of interacting with people in his environment and in co-operation with peers. (Nath 2010, 25) Vygotsky's social interactionist theory serves has a strong foundation of the modern trends in applied linguistics. It is also the basis of the new trend of language acquisition through acculturation and immersion programme.

As a result of this, Arabic language learning in a communicative form would imply that competency is based on the individual's ability to use Arabic in everyday situations. Communicative Arabic is a concept that centers around fundamental human communicative functions, such as "socialising, establishing closer relationships, giving and responding to feedback, arguing, requesting, reporting, receiving, and processing information". This forms the aims and objectives of teaching Arabic language as a course of study in Nigerian Universities. The curriculum of the Benchmark for Language Courses prepared by the National University Commission (NUC) asserts that Arabic

lecturers should adopt Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as the methodology for the teaching of Arabic language courses. It states thus:

*Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approaches should be employed. These approaches have been found to promote the use of the target language by the learners and encourage Student-Centred Teaching and Active learning strategies. (NUC 2012, 98-98)*

In view of this, it is expected that there should be an enabling environment for this stated objective to be effective in terms of theory and practice because CLT approach depends on understanding language in its various social and cultural aspects. In order to make this a reality, Batawi in (Alsaari 2015,15) emphasises that success in CLT approaches depends on three main factors: (i) educators (teachers, principals, supervisors and curriculum designers); (ii) professional development programs and (iii) the extent to which CLT is compatible with society.

### 1.1 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This research investigates the effectiveness of the adoption of CLT as the methodology of teaching Arabic language in Nigerian Universities and also analyses the factors that may hinder the approach with the necessary pedagogical implications.

### 1.2 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions are espoused as the pathfinder of this research:

1- Do Arabic lecturers in colleges of education adopt communicative language teaching approach in teaching Arabic language?

2- What are the factors that hinder the effective application of communicative teaching approach in Nigerian Universities?

### LITERATURE REVIEW ON LANGUAGE TEACHING THEORIES

The main purpose of theories of second-language acquisition (SLA) is to make the target language easy for the learners. Various language education specialists have discussed different theories in second language acquisition. The theories of Piaget, Vygotsky, Chomsky, Skinner, Krashen etc. debate the exact functions of language and its role as a tool in conceptual thinking.

The structure of the grammar-translation approach is one of the approaches developed by the early linguists. (Richards and Schmidt 2002, 231-32) defined the grammar-translation method as “a method of foreign or second language teaching which makes use of translation and grammar study as the main teaching and learning activities”. The major focus of this method as highlighted by (Graffth and Parr 2001, 24) is

basically on reading and writing with relative attention to speaking and listening. Priority is placed on the accuracy and ability of the student to construct and correct sentences through the translation process. This theory can be related to the cognitivist approach of learning because the proficiency of the student in the target language depends solely on his cognitive ability to translate from one language to the other.

The reaction of some other linguists against the shortcomings of the grammar-translation method brought about another learning theory in second language known as audio lingualism in which emphasis was laid on drills, repetition and substitution. Pertinent to say that this method was also borne out of the urgent war demand of fluent speakers for other language which led to the development of Army method to produce military personnel with conversational urgency in the target language. The method later attracted the attention of linguists that were looking for an alternative to grammar translation method and this led to the emergence of audio lingualism (Graffth and Parr, 2001). In this case, language is seen as a system that should be taught and learn on stimulus response and reinforcement basis. The objective of the audiolingual method is accurate pronunciation and grammar, the ability to respond quickly and accurately in

speech situations and knowledge of the sufficient vocabulary to be used with grammar patterns. This method can be justified as the behaviorist learning approach in which language can be seen as object that reacts to external stimuli.

Chomsky developed a language theory of learner as a generator of rules, he argues against the idea of the audio lingualism. He notes that children are born with an inherited ability to acquire any human language. He believes that every child has a Language Acquisition Device (LAD) which encodes the major principles of a language and its grammatical structures into the child brain. He also holds the view that a child could not possibly learn a language through imitation alone because the language spoken around the child is irregular (Chomsky 1975, 145-46). This theory was later developed into innateness theory by (Chomsky 2009, 150-51). He asserts that the main argument in this theory is that children are born with an innate knowledge which guides them in the language acquisition task. Other linguists that hold the same view with Chomsky include Corder (1967, 12) who argues that language errors made by student indicate the development of the underlying linguistic competence and also reflects the learner's attempt to organize linguistic input. This was also supported by (Selink 1972, 25)

who views learner's error as evidence of positive effort by student to learn the new language.

The concept of Chomsky was criticized by the behaviorist psychologists that held the view that children imitate adults. They believe that children's correct utterances are reinforced when they get what they want or are praised for what they say. It clashes directly with that of (Skinner 1957, 23) who espoused the idea that language is a direct result of conditioning.

The cognitive psychologists as opposed to the behaviorist view language as an aspect of a child's overall intellectual development. Jean Piaget viewed language acquisition as a part of overall cognitive development in children (Shaffer et al, 2002, 27-28). He placed acquisition of language within the context of a child's mental or cognitive development. He argued that a child has to understand a concept before he can acquire the particular language form which expresses that concept. According to the cognitive theorist all aspects that are learnt by an individual are as a result of what learners have constructed or discovered by their own mental process and not through observable behaviour (Warren 2012, 22). (Wilburg 2010,29) asserts that children /learners come to school with knowledge, skills and related experiences to the learning

situations and this make them actively involved in their learning process.

However, Steven Krashen was considered to be one of the driving forces of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). He asserts that acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language - natural communication - in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding. On this account he enjoys the native speakers of the language to help the student or the acquirer of the language by communicating with them in the target language, he says thus, "In the real world, conversations with sympathetic native speakers who are willing to help the acquirer to understand their language are very helpful." (Krashen 1987,45). According to Krashen, second language acquisition can be based on five hypotheses: Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, Natural order hypothesis, Input hypothesis and the affective filter hypothesis. The Acquisition-learning hypothesis divides into two independents of second language performance: the acquisition system and the learning system. The acquisition system as the name implies, laid much emphasis on the meaningful interaction in the target language. The second system as stated by Krashen is the product of formal instruction

of teaching and learning a target language. It comprises of conscious process which result in conscious knowledge about the target language. Krashen notes that for better understanding and good proficiency of the second language, much priority should be given to the former over the latter.

There are other less widely adopted methods and approaches to the teaching and learning of language such as natural method, direct method, the total physical method and the silent method. But in recent times the linguists believe that the field has tended to move away from the dogmatic position of which method is right or wrong, it has now become eclectic in its choice of method, therefore, language teachers are advised not to stich importance to one method over the other. The effectiveness of each of these methods depends on the teachers' liberty to use his discretion to select the technique or the combination of techniques that suit their purpose best and this is the new method in language teaching called eclecticism method.

### **Research Design**

This research is qualitative in nature. Observation and document analysis were adopted as the research methods. Through the field notes prepared from the observation, the writer gained much information on the methodology adopted by

lecturers in teaching some of the courses available in the programme. He tried as much as possible to adapt to the context and interaction in the classroom without influencing the course of events. In this case of observation method, the researcher exerted minimal influence on the environment and acted as a non-participant observer who observes without any involvement into the classroom activities. The researcher also paid attention to the physical place and the individual participants present in connection with the situation of events. (Ciesielska et,al 2018, 229-30) assert that (Arvastson and Ehn 2009, 37) propose a list of aspects that might be useful for choosing what to observe in a typical organization study: The Management of Time and Space (How is time organized? Who makes the decision), Objects (What are the physical objects present?), Social Actors (How do participants look like and behave in a given space and time?). Routines, Rituals, Episodes (What are the routine chores? What are rarer, unusual, or unexpected ones?). All these conditions were critically assessed in the observation. Furthermore, the field note was guided by Banciu and Jireghie as stated in (Sabrina 2020, 20-21) who asserts that the following features should be put into consideration for effective language communication teaching:

1. an emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language,

2. the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation,
3. the provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning management process,
4. an enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning,
5. an attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

All these features guided the decision of the researcher in his field note and formed the basis of the research analysis. Some of the available documents such as course materials, recommended books, statements of aims, objectives and syllabi, lecturers' handout and students' handbooks were critically analysed to determine the factors that hindered the effective communicative teaching approach in some of the Arabic language courses. The field notes from the observation and materials analysed were later compared with past literatures to answer the two research questions.

### **Synopsis of The Respondents**

The two Lagos state owned universities: Lagos State University (LASU) and Lagos State University of Education (LASUED) were selected as the sites of the research. The Arabic lecturers and students in part one to three in the Arabic language departments

of the two institutions were the observed participants. Three lecturers each from two universities were observed in the classrooms of minimum of 20 students across levels. Two lecturers have Doctorate degrees in Arabic language while one has Doctorate degree in Arabic language curriculum studies and others have Master degree in Arabic language and literature. The lecturers from LASU were coded as LASU LECT 1, LASU LECT 2, and LASU LECT 3 while LASUED lecturers were coded as LASUED LECT 1, LASUED LECT 2 and LASUED LECT 3. The classrooms observed in each college according to their levels were coded thus: LASU PART 1, LASU PART 2, LASU PART 3; LASUED PART 1, LASUED PART 2, and LASUED 3.

### **Analysis and Discussion**

The necessary observation of all the courses taught were written down as field note. The salient issues on the field note were critically analysed and coded. The codes were matched together to become themes and analysed as follows:

#### **4.1 English Language as Medium of Instruction**

It was observed that the medium of instruction in the class irrespective of the course content is English language. The students and teachers sparingly used Arabic language intermittently and always translate



it in English. The following field note testifies to this issue thus:

*The class started by 10:00am, the lecturer entered the class and greeted the students in English language, he asked them to bring out the handout given to them for the course. He read a passage to them in Arabic language and asked them to listen attentively; he later translated the passage to them in English language. He started to ask them questions based on their understanding of the passage and encouraged them to answer the questions in Arabic language. It was observed that very few numbers of the students can express themselves in Arabic language and have little understanding of the passage. The whole class was not so much active because many of the students did not participate in the exercise expect when the teacher changed his mode of instruction into English language.*

Field Note of ARB 112 Oral Arabic (Reading, Listening Speaking, and Writing Skills) 2 C  
20 February 2023, 10:00am delivered by LASU LECT 1to LASU PART 1

Another field note on the same theme is as follows:

*The lecturer entered the class and greeted the students in English language, the students also replied in English language. The lecturer revised the last topic to the students and asked them some question on it. The lecturer introduced the new topic to the students. It was a topic on the Jihad activity of Usman Dan Fodio in Sokoto, he brought out a note he has prepared on the topic and started to dictate and translate it to the students. He pauses intermittently to explain some points to them in English language. Some of the students asked questions during the course of the dictation. All the interaction between the students and lecturer from the beginning to the end of the lecture was done in English language. The lecture ended by 2:00pm*

Field Note of ARB 112 Oral Arabic (Reading, Listening Speaking, and Writing Skills) 2 Thursday, 20 February 2023, 10:00am delivered by LASU LECT 1to LASU PART 1.

The situation is also the same thing in the other University. The field note of the sister college of education goes thus:

*The lecture started by 9.00am. the lecturer entered the class and greeted the students in Islamic way. He started his lecturer by communicating to them in Arabic language and translated it to them in English language. He asked them questions on previous topics on the meaning, importance and features of Drama. Few students answered the question in Arabic language while the rest answered it in English language.*

Field Note of ARB 213 Arabic Drama delivered by LASUED LECT 1 to LASUED PART 1. on Monday, 15 March 2023, by 9.00 am

To make the field note more systematic, the writer provides the points of teaching process in a listing form below:

1. The teacher greeted the students in English language and in most cases with Islamic greetings.
2. The teacher introduced the topic to the students in English language.
3. The teacher read a passage to the students in Arabic language and translated it in English language.
4. Few numbers of students can express themselves in Arabic language.
5. The class was not active when the communication was done in Arabic language.
6. The teacher dictated notes to the students and paused intermittently to explain some points to them in English.
7. The interaction between the teacher and students in most cases was done in English language.

From the above observation it was deduced that the opening activities in the class are greetings which are always done in Islamic way regardless of the faith of the students. This shows the influence of Islam on Arabic language. In most cases, it is expected that students learning Arabic language and teachers teaching it to non-native speakers are Muslims. Therefore, the student teacher's interaction is always based on Islamic principles.

Moreover, the observed classes have showed clearly the influence and supremacy of English over Arabic language. It was observed that English language dominated the means of instruction and communication in Arabic language classes. Thus, the main objective of communicative language teaching has not been realised. It was expected that forms of communication and interaction in the class would be in Arabic language. It must be noted that teacher who provides spaces for the students to speak in Arabic language contextually characterizes the Communicative Language Teaching. This issue has been the common phenomenon in the field of teaching Arabic language to non-native speakers. The first thing that needs to be established is that in teaching second language through communicative competence approach, the language input (listening) must be higher than the level of language production expected of the pupils. This means that teachers need to develop the habit of

speaking the language to the students several times for the students' listening, and this will gradually become meaningful to the hearing of the student. Chomsky (1975) developed a theory of language acquisition in which the learner is described as the generator of the language rules, to this extent, his view is that learner develops acquisition of the target language through his own effort by joining what he heard together to pass a meaningful message. This notion was also taken by Corder (1967) he argues that language errors made by students indicate the development of the underlying competences. Selinker (1972) referred to the learner's errors as the positive effort of learning new language. Krashen (1987) in his theory of communicative learning competence hold the view that language can be learnt or acquired. He believed that the process of language acquisition through communication is the best form of having good competence and proficiency of the target language.

### **Abstruse Methods and Application of Teaching**

The field note also indicates that almost all the observed lecturers did not adopt a particular methodology of teaching. It was observed that their mode of teaching was abstruse and cannot be identified with any methods of teaching foreign languages. In most cases, teaching and learning in Arabic classes are carried out through translation,

memorisation and rote learning. The field note below confirms this assertion thus:

*He asked them to bring out their novel entitled the Burning Gras” By Cyprian Ekwensi and the copy translated by Raji Masu’d. The lecturer asked one of the students to read the English text from where they stopped in the last class. After few minutes of reading, he asked another student to translate that particular portion in Arabic language. He later asked another student to read that particular portion from the Arabic text as it is translated by Raji Masu’d. The lecturer and students now engaged in interaction on the pattern and system of the translation done by the author. He later asked them to read the passage together for memorisation and asked them to translate what they have memorised into English language*

*Field Note of ARB 213 Arabic Drills 11 delivered by LASU LECT 2 to LASU PART 2 on Monday, 15 March 2023, by 9.00 am*

However, LASUED LECT 3 adopted lecture methods of teaching. He read and dictated from his handout while students were busy writing down his dictation. He explained to them intermittently and the students jotted down his explanation. This method of teaching is mostly adopted by the lecturers teaching Arabic literature, rhetoric and syntax.

*Field Note of ARB 313 Arabic Literature 111 delivered by LASUED LECT 3 to LASUED PART 3 on Monday, 15 April 2023, by 9.00 am*

The issue of methodology adopted in teaching Arabic language to non-native speakers is borne out of the fact that many of the lecturers do not have any training and experience on methodologies of teaching foreign languages. It is also pertinent to say that the teaching and learning of Arabic language to non-native speakers was carried

out at the initial stage by the Arabic philologist and linguist without any methods or rules guiding them in teaching Arabic as a second language. Because of the fact that the purpose of learning Arabic language as at that particular point in time was to prevent mistakes, particularly, in reciting the Qur'an and Hadith, as a result, the non-Arab Muslims imitated the Arab scholars in speaking and also in writing in order to actualize their initial aims of assimilating and understanding the teaching of Islam and this continue to be the methodology of teaching Arabic language to non-native speakers until the present time. Generally, it implies that Nigerian teachers of Arabic are required to possess relevant teaching qualification to be able to motivate and guide the learners. Hence the need for teachers of Arabic language to have basic professional training and orientation in both Arabic as a language and in the methodology of teaching it as a second language or foreign language is very important toward an effective implementation of Arabic curriculum at all levels of Nigerian education system.

### **Teacher Centred Approach**

field note shows that lecturers' instruction was the main activity that dominated the classes observed from the beginning to the end of the class. The students were given little opportunity to interact and express their views

in the target language. However, it is expected that lecturers should act as guiding and facilitators in the CLT class. (Larsen-Freeman 1986,28) asserts that teachers in communicative classrooms will find themselves talking less and listening more--becoming active facilitators of their students' learning. It is also important to note that the teacher's task in a CLT class is to set up the exercise, but because the students' performance is the goal, the teacher must step back and observe, sometimes acting as referee or monitor. A classroom during a communicative activity is far from quiet, however. The students do most of the speaking, and frequently the scene of a classroom during a communicative exercise is active, with students leaving their seats to complete a task. Therefore, it is very important to note that in the communicative classroom, Teacher Talking Time (TTT) must be kept to a minimum. This is not to say that the teacher should not speak at all, but TTT should be controlled appropriately. The classroom should be learner centred. The teachers' role is to facilitate students' communication which is the aims and objectives they want to achieve.

Moreover, the second research question discusses some of the factors that hinder an effective teaching of Arabic language through CLT. This question was answered through the general over view of the course outline, resource materials and facilities provided for

the program. The themes that were generated after the critical assessment of materials and facilities available for the program are analysed below:

### **Wrong Selection of Course Content, Facilities and Materials**

Through the assessment of the course contents and materials provided for the program, it shows that some of the course contents are too abstract and rigid to be delivered through CLT approach. A critical assessment of the contents of some courses such as Arabic culture, Arabic prosody and Arabic literature show that the courses are too complex for beginners to understand through CLT.

More so, all the topics in Arabic rhetoric are too voluminous to be taught for just one semester through the adoption of CLT. Such topics could be taught in both semesters of 200 and 300 levels for effective application of CLT. Some of the course materials such as textbooks and handouts giving to the students are not in conformity with principles and application of CLT. Therefore, all the activities usually start and end in the classroom without any other extramural application and practice of CLT. However, it is must be noted that the most common educational model applied in the context of the Communicative Method is the Functional-Notional approach, which emphasizes the organisation of the syllabus.

This breaks down the use of language into 5 functional categories that can be analysed as follows: personal (feelings, affections and interest of the students), interpersonal (social and working relationship among the students and the teachers), directive (influencing others), referential (reporting about things, events, people or language itself), and imaginative (creativity and artistic expression).

These 5 broad functions are then delivered by the teacher in both inside and outside the classroom using the '3 Ps' teaching model, which stand for Presentation, Practice and Production. In most cases, the material that is used for CLT can be categorised into three broad categories: Text-based- it forms an essential part of the exercises and students are expected to put the four language basic skills into practise. Among the activities involved are reading passages, gap fills, notes taking, listening to audio recordings and watching films. The Task-based- approach gives room for students to interact and cooperate together to complete a given task. These tasks may include: game boards, role-play cards, materials for drilling, pair work tasks. They may be exposed to 'real life' tasks such as role playing, booking into a hotel, buying and selling in a market place, transaction of business in the bank or a job interview. Realia- This would allow the students to get familiarised with the nature and the real world of life. This includes reading magazines,

newspapers and maps to know about natures, people and places. Students may be taking out for excursion to places such as amusement parks, zoo, farmlands and gardens to see things from the real world outside the classroom. It is also essential for students studying foreign language to immerse and live with the original speakers of the target language so as to get familiarised with their culture and ways of life. This forms the basis for immersion and acculturation programs for students offering a foreign language as a course of study.

### **Recommendation and Conclusion**

Communicative approach to language teaching and learning suggests that language is communication. Therefore, the final aim of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is communicative competence in which learners learn the target language by using it frequently and adequately to communicate at all time and in all places. As a result of this, authentic and meaningful communication in the target language should be the goal of the CLT classroom activities. This involves the integration of different language skills for effective communication and interaction among the teachers and the students. Moreover, the teacher has two main roles in CLT approach to language learning: to facilitate the communication process in the classroom and to act as an independent participant within the learning and teaching

group. The teacher is also expected to act as a resource, an organiser of resources, a motivator, a counsellor, a guide, an analyst and a researcher. Therefore, such teacher must be a very knowledgeable person that understands the individual differences of his students. This research recommended that adequate use of authentic materials could go a long way to make the aims and objectives of the program achievable. Theoretical knowledge of a language teacher needs to be very good in practice. The monitoring ability of the teacher must be very good in grammar and language pedagogical skills. The weaker learners who struggle and cannot use the target language as it was observed during the course of the research would continue to make mistakes and they may eventually give up. As a result of this, there is need for critical evaluation of the Arabic program in colleges of education in Nigeria and total overhauling of the course contents so as to make it attractive for the beginners. Pair and group work activities is also recommended and teachers should focus on accuracy through error correction because learners need to understand their mistakes. In conclusion, the research has established the fact that CLT would be more achievable in Arabic language program for the learners of intermediate and advanced levels of Arabic proficiency while some controlled practice and application is highly recommended for the beginners of low proficiency. Therefore,

the adoption of a communicative approach raises important issues for; Teacher training, workshops on foreign language teaching, Materials development, Testing and Evaluation.

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