

## EFFECTIVE APPROACHES IN LANGUAGE LEARNING

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**Annotation:** *Methods of teaching English as a second foreign language: communicative language teaching approach, concentrated language encounters, and characteristics of computer-based language activity methods are clarified and analyzed in this article.*

**Keywords:** *CLT, EFL, CLE, COBLA, approach, phenomena.*

In order to implement the suggested teaching methods effectively and successfully in an EFL primary classroom, a basic knowledge of child development and learning needs to be insightfully related to EFL pedagogy. It is believed that children’s cognitive development and language learning occur through interaction with the surrounding environment and social contexts. Also, children’s knowledge is thought to be constructed when they take part in activities presented to them by others in the surrounding world, and also through the support and scaffolding of these more experienced others (Cameron, 2001). More knowledgeable people can help children to learn by talking to them or asking them some questions while they are playing or doing tasks. The interaction between the more expert and the children, when tuned to suit the children’s level, means comprehensible input is presented. Children process this input internally and eventually acquire the language they have been exposed to (Krashen, 1982). Children can better undertake the tasks that they can nearly do by themselves with help or guidance from adults or more experienced others (Vygotsky, [1934] 1978). According to Piaget’s notion, children’s learning and development occurs through several chronological stages, from birth to the age of over twelve (White, Hayes, & Livesey, 2005). Through each stage children construct and acquire knowledge from interaction with different features of surrounding environments. Children develop their knowledge through their sensory impressions and actions and concrete contexts, and they are able to learn through imagination and abstract phenomena as they grow older. Children, aged from five to twelve, which is the age of students in the primary schools, can learn through objects, words and images that represent the surrounding world. They can understand the outside world well through concrete experiences, but have difficulty dealing with abstract issues. Knowledge about children’s learning and cognitive development is the basis for determining classroom activities, teaching and learning aids which are appropriate to the stage of children’s development

The activities for EFL classes are designed according to principles of meaningful input, which means developing engaging tasks and teaching and learning aids suitable for students’ ages. These activities need to be so engaging that students become

enthusiastically involved in learning and using the language in the class. The communicative language teaching approach (CLT), which has been introduced to and implemented in our national EFL classes for more than twenty years, based on principles identified above. The goal of the CLT implementation is that students gain an ability to use English effectively because they develop a competence with grammatical knowledge, and with functions of language suitable to context, language discourse, and strategies to compensate for their inability to express what they want to say (Hedge, 2000). These competences can be developed through communicative activities in classrooms, such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and completing information gaps. These activities can be carried out through group work, pair work and individual work (Richards & Rogers, 2001). In a CLT classroom, the teacher plays three main roles: an activity facilitator, a participant observer and a learner. This means the teacher of a CLT class needs to be competent in providing activities, be proficient in English so that he/she can use the language in the activities, and have an ability to observe and learn from classroom implementation (Breen & Candlin, 1980).

The approach that is currently implemented in our national EFL classes tends to be a weak version of CLT. A strong version is rarely carried out in our national schools, because students and teachers are unable to use English to interact in classes as intended by the strong version of this approach. The weak version of CLT consists of three main phases, namely presentation, practice, and production (Holliday, 1994). These three phases are necessary for students in EFL contexts because there is no English context for students to be immersed in. All models of language have to be provided for students in the presentation phase and communicative situations are provided only through the practice and production phases. Another way that the EFL class can offer an English-speaking context and communicative situations for students is through a related method called Concentrated Language Encounters (CLE). With this method students learn and use the language through five phases (Rattanavich, 1992). The language models are presented through the starter story or tasks in the first phase of CLE. Students are encouraged to practice using the language through talks and discussions about the story or the task in the second phase. They have opportunities to jointly write a text for the whole class in the third phase, and write a text for their own group in the fourth phase. They practice the discrete points of language through various activities in the fifth phase. CLT in its weak version and CLE are different in that the CLT provides learners from small parts of language to the whole part, while CLE involves learners in the whole part of language in the provided situation before embarking on discrete points of the language. The common feature of these two methods is that both need the proficient teachers in the classroom, teachers who can carry out attractive and appropriate activities. Teachers' English proficiency in the CLE class needs to be sufficient for them to be good models and to provide effective scaffolding for their students.

Computer-based language activity software (COBLA) has been constructed to facilitate the teachers' presentation of accurate models of language and language activities to their classes. It stores a starter story as language context and models, and includes various activities for students to respond to. Each activity is presented to the students through multi-media information such as texts, animated illustrations and sound. The lessons can be played back many times. Therefore, students can access ample models of language and language contexts in various activities. Students are able to select and click to have the texts read aloud or they may choose to respond to a computer and get some evaluating feedback immediately. These multi-sensory features of the computer-based activities are found effective for engaging students in the activities at high and long levels of concentration (Pearman, 2003) and for helping students remember vocabulary for longer periods of time (Siribodhi, 1995; Clement, 1997; Yu-Huei, 2002).

Due to the fact that most schools throughout the country have been provided with computers for school administration and for classroom pedagogy, according to National Education Reforms COBLA designed in line with CLE methods is viewed as being helpful for the EFL teachers in national primary schools, as they face the challenges in their EFL classes. The promising effectiveness of using computers to assist teaching and learning English is evidenced by the studies of many national EFL teachers (Siribodhi, 1995; Chonlapap, 2002; Prakobnun, 2002).

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