

Developing English Language Skills Through Competency-Based Language Teaching

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Abstract

Language proficiency is a communicative competence that lets learners express their ideas succinctly. And in order to achieve communicative competence, English language learners require a good admixture of accuracy and fluency to attain a certain level of proficiency according to Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). This research paper emphasises that developing English language skills can become more effective by implementing Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT). Furthermore, this paper highlights how CBLT allows teachers to help learners develop English language skills by clubbing them with language components and other essential skills, boosting learners' communicative competence. In addition, learners also set clear objectives and align their needs with the predefined competencies to achieve the desired learning outcome. Fusing language components like grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation with English language skills help learners enhance their language proficiency. If this fusion is integrated with a few more competencies of the “21st-Century Skills”, it makes learners more social, professional, and employable. Thus, Competency-based Language Teaching helps the learners master at least one competency and strengthens the other required skills for overall development.

Keywords: Competency-based Language Teaching, Developing English Language Skills & Proficiency

Introduction:

A few major influences on our period and future are globalisation, changing demography, and technological breakthroughs. To meet these difficulties and embrace novel and exciting opportunities, the students must have specific competencies to be ready. Let's understand what it means to be competent in the 21st-century contemporary world, but before that, one should know the meaning of competence. *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* defines competence as “the ability to do something well” and as “a skill that you need in a particular job or for a particular task.”

The renowned English Language Teaching (ELT) experts Richards and Rodgers define competency as “*An element of competency can be defined as any attribute of an individual that contributes to the successful performance of a task, job, function, or activity in an academic setting and/or a work setting. This includes specific knowledge, thinking processes, attitudes, and perceptual and physical skills.*” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.141). Whereas, Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT) is a teacher-led reform because it focuses on what “*learners are expected to do with the language*” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.141). The idea behind this concept is straightforward: rather than counting the hours spent in a classroom, learning is best assessed by how well students apply what they have learned. In

addition, teachers, by using this method, can better prepare students for an increasingly global and competitive market. The main goal of Competency-based Language Teaching is to give every student an equal chance to develop the skills they need to succeed in their lives.

What is Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT)

Language is a bundle of skills comprising listening, speaking, reading, writing (LSRW), and many other paralinguistic skills required for a learner to be fluent enough to help achieve a certain level of accuracy, too. These language skills become dominant and effective when 21st-century skills and their paralinguistic features strengthen them. Hence, CBLT completely suffices as it is based on defined and framed competencies as per the students' needs. According to Richards & Rodgers (2001, p.141) “*Competency-Based Language Teaching (CBLT) is an application of the principles of Competency-Based Education to language teaching*” because CBLT has many similarities with Competency-based Education as it is modelled on a set of outcomes that have been determined through an analysis of the tasks that students are often expected to do in real-world scenarios.

CBLT also provides an opportunity and flexibility to language teachers to design an ELT (English Language Teaching) course that integrates the "21st Century Skills" like creativity, collaboration, employability, communication, leadership, productivity, and social skills implicitly. In a classroom, while teaching receptive or productive skills of language, learners can be engaged in activities like "a pair activity", "a group activity", and "an individual activity" to do the tasks. The learners will be occupied enhancing their language skills; however, they will be indirectly exposed to other essential 21st-century skills. For example, if they are busy with "a pair activity", they will learn about collaboration. While doing "a group activity", they will learn about the spirit of teamwork and critical thinking. If the activity is "an individual activity", learners will be able to express themselves with clarity. In a way, integrating 21st-century skills with CBLT is like killing two birds with one stone. Combining these two will not only help the students enhance their language proficiency but also make them more social, amiable and employable. Implementing CBLT will be a paradigm shift in education because it concentrates on the results or outputs of learning while designing ELT courses. Thus, the thrust area of CBLT is the “*functional and interactional perspective on the nature of language*” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 143), which means that language learning cannot happen in isolation. It has to connect with the social context where one uses the language. This innovative and outcome-based method enables teachers to support learners in acquiring information, values, and the ability to continue learning long after earning a degree.

Features of Competency-based Language Teaching:

Some essential key features which help in the implementation of Competency-based Language Teaching programs. They are given below:

1. It contributes to society by helping pupils develop the required skills to deal with the demands of the contemporary world.
2. It focuses on contextual language teaching so that the learners get exposed to specific language forms/skills which are useful.
3. It divides the process of language learning into precise and meaningful chunks, enabling the teacher and taught to gauge the progress.
4. It involves constant and ongoing assessment, identifying the skills lacking in learners and testing them again after teaching the lesson.

5. It evaluates students on their ability to exhibit the pre-defined competencies rather than through the use of conventional assessments.

6. It incorporates individualised and learners-centered instruction in terms of content, level, and pace.

Since learners' needs and interests may be linked to the skills they need, a competency-based approach is said to have several advantages. Additionally, they become aware of what needs to be learned and how it applies in the context of the actual world. Learners may also judge whether the competencies are applicable and valuable. Moreover, mastering one ability at a time allows learners to see what they have learned and still need to learn.

Role of Competency-based Language Teaching (CBLT) in Developing English Language Skills:

CBLT acts as a catalyst in developing English Language Skills. It is based on the English language's functional and interactional linguistic views to impart knowledge of the language in light of the social settings in which it is utilised. Furthermore, language always serves as a means of interpersonal contact and communication for accomplishing particular objectives, such as developing expertise or professional skills. The four core language skills are: Listening, Speaking, Reading, and Writing (LSRW). The most common order in which they are learned is to listen first, followed by speaking. Reading and writing come into the picture simultaneously. An individual may understand, generate, and use language effectively to improve interpersonal communication using these four skills.

In a CBLT framework, students must complete an initial assessment before the course begins. The instructor assesses each student's current skill level and divides them into groups based on "*their current English proficiency level, their learning pace, their needs, and their social goals for learning English*" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.147).

While teaching the English language in class, a language instructor can begin with "listening/reading skills" lesson because it is highly crucial. It enables pupils to speak, interact with others, and learn new words and grammar. There are three stages involved while teaching listening or reading skills through a classroom activity.

A) Before Listening: The first stage engages the students for the listening activity by:

- Getting their attention with a captivating introduction to the subject.
- Providing them a reason to listen and posing a query for them to respond to
- Defining the new vocabulary
- Describing the updated structures

B) During Listening: Whereas, the second stage is like providing stimulus to the students

- Reading the text aloud to the class
- Assisting learners to predict what's going to happen next after listening
- Asking them to compare their initial listening with their predictions
- Pose some questions for them to answer before they listen again
- Giving students a second chance to listen again
- Engaging students in performing various tasks while listening again, such as filling out a table

C) Post Listening: The final stage is like activating by:

- Asking extra questions about particular details to make sure that pupils have understood the entire listening material
- Making five to six blunders when reading out the text (the story), students either rectify these errors right away or make a list of them and report them to the teacher after listening

After going through the stages of teaching listening skills, it gets evident that active listening requires a significant level of discipline and self-control. In addition, when the CBLT approach is put to practice, it helps improve listening skills and strengthens learners' reading skills on the quiet. During the entire learning and teaching process, learners are exposed to listening to audio clips. As a result, the learners get familiar with new expressions and vocabulary, gradually improve their pronunciation, learn to retain essential information for doing an activity, and embark on becoming good readers. Moreover, when the learners are involved in activities, they learn to collaborate with their peers, realise the importance of teamwork, start paying attention to others when they speak, put effort into using the English language accurately and develop a sense of becoming independent speakers.

Now, it can be observed that just by executing one "listening skills" activity in the class, learners also start getting acquainted with interpersonal skills such as collaboration, teamwork, effective listening, communication, problem-solving, and so on. These are a few "21st-Century Skills" which enable learners to stay up with the quick-paced modern markets of today.

Conclusion:

The benefits of using Competency-based Language Teaching in the classroom are innumerable. Classroom practices show that learners can achieve more remarkable results if language teachers use this method for teaching and evaluation. In addition, CBLT makes it possible for learners to jump from one proficiency level to the other as it centres on developing learners' language skills while implicitly integrating them with 21st-century skills. Through this method learners will achieve greater heights in demonstrating language proficiency and becoming more employable. Hence, it won't be an exaggeration to state that developing English language skills through CBLT will have greater impact on learners. Moreover, learners will develop an attitude with critical thinking, communicative competence, problem-solving skills, and leadership qualities on the quiet through this method.

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