Revisiting the Communicative Approach: The Tripod Construct

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Abstract

The Communicative Approach (CA) has been adopted in English Language-Learning contexts as the ultimate solution in English language teaching, following dissatisfaction with the structuralist approaches, grammar drills and audiolingualism (Liao, 2004; Hiep, 2007). The Communicative Approach promised rapid results in English language learning, however concerns have been voiced on a perceived decline in students' performance in writing proficiency, following the shift in focus to communication (Lakhwe, 2016; Maalouf, 2016). Thirty years after its implementation, calls were made to reevaluate the Communicative Approach based on case studies and results from ELL contexts (Bacha, 2016; Samra, 2016). Arguments provided that what may work in native contexts may not have the same impact in non-native learning contexts (Lakhwe 2016, Ghadi, Biddou and Boukanouf 2016). This case study seeks to identify the main tenets of the Communicative Approach in non-native contexts, and to recommend essential components to its application. The study is based on data collected from 198 students doing English communication skills courses and 45 participating English tutors in an English foreign language (EFL) university context, Lebanon. Findings suggest that performance remains the evidence of competence; however appropriate language performance is essentially reflective of a tripod model of CLT that incorporates correct linguistic application, appropriate sociolinguistic awareness and higher order strategic maneuverability.

Keyword: Communicative approach (CA), communicative language teaching (CLT), English language teaching (ELT), the tripod construct, non-native contexts

Cite as: Al-Khatib, H. (2017). Revisiting the Communicative Approach: The Tripod Construct. *Arab World English Journal*, 8 (1). DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no1.1>