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THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *It has been widely accepted that language is not only a system of rules, but a dynamic resource for the creation of meaning. In that sense, it is essential to distinguish between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use these rules effectively when communicating. This view has underpinned one of the most popular approaches to language – communicative language teaching. The aim of this paper is to present the growing importance of focusing on the processes and means towards the learning of a foreign language (FL) rather than the products of a language. With communication at the centre of any FL curriculum, cooperative language learning assumes one of the leading positions in the language teaching-learning process. The paper will try to show the positive effects of cooperative language learning and teaching, as based on the results obtained from the survey carried out on a group of students at the tertiary level of education. It will point out to the fact that cooperative language learning provides students with the necessary social and academic skills, promoting productivity and achievement, which are also the aims of communicative language teaching. The survey results might also be used to give further implications for the creation of FL curriculum.*

Key Words: *communicative language teaching, communicative competence, cooperative learning, English for academic purposes.*

1. COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH TO LANGUAGE TEACHING

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) started developing in Great Britain in the 1960s, when British applied linguists began to question the assumptions underscoring Situational Language Teaching. Noam Chomsky was among the first ones to demonstrate that standard structural theories of language were incapable of accounting for the creativity and uniqueness of individual sentences. Therefore, there was a shift from the insistence on the mere mastery of grammatical structures to the emphasis on communicative proficiency.

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Wilikins (1972) claimed that a functional and communicative definition of language could actually help develop communicative syllabi for language teaching, while Firth (1950) suggested that a broader sociocultural context, which included participants, their behaviour and beliefs, objects of linguistic discussion and a word choice, should also be taken into consideration while teaching any language. Other theorists (Canale and Swain 1980; Widdowson 1989; Halliday 1970) also stressed the importance of communicative approach to language teaching, particularly the communicative acts underlying the ability to use language for different purposes and the relationship between linguistic systems and their communicative values in texts and discourses.

A theory of language as communication lies at the very core of the CLT. Hymes (1972) advanced the notions of "competence" and "performance" introduced by Chomsky in the 1960s and stated that the goal of language teaching was to develop "communicative competence", which implied acquiring both an ability and knowledge to use language. In other words, communicative competence considers language as a tool used for communication. Not only does this competence aim to focus on the development of four language skills, but it also depends on the correlation between the skills. Canale and Swain (1980) claimed that it was common to use the term "communicative competence" to refer exclusively to grammatical competence. Yet, it is worth observing that the phrase "communicative competence" was also used to relate to the psychological, cultural and social rules which discipline the use of speech (Hedge 2000). Therefore, the communicative approach, which challenged the prevalent audio-lingual method, promoted the idea that social and cultural knowledge were necessary prerequisites for understanding and using linguistic forms. The list of communicative competences proposed by Hymes (1972), and complemented by other theorists includes:

a) linguistic or grammatical competence;
b) sociolinguistic or pragmatic competence;
c) discourse competence,
d) strategic competence (Richards and Rogers 1986; Hedge 2000), and
e) fluency (Hedge 2000).

Linguistic or grammatical competence is commonly referred to as a set of grammatical rules that guide sentence formation. Canale and Swain (1980) find those rules useless since language users are unaware of the rules of language use.

Since fours skills (reading, listening, writing, speaking) essential to language learning do not occur in isolation from the extra-linguistic reality, it is plausible that *sociolinguistic competence* addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors. The way in which children learn languages illustrates sociolinguistic competence. Children learn to communicate through socialisation in their surroundings. By means of various interactions with the external world, by learning family and social values, norms, conditions, culture, even the economic and political situation, a child develops its identity, as well as the world view of the individual. When it comes to the pragmatic aspect of this competence, language learners are supposed to engage in coherent communication on various occasions. Success is achieved by the correct use of grammatical and linguistic rules. Thus, it becomes obvious that the grammar of the target language could not be taught in isolation, but in specific, everyday communicative settings and situations. This fact serves as an illustration of an interrelationship between the form and function in language

teaching. Erton (1997) stresses the functional study of language, by insisting on finding specific purposes that language is used for, and on revealing how communicators react to those purposes through the above-mentioned four skills. To sum up, linguistic behaviour consists of two parameters: social behaviour and people. People talk because they want to socialize and express themselves as human beings, and this sociolinguistic or pragmatic competence enables them to do this.

As far as *discourse competence* is concerned, a language learner is supposed to make a connection between various sorts of discourses, in order to create a meaningful whole by an accurate use of grammar and fluent communication. Consequently, discourse competence is related to the ability of speakers to put language structures together coherently and cohesively. Discourse Analysis, which has become a popular approach to analysing spoken, signed and written language, focuses on several aspects of discourse which deal with conversational interaction (sentences, propositions, speech acts and turns-at-talk) (Gill 2000). Therefore, apart from the fact that the development of discourse competence leads to a successful utterance of meaningful sentences, it also enables learners to gain an insight into language, by experiencing different interactional patterns in varying socio-cultural and physical contexts.

Strategic competence is believed to refer to critical and creative aspects of human mind, for it deals with the knowledge and effective and appropriate use of language by speakers in order to take an active part in communicative interaction. Strategic competence illustrates how a communicator makes a completely new sequence of utterances from the prior knowledge of words and phrases, thus achieving the effect of novelty. In other words, strategic competence mediates between the internal traits of the user's background knowledge and language knowledge and the external characteristics of the situational and cultural context (Douglas 2000). When talking about the critical aspect of our minds, it is suggested that critical reflections refer to the processes and activities in which prior experience is recalled, considered and critically assessed in relation to some broader purpose, usually to the process of decision making or planning (Farrell 1998). Decisions and plans are made by analyzing, synthesizing, evaluating, observing, reflection, interaction, etc. Examples of strategic competence abound. For instance, economic discourse shows signs of numerous strategic competences, some of which include negotiated goal alignment, risk assessment, procedural and means-end flexibility, project management, and the ability to tackle unconventional problems.

Hedge (2000) added fluency to the list of communicative competences of a successful English language speaker. According to Ellis and Sinclair (1989), language users are supposed not to make pauses and to speak spontaneously and meaningfully, without excessive repetition. Hedge (2000) goes even further with her definition of fluency, stating that it implies coherent response within turns of communication, as well as an appropriate use of linking devices, intelligible pronunciation and proper intonation. The reason why Hedge insists on fluency lies in the fact that in CLT the emphasis is on comprehensibility and not on accuracy. Speaking fluently does not imply speaking accurately (Canale and Swain 1980), which means that errors are tolerated. As a matter of fact, fluency creates a sense of comfort, self-confidence and control even in those speakers who lack strong pragmatic competence.

Since the Communicative Approach evolved as a response to the Audio-Lingual Method, it is reasonable that it prioritizes meaning, that is, the semantic content of language learning over other aspects of language. The idea at the base of this approach is

that grammatical structures are learnt and acquired through meaning and not vice versa. Thus, while teaching a language, a teacher is supposed to select learning activities in such a way as to engage learners in meaningful and authentic language use (Richards and Rogers 1986). These kinds of classroom activities actually bring the student into the focus of learning, which was not the case in earlier language teaching methods, supporting the model of a teacher-centred classroom (Al-Mutawa and Kailani 1989). It is active participation instead of passive reception which distinguishes communicative learning from traditional lecturing. The main role that students play in this approach is that of negotiators – between the self, the learning process and the object of learning. Another role is the role of a joint negotiator within the group, which points to the fact that failed negotiation is not the fault of the speaker or listener, but a joint responsibility (Breen and Chandlin 1980; Richards and Rogers 1986). 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. The teacher is also perceived as a group process manager, analyst, and counsellor (Rihards and Rogers 1986; Larsen-Freeman 1986).

Should CLT be considered either an approach or a method? Richards and Rogers (1986) claim that it is an approach rather than a model, since methods are considered to be fixed teaching systems with prescribed techniques, while approaches are held to be teaching philosophies that can be applied in various ways in the classroom.

One more point to be discussed within the theoretical framework of CLT is whether the theory of language underlying this approach is holistic or behaviouristic. Since the basic idea is that of language as communication (Richards and Rogers 1986), this approach is viewed as a mélange of the knowledge of grammatical structures and performance. In other words, both the usage and use of language (Widdowson 1984), including active student participation, knowledge construction, individual and collective discovery and problem solving, suggest that this approach is holistic and that it contrasts conventional approaches to education.

2. COOPERATIVE LANGUAGE LEARNING

Cooperative Learning (CL) started developing within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching and it is defined as an approach which encourages and promotes the maximum use of cooperative activities based on pair work and group work of learners in the classroom (Johnson, Johnson and Smith 1991). Olsen and Kagan (1992) state that CL is: "*A group learning activity which is organized so that learning is dependent on the socially structured exchange of information between learners in groups and in which each learner is responsible for his own learning, and is motivated to enhance the learning of others"* (8). Other theorists (Fathman and Kessler 1993; Richards and Rodgers 2001) claim that CL is group work structured in such a way as to enable student interaction, the exchange of information, as well as cooperation rather than competition in learning. As CL emerged from CLT, it encourages the development of critical thinking skills and communicative competences, by means of carefully structured activities of social interaction. The incorporation of CLT into CL was not a novelty, since cooperative learning applied many CLT techniques (Richards, Platt and Platt 1992). As a matter of fact, CL and CLT were a natural match in Foreign Language Teaching (Kagan 1995, 21).

The two major components of CLT were embraced by CL: (1) socially oriented lessons and (2) small group interaction (Kagan 1995). Nowadays, both of these correspond to the essence of CL, demonstrating the embodiment of a set of teaching methods and techniques and the spirit of CLT.

Since the popularity of CL has grown over time and had a positive impact on almost all aspects of language acquisition and language learning, linguists, methodologists, and pedagogues have started carrying out further examinations of CL and its three vital variables (Krashen 1985; Kagan 1995):

1) input;
2) output, and
3) context.

2.1. Input

According to Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory (1985), which in this case could be applied to Foreign Language Learning, comprehensible, developmentally appropriate, redundant, and accurate input (Kagan 1995) is a key to a successful mastery of any language. In order to facilitate language learning, students should make comprehensible sentences. The more language students hear and understand, the faster and better they learn language (Long and Porter 1985). The CL environment makes this possible, because a small group setting allows a greater degree of comprehensible input: the speakers in the group are usually of the same level, which results in the production of the level appropriate language and easier negotiation of the meaning. This would not be possible if teachers were in the centre of these activities, for they use more complex, level inappropriate structures. Moreover, CL enables language learners to focus on the essential meaning rather than the linguistic form of the language (McDonell 1992), i.e. on memorizing vocabulary and grammar (often achieved through drill exercises in isolation with no chances to communicate and cooperate).

Yet, comprehensible input is not enough. Even if the language is comprehensible, it is not necessary that it will stimulate the next step in language acquisition unless it is in the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky 1978). Vygotsky defined the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) as the area between the actual development level where the child can solve problems independently, and the potential developmental level where the child can solve problems under adults' guidance or in collaboration with more advanced peers. The child's developmental processes happen first between people when they are co-constructed during shared activities, whereby the processes are internalized by the child and become part of the child's cognitive development. When it comes to CL, groups should be formed in such a way as to engage some more advanced students who would support the development of their less fluent peers, for through imitation and a teacher's guidance students are able to do much more.

Furthermore, Kagan (1995) claimed that comprehensible input in the ZPD would not ensure language acquisition if the student was not exposed to the input repeatedly and from various sources. The CL environment is a natural source of redundant communication.

Finally, accuracy is one of the prerequisites for successful language learning in the CL setting, for grammatically correct communication followed by an adequate word choice and proper pronunciation facilitates language learning and language acquisition. It

might be true that traditional classrooms provide more opportunities for accuracy, as peers' output is less accurate than a teacher's output. Nonetheless, traditional classrooms achieved accuracy at the expense of students' output: teachers were those who were talking, while students were hindered from any communication and language production. Therefore, it could be concluded that a frequent communicative output produces language acquisition far more readily than a formal accurate input.

Mc Groarty (1989) points to the benefits of CL, claiming that students gain both in comprehension and production of the second/foreign language. The learning environment, abounding in activities promoting verbal exchange and interaction, contributes to speakers' fluency and language mastery.

2.2. Output

SLA theories are used again to explain the second variable of CL – output. As it has already been stated, interactions are crucial preconditions for Foreign Language Learning both in a natural linguistic context and in classrooms. Many theorists believe that comprehensible input is not the only asset necessary for successful communication. Output also plays a significant role in language learning. Student output was restricted in traditional classrooms (Chaudron 1998; Mickan 1995 and 1998; Tusi 1995), as teachers were considered to be the sole authority. CL enables students to actively participate in communication, which increases the production of students' language. Therefore, language acquisition/learning is fostered by output that is functional and communicative (Swain 1985), frequent, redundant, and consistent with the identity of the speaker.

Functional output occurs only if students are encouraged to produce the language that is representative of the way native speakers communicate in an everyday setting. If speech is not functional, it will add little to the speaker's actual communicative competence. Teachers using the traditional model of language teaching required their students to memorize extensive lists of vocabulary or to learn verb conjugations by heart, which, in fact, did not bring about acquiring or learning a language but learning *about* a language. Repetitions of sentences such as "This is a dog" or "The picture is on the wall" are not representative of the real, actual speech, and serve to practice de-contextualized chunks. It is CL which provides a springboard for using functional, communicative, real and actual language output.

A lot of research in the field of language acquisition/learning revealed that in traditional classrooms a teacher talk, which, in effect, was an explanation of grammatical forms and functions, dominated the classroom, and that students had very few opportunities to speak in the target language (Chaudron 1998; Mickan 1995). If teachers and students shared the mother tongue, code switching and translation were common occurrences. Moreover, students were called one upon one at a time, which provided each student only a short time for an output opportunity. In CL, the amount of student talk is maximized by means of a variety of pair work and group work activities, including group discussions, peer checking of worksheets, an exchange of ideas, making corrections and improvements.

Output redundancy is also a necessary precondition for obtaining communicative competence. As a matter of fact, students become fluent providing that they have a lot of opportunities to speak repeatedly on the same topic. Many cooperative activities, such as

Think-Pair-Share[1] or Inside/Outside Circle[2], make the redundancy of output possible and feasible. On the other hand, the traditional classroom organization leaves no time to the teacher to call on each student to talk more than once on a topic.

In order to successfully obtain fluency, students are supposed to practice classroom speech that is congruent with their identity. Any signals that potentially jeopardize students' identities will eventually be resisted. Consequently, less formal and peer-oriented use of language in a cooperative group should be used, as it is closer to the identity of many students than the formal use of language practiced in a whole-class setting.

2.3. Context

Apart from the variables of input and output, another important factor which fosters language acquisition/learning is a supportive, friendly, motivating, communicative, developmentally appropriate and feedback rich context (Kagan 1995). Kagan (1995) points to some of the disadvantages of the traditional classroom, stating that such a setting was far from supportive, since students were labelled as "right" or "wrong" after they answered questions in front of the whole class. Such an experience is rather threatening and the emotions of discomfort, apprehension and anxiety that students feel are usually aggravated by the fear of losing face when using the target language incorrectly in front of the whole class. Therefore, Kagan lists several rationales why CL creates a supportive learning atmosphere:

a) students are asked questions more frequently;
b) CL involves people working in teams to accomplish a common goal;
c) peers are more supportive since they work on the same side;
d) CL structures demand speech;
e) students praise, support and encourage each other, and
f) as students are independent, they need to know what others know (Kagan 1995).

As it has already been clarified, the communicative aspect of CL is very important. Students engage in communicating about real objects and events, whereby they are trying to negotiate meaning. Functional communication is a key to facilitating language acquisition/learning and should, therefore, be enforced in CL classrooms.

It is worth mentioning that CL provides a learning setting which enables students to communicate on developmentally appropriate levels, which is not the case with the traditional classroom. Traditional classrooms expect their students to speak before the whole class when answering a question or talking on an assigned topic, which makes the speech more formal and less contextualized. Speaking in front of a few friends within a group makes more opportunities for students to enter a discourse on a developmentally appropriate level.

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[1] Think-Pair-Share is a three step cooperative structure. During the first step individuals are asked to think silently about a question. After several minutes spent thinking, individuals pair up and exchange thoughts. In the third step, the pairs share their responses with other pairs, other teams, or the entire group (Lyman 1981).

[2] During this strategy, students form two different circles: half of the group stands in a circle facing outward while the other half forms a circle around them facing inward. Students exchange information until the teacher signals the outer circle to move in one direction. The students now have a different partner with whom to exchange (Kagan 1994).

In CL classrooms, students are provided with immediate feedback and correction, in contrast to the traditional classroom, where teachers usually experience silence when they ask their students if they have any questions. Even if some students are really confused and do not understand the learning material, they will, nevertheless, hesitate to raise their hands and ask for further clarification and explanation, as they are inhibited by the fear. On the other hand, CL classrooms create a positive setting in which feedback and correction represent part of the process of communication, which leads to an easy acquisition/learning of vocabulary and grammatical forms.

The examination of how the variables of CL (input, output, and context) facilitate language acquisition/learning shows that communicative language teaching can be best enacted in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom by means of cooperative learning (Kagan 1995). That is the reason why communicative approach and cooperative learning in an EFL classroom are a natural marriage.

3. Elements of Cooperative Language Learning

The idea of the decentralization of authority and classroom focus, put forward by Sharan (1980), is used to distinguish CL from traditional lecturing and refers to giving preference to active participation over passive listening. This is achieved through team work, group work and pair work. However, it is important to emphasize that not all group work constitutes CL (Richards 2006), as the small group format is not the essence of CL. Namely, it often happens that small group activities are not of cooperative nature, for *"simply placing students in groups and telling them to work together does not in and of itself promote higher achievement"* (Johnson, Johnson, and Smith 1995: 30). For instance, some EFL textbooks offer "group or pair activities" which appear to have been created only for the purpose of putting words "in groups" or "in pairs". What is, actually, the essence of these activities is an individual activity of a learner, without any encouragement of students to cooperate with one another. Moreover, placing students to sit together and telling them to work in groups does not imply CL either, as these activities are not carefully structured and lack further assistance which will make group work become team work. What is, actually, meant by the term "cooperative learning" is the incorporation of students working in groups to accomplish the same goal (Gillies 2007). In order for an activity to be called cooperative learning, there are several preconditions which have to be met and they include:

a) positive interdependence;
b) individual accountability;
c) promotive interaction;
d) teaching interpersonal and small group skills (teamwork skills), and
e) group processing (Johnson and Johnson 1994).

The first condition outlined here is *positive interdependence*, which rests upon the idea of students working together to attain a common goal and caring about each other's learning. In other words, one understands that one is linked with others, in the sense that one cannot succeed if others do not succeed and the other way round. In order to achieve this, students need to coordinate their efforts with the efforts of others to complete a task (Johnson, Johnson and Smith 1995) and to maximize both their efforts and the efforts of

other group members. Moreover, the knowledge that they either "sink or swim together" (Johnson, Johnson and Holubec 1998: 4) creates a commitment to the success of group members as well as one's own, which is the core of CL.

Another feature of CL is *individual accountability* and it implies that each team member is responsible for their share of the work and that they make contribution to the group. If students are individually accountable, they know that they cannot "hitch-hike" on the work of the others (Johnson and Johnson 1989: 70). In order to assess the performance of each individual student and what the group has accomplished, the teacher can use a number of ways: random selection of papers if each student is doing work within the group, random calling on individual students to present their group's answer, random oral quizzes of students, written quizzes or examinations (Kagan 1989). The most common way to structure individual accountability is by requiring each person to learn and teach a small portion of conceptual material to other group members.

Although positive interdependence is an important factor influencing cooperative learning, it alone does not create CL. After establishing positive interdependence, the teacher must ensure *promotive interaction*, i.e. that students interact to help each other accomplish the task, produce in order to reach the group's goals and promote each other's success (Johnson and Johnson 1989). Promotive and positive interdependence is achieved by various strategies and occurs when students: give help and assistance; exchange resources and information; give and receive feedback on taskwork and teamwork behaviour in order to improve further performance; challenge each other's conclusions and reasoning in order to promote a higher quality of decision making; advocate increased efforts to complete tasks and achieve mutual goals; mutually influence each other's behaviour (e.g. if a member has a better way to complete the task, group mates usually quickly adopt it); engage in the interpersonal and small group skills needed for effective teamwork, and process how effectively group members are working together and how the group's effectiveness can be improved (Johnson and Johnson1989).

Teamwork skills, which enable students to work effectively and function as a group, play an important role in contributing to the success of CL. The more skilled students are, the higher the success of CL will be. In order to coordinate their efforts to achieve the expected goal, group members are supposed to know and trust each other; communicate accurately and unambiguously; accept and support each other, and resolve conflicts constructively (Johnson and Johnson 2003). However, not all students know those skills, which implies that placing them in groups and telling them to cooperate will not guarantee the success of CL. As some students have never worked cooperatively under cooperative learning conditions, teachers are expected to carefully and explicitly teach them the required skills. Johnson et al. (1990) suggest that the interpersonal and small group skills be taught in a number of ways, some of which include setting the social skills goal together with the academic goal, role playing, modelling, and discussing the components of particular social skills (Cohen and Tellez 1994). It should be emphasized that the teacher is not somebody who measures the capacities of the students in terms of the final product, but somebody who acts as a friend, coordinator, director, guide and counsellor (Cowei et al. 1994).

Group processing is very important for it enables students to discuss how verbal, face-to-face communication helps them describe what member actions were helpful and unhelpful, and make decisions about what actions to continue or change. The purpose of

processing is to achieve the group's goals, link current material with what they have provisionally learned, facilitate the learning of cooperative skills and maintain effective working relationships by clarifying and receiving feedback on how the effectiveness of members contributes to the collaborative efforts of the group (Johnson and Johnson 1989). Moreover, group processing ensures that students think on both the metacognitive and cognitive level, and provides the means to celebrate the success of the group and reinforce the positive behaviour of group members (Johnson and Johnson 1989). In order to successfully interact and exchange communication, students need to be clustered in small groups, facing each other, while teachers are supposed to allow students enough time for successful processing to take place and to keep students involved in processing. The role of teachers is also crucial to the quality of group processing: they are supposed to observe the groups, analyze the problems the students come across working together, and give feedback to each group on how well they are cooperating. Not only should teachers serve as monitors in group processing, but they should also remind students to use their teamwork skills during processing and ensure that clear expectations related to the purpose of processing have been communicated.

4. English for Academic Purposes and Cooperative Learning

CL is an approach which has found its place not only in primary and secondary education, but also on the tertiary level of schooling. CL is a pedagogical concept that has been widely researched, practiced and endorsed by many professionals and is aimed at producing academically stronger students. Most tertiary level institutions feel responsible for the production of quality graduates who will be able to improve standards of living. Moreover, universities are trying to make their graduates able to compete in the global job market, by providing them with suitable techniques and methods to develop their intellectual capacities and integrity. Being a "team player" is probably one of the most desirable skills that one newly graduated student can possess. Ingleton (2000) says that:

> There is an upswing in demand by staff, students, and employers for students to graduate with good interpersonal skills, knowledge of group dynamics, the flexibility to work in teams, the ability to lead, to problem-solve and to communicate effectively. New curricula include a strong emphasis on generic skills, and we have the task of turning those emphases into actual graduate attributes. In the process, teachers' roles are changing from imparting information to facilitating students' acquisition of learning and generic skills (2).

Teachers using the CL approach are, as we have seen, considered to be facilitators who guide their students to attain the skills stated above.

As for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and English for Specific Purposes (ESP), there has been a universal tendency of incorporating CL structures into EAP and ESP courses. Many universities require their students to take obligatory EAP and ESP courses which address the specific language needs of students in specific disciplines, such as economics, engineering, education, hard sciences, law, etc. The guiding principle of all EAP and ESP programmes is: *"Tell me what you need English for and I will tell you the English that you need"* (Hutchinson and Waters 2004: 8). Therefore, EAP and

ESP syllabi are created in such a way as to provide as much language proficiency as possible by means of the academic discourse within the framework of students' disciplines (Dudley-Evans 1990). Essentially, EAP and ESP are designed to provide tertiary level students with the language skills that they need in order to properly deal with studies and texts in their areas of specialization. Learning EAP and ESP is based upon the principles of obtaining communication and problem solving skills, as well as critical thinking. It is cooperative learning that promotes the development of those skills. Only in a CL setting will students have an opportunity to discuss a certain problem with their peers, present and defend ideas, exchange diverse beliefs, question other conceptual frameworks and actively engage in the learning process. Group work and team work are becoming the basic structural form of EAP and ESP classes, with a particular emphasis on student-centred tasks. It is important to take into consideration the fact that language students should acquire communicative competences through involvement in relevant and academic contexts and engage in a process leading to social and academic integration (Beder 1997; Cooper et al. 2006) adequate for survival within the target academic culture. Many activities at universities are designed to improve students' academic literacy and CL is an excellent, reliable and effective method of reaching these goals.

5. PURPOSE AND METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

One of the aims of this paper is to examine the attitudes of students at the tertiary level of education, assess the teaching methodology applied at university, and get an insight into teaching and learning effectiveness. Quantitative data were obtained from 200 students at the Faculty of Economics, University of Niš. 100 interviewees were students of the second year of studies, while the remaining 100 were the students of the third year of studies. Language courses are obligatory in both the winter and summer semester of the second and third year of education. The data about the students' perspectives on CL, and particularly on their experiences about working in pairs and groups in EAP and ESP classes, were collected through a twenty-item questionnaire adapted from Ingleton (2000). All the items in the questionnaire were designed using a four-interval scale of "strongly agree", "agree", "disagree", and "strongly disagree". At the end of the questionnaire, students were given space to write their comments. The students completed the questionnaire at the end of the winter semester.

The data obtained from the questionnaire were analyzed using percentages and are presented in tables and figures.

5.1. Results

The students' views on CL, examined by means of twenty questions, were analyzed and presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Description of students' responses in relation to collaborative learning

No.	Working in pairs and groups	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1.	Helped understanding/ comprehension	25.2%	52.5%	17.5%	4.8%
2.	Fostered exchange of knowledge, information and experiences	35.3%	41.6%	14.3%	8.8%
3.	Made problem-solving easier	19.5%	46.7%	24%	9.8%
4.	Stimulated critical thinking	22.3%	41.2%	25%	11.5%
5.	More relaxed atmosphere	18.8%	33.5%	31.8%	15.9%
6.	Received useful/helpful feedback	21.5%	47%	24.5%	7%
7.	Got fresh insight	14.0%	45.5%	30.2%	10.3%
8.	Focused on collective efforts rather than individual effort	35.5%	40.1%	12.5%	11.9%
9.	Greater responsibility-for myself and the group	38.7%	33.2%	15.0%	13.1%
10.	Enabled learners to help weaker learners in the group	23.4%	49.8%	15.2%	11.6%
11.	Enhanced communication skills	30.2%	42.2%	18.7%	8.9%
12.	Improved performance	27.3%	36.7%	19.0%	17.0%
13.	Learners actively participated in the teaching/learning process	18.3%	33.7%	25.4%	22.6%
14.	It was fun	27.2%	30.7%	22.3%	19.8%
15.	Made new friends	25.7%	27.8%	32.0%	14.5%
16.	Fostered team spirit	22.9%	41.2%	22.2%	13.7%
17.	Waste of time explaining things to others	11.3%	20.6%	27.8%	40.3%
18.	Difficult getting members to actively participate in tasks	14.6%	20.8%	38.2%	26.4%
19.	(Pair/group work) should be encouraged/continued	30.6%	34.8%	19.2%	15.4%
20.	Maximum group size should be four	44.1%	25.2%	18.2%	12.5%

Results in Table 2 show the combined responses in figures and percentages. The "Agree" and "Strongly agree" responses are combined and presented here as "Agree" responses. In a similar fashion, the "Disagree" and "Strongly disagree" responses are combined and presented as "Disagree" responses.

Table 2. Combined responses

No.	Agree responses	Disagree responses
1.	77.70%	22.30%
2.	76.90%	23.10%
3.	66.20%	33.80%
4.	63.50%	36.50%
5.	52.30%	47.70%
6.	68.50%	31.50%
7.	59.50%	40.50%
8.	75.60%	24.40%
9.	71.90%	28.10%
10.	73.20%	26.80%
11.	72.40%	27.60%
12.	64.00%	36.00%
13.	52.00%	48.00%
14.	57.90%	42.10%
15.	53.50%	46.50%
16.	64.10%	35.90%
17.	31.90%	68.10%
18.	35.40%	64.60%
19.	65.40%	34.60%
20.	69.30%	30.70%

The results obtained from the survey and presented in Table 1 and Table 2 indicate that more than three quarters of respondents agree that CL helps understanding (77.70%); fosters the exchange of knowledge, information and experience (76.90%). A slightly smaller percentage of interviewees (65.40%) believe that CL should be encouraged and continued. Moreover, over three quarters of the students (75.60%) agree that CL focuses on a collective effort, while 71.90% of the respondents claim that CL gives learners greater responsibility for their learning. Also, three quarters of the students (75.8%) agree that CL enhances communication skills. The smallest percentages of respondents agree that the atmosphere is relaxed (52.30%); learners actively participate (52.00%); it is fun (57.90%); and students make new friends (53.50%). Interestingly, 68.10% (more than two thirds) believe it is not a waste of time explaining things to others.

For the clarity of the analysis, the items in the questionnaire (as shown in Table 1) are grouped into four categories: academic benefits (questions 1, 2, 6, 7, 10, 12, 13); social benefits (questions 5, 14, 15); generic/ life-long learning skills (questions 3, 4, 8, 9, 11, 16), and negative aspects of CL (questions 17,18). Items 19 and 20 are not included. Students' responses by categories are displayed in percentages in Table 3.

Table 3. Percentage combined students' responses by categories

Category	Agree	Disagree
Academic benefits	68.72%	31.28%
Social benefits	54.57%	45.43%
Generic skills	68.95%	31.05%
Negative aspects	33.65%	66.35%

Table 3 clearly indicates that more students agree that CL helps in the acquisition of life-long learning skills and has academic benefits in comparison to social benefits. The least number of respondents agree about the negative aspects of CL. In other words, the highest number of students disagree that there are negative aspects to CL. The smallest number of students disagree that CL helps them acquire generic and academic skills.

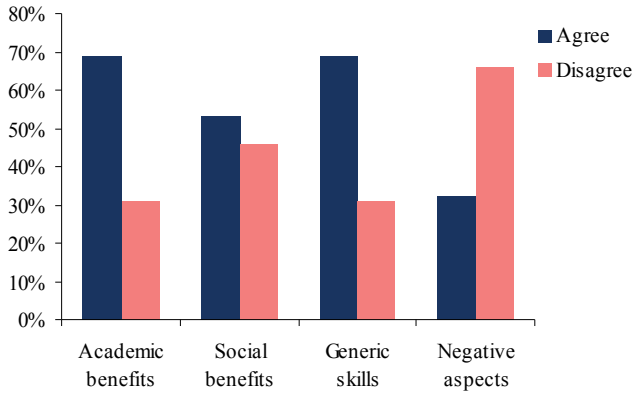

Fig. 1. Agree and disagree responses by categories in percentage

Figure 1 shows that students have highly positive attitudes towards two categories – academic benefits and generic skills. However, it is interesting that only more than one half of the interviewees (54.57%) agree that CL has social benefits. This is reflected in the fact that 35.40% of the students find it difficult to make other students actively participate in tasks, which explains why 33.65% agree that CL was a waste of time.

5.2. Discussion

The results obtained from the questionnaire point to the fact that CL has academic, social and generic benefits. Nevertheless, some students claim that there are negative aspects of CL. The students' comments at the end of the questionnaire reveal the reasons for the students' dissatisfaction with CL. Although CL is a good way to learn a language, develop critical thinking and encourage team work, some students feel that not everybody is actively participating and interacting in CL activities. As a matter of fact, working in a group leads to people becoming lazy, as they believe that the rest of the group will complete the assigned task. Moreover, some respondents claim that working in a group is not fun, since the students tend to mix and talk with the people they know, and ignore the students they are not familiar with.

In spite of the fact that one of the aims of CL is to make classes less teacher-oriented and more learner-oriented, it is not always easy to achieve this. It might be true that not all students are willing to actively participate in group work, but it is the teacher's task to make sure that even the negligent students are involved and to ensure equal participation. The teacher is supposed to clearly and explicitly present the consequences of not participating actively to students. Since the teacher monitors and observes the work and progress of each group, it should not be difficult to enforce the rules. Giving the same mark to the whole group, even though not everybody was participating would be unfair; therefore, it is clear that defaulting members will be given lower marks than the rest of the group.

Another problem pointed out by the students was group formation. It is understandable that if students are allowed to form groups themselves, they will select their friends. This explains a slightly lower degree of the acquisition of social skills. In order to enhance the interaction among students, the teacher is supposed to provide new grouping methods. Opportunities for making new friendships among students increase if the teacher is organizing groups. It is common that friends sit together; hence, the teacher should group students randomly instead of telling them to work as they are sitting.

The results of the survey indicate that 42.10% of the students believe that group work is not fun. In order to make CLL classes more interesting, the teacher should think of some course materials which will incorporate fun activities. Crossword vocabulary exercises[3], puns, pelmanisms, using cartoons and sketches to present new words are just some of the ways of making classes more appealing and catchy.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The analysis of the data obtained from the survey reveals that CL brings about the improvement of learning conditions in many ways. Some of the benefits include acquiring academic, social and generic skills. However, certain aspects of CL still need to be enhanced in order to make learning more enjoyable and interesting and to ensure that all members of groups are participating. What is important to emphasize is the fact that CL breaks the silence pattern that exists among students in the traditional classroom. Working on improving the social aspects of CL should be one of the aims of teachers at the Faculty of Economics, and this can be achieved if monotony is removed from learning. Learning may be stimulating and enjoyable for learners by:

- making tasks challenging;
- making task content attractive by adapting it to the students' natural interests or by including novel, intriguing, exotic, humorous, competitive or fantasy elements;
- personalizing learning tasks, and
- selecting tasks that yield tangible, fished products (Dornyei 2001, 77).

[3] The reason why the emphasis is put here on the vocabulary acquisition lies in the fact that Language for Specific Purposes classrooms are devoted to expanding and enriching students' vocabulary from specific areas of study. It is assumed that students at the tertiary level of education have successfully acquired and learnt grammar structures at lower levels of education. Thus, the major part of the class rests upon the presentation of vocabulary, its practice and active production of sentences using the newly-learnt economic words, idioms, collocations, etc.

One issue that should be taken into consideration when organizing classes is spatial organization. Chairs and desks should be placed in a way that does not hinder the mobility of students. Even though the classrooms at the Faculty of Economics are spacious, a great number of chairs and desks prevent students from moving freely and collaborating with each other. Nevertheless, such a spatial organization should not discourage the teachers from incorporating CL into their classes.

Students sometimes feel uncomfortable with the number of group members. Therefore, it is advisable that the teacher should discuss the group size with the students, and, if necessary, modify some aspects of methodology. When it comes to the students of the Faculty of Economics, it has been observed that they prefer working in groups of four, which, in fact, turns out to be the best group size. Bigger groups make students feel threatened, jeopardized and hinder them from producing a quality output.

As it has already been put forward, group and individual performances should be made components of the final assessment. This will motivate students to actively participate in the learning process. Moreover, students should be aware of the fact that uniform marks will not be given to all the members of a group and that lack of active participation in group work will result in a lower mark for the individual. If students are familiar with this kind of assessment, they will be more willing to contribute to group work and develop a sense of individual accountability and personal responsibility, previously mentioned in the paper.

Extracurricular activities are a powerful means of increasing student cooperation and improving social skills, which seem to be a problematic area revealed by this research. When students are assigned extracurricular tasks, they lower their "university or school" filter and relate to each other as "civilians" rather than students. This positive experience will prevail in their memory and they will start perceiving their university relationships in a new, positive way (Dornyei 2001). Even some of the most popular social networks, such as Facebook, My Space and Tweeter, can become a powerful means of motivating students to take part in language learning. By forming various groups on these networks and inviting students to become members, teachers encourage students to start thinking about language learning not as a tiresome task, but as a very positive and joyful experience. The groups become the place where students meet, share they knowledge and beliefs, think critically and socially interact.

If students are presented with the idea that they are working to attain common goals, they will start cooperating more effectively. Even openly hostile students will show readiness and willingness to cooperate. Therefore, it is the teacher's task to explicitly state the goal of each activity and motivate students to cooperate.

In order to improve students' performance, teachers should consider introducing intergroup competitions to their classes. Namely, games in which small groups compete with each other within a class can be seen as a potent implement for increasing collaboration and uniting students' efforts to win. Yet, it is the teacher's task to ensure that students who would not normally make friends easily are put together. If students are allowed to self-select group members all the time, they will tend to make choices based on such factors as gender and ability. Since this kind of selection does not enhance learning as a whole, the teacher is supposed to vary grouping techniques. More importantly, variety eliminates boredom, which the survey revealed to be a potential threat to the success of CL.

In addition to this, feedback from students presents one of the crucial elements of language learning, and CL in particular. Having obtained feedback on diverse aspects of the teaching-learning process, the teacher will be able to act upon the weakest points of a class and sustain increased learning outcomes. Feedback might be both formal and informal. The research presented in this paper represents a formal mode of exploring and investigating students' perceptions of CL. Concerning the informal evaluation, it can be carried out by simply asking learners what they have learnt in the class and what aspects of a certain lesson should be clarified (Ingleton 2000: 40). Furthermore, office hours may also serve as an occasion for obtaining information about what students actually think about the class structure and organization, learning opportunities and learning outcomes.

Moreover, the teacher's role of an instructor, facilitator, guide and advisor will create an atmosphere which will reduce the anxiety that students feel and arouse the learners' interest in the subject and activities. If students do not feel threatened, they will be more prepared and willing to cooperate, disseminate information to a large number of students and gather information from a variety of sources in a shorter period of time. Students at the Faculty of Economics are encouraged to perceive their lecturers primarily as helpers in the learning process and are expected to contact their teachers not only when they feel uncertain about the learning objects, but also when they want to share their impressions both about the classroom organization and some other out-of-classroom economic matters.

To conclude, the research carried out at one of the institutions at the tertiary level of education confirms presuppositions and previous findings related to CL. Namely, CL provides students an opportunity to improve not only their language learning skills, but also academic, social and generic skills. Nevertheless, there are some negative aspects of CL that teachers might encounter in their classes (e.g. difficulty in engaging all students in teamwork). Yet, these negative aspects can be successfully and easily dealt with and overcome. The findings in this research reveal that well planned and organized group work is an effective means of improving an EFL learner's language mastery. Teachers should use CL in order to make their students use the language, and, hence, communicate effectively and efficiently. The application of CL to the field of language learning is essential to promoting communication because it creates a situation where students are expected to help each other, discuss and argue with each other, assess each other's current knowledge and fill in the gaps in each other's understanding. Furthermore, CL is distinctive because it insists on positive interdependence, team formation, accountability, structure, structuring learning and developing social skills. It offers a richness of alternatives to structure interactions among students, which are important for language development and developing familiarity with new academic content materials. Finally, a well-structured framework of CL enables students to learn language functions more effectively than the traditional language learning methods do.

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ULOGA KOMUNIKATIVNOG PRISTUPA I KOOPERATIVNOG UČENJA U VISOKOM OBRAZOVANJU

Jelena Basta

Opšte je zastupljeno mišljenje da jezik nije samo sistem pravila, već i dinamičan izvor stvaranja značenja. U tom smislu, važno je praviti razliku između poznavanja različitih gramatičkih pravila i sposobnosti da se ta pravila uspešno primenjuju u komunikaciji. Ovakav stav se nalazi u osnovi jednog od najpopularnijih pristupa učenju jezika – komunikativnom učenju jezika. Cilj ovog rada jeste da ukaže da je sve važnije baviti se procesima, postupcima i sredstvima koji dovode do uspešnog učenja stranog jezika nego proizvodima jezika. Ukoliko su nastavni planovi stranih jezika osmišljeni na taj način da naglasak stavljaju na komunikaciju, onda u tim slučajevima kooperativno učenje zauzima vodeću ulogu u procesu učenja jezika. Rad će pokušati da ukaže na pozitivne aspekte kooperativnog učenja jezika, koristeći rezultate dobijene na osnovu istraživanja sprovedenog na grupi ispitanika u visokoškolskom obrazovanju. Rad će, takođe, ukazati na činjenicu da je kooperativno učenje jezika omogućava studentima da steknu akademske i socijalne veštine, jer promoviše produktivnost i ostvarivanje zajedničih ciljeva, koji, između ostalog, predstavljaju osnovne premise komunikativnog pristupa jeziku. Rezultati istraživanja se dalje mogu iskoristiti za osmišljavanje nastavnih planova stranih jezika.

Ključne reči: *komunikativno učenje jezika, komunikativna kompetencija, kooperativno učenje, učenje u visokom obrazovanju.*