Using an Interactive Teaching Approach to Foster Communicative Competence in the Algerian EFL Context

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Abstract.

This mixed methods study aimed at examining the use of the Interactive Approach along with the traditional use of literature as a source for language learning. Also, how it can affect Algerian EFL learners' motivational awareness in learning a literary text by being communicatively competent. For, it depicted the approach's impact on improving Learners communicative competence when learning literacy. Using a classroom observation as a research instrument, this research tempted to investigate two different teaching approaches used by two literacy teachers of two comparable groups. The observation aimed at assessing the challenges and benefits of teaching a literary text through these approaches, documenting learning in class, and monitoring the learners' progress. Preliminary results of the study showed that using a traditional reading approach resulted in lack of interest and understanding from the part of the CG learners whereas EG learners who were familiarized with the Interactive approach had adequate understanding. For, this study revealed that the suggested approach for teaching literacy had a great potential for enhancing Algerian EFL learners communicative competence in learning and understanding a literary text in class.

Keywords: Algerian EFL context, communication, co-operative learning, interaction, literacy teaching

1. Introduction

A wide variety of English language teaching approaches appeared in the 20th century which deeply influenced the flow of language teaching and learning. Besides, teaching English was often viewed in terms of a set of methodologies. Indeed, teachers choose the methodology that seems to them the most efficient and appropriate including functional, structural, and interactive methods of teaching. Prior to the appearance of the interactive approaches which has led to multiple depictions of how to teach language through role-play, direct method, communicative language teaching, and according to the claims of certain educationalists of English literature, it is worth mentioning that the majority of EFL learners find obstacles to understand, read, and analyse literature. Besides, general dissatisfaction with literature teaching and learning in Algerian higher education has been prevailed in this study as to wonder whether these impediments are due to a lack of motivation or a defect in the teaching approaches.

1.1 Review of Literature

The mastery of speaking skills in language has become a priority for many second or foreign language learners. Consequently, language learners often evaluate their success in language learning as well as the effectiveness of their language course on the basis of how well they feel they have improved in their spoken language proficiency. Richards (2005) Further, many researchers maintain that speaking is one of the four key and pivotal skills of language that should be developed since the ability to communicate effectively benefits EFL learners by gaining self-confidence and improve performance in the rest of the language skills (MacIntyre, 2007; Trent, 2009). In addition, the significance of mastering speaking skills of the target language arises when the language learners realize the impact it would have on the success of their future careers. Learners realize that they need to practise the target language regularly in the classroom in order to overcome shyness and hesitation Taous (2013) The lack of interaction or the use of the language will negatively affect language learners in their communications. Therefore, language learners should be encouraged to participate in the acute interaction that takes place in the classroom so that they can be fluent and well-versed in spoken language (Mackey, 2007; Zucker, 2005).

It has been shown that for language learners to improve their speaking skills practising the language they are learning, in particular engaging in interactions that take place between learners in the classroom environment is important. In this type of interaction, teachers play as observers and facilitators and students are the major participants of the interaction (Tuan & Nhu, 2010). Interaction has stimulated a lot of research in the past in the field of second language acquisition. Long (1981), suggests that it is the interaction which simplifies comprehension and promotes second language acquisition, in particular speaking skills. In fact, the role of learner-learner interaction is of paramount importance as it paves away for learners to improve their language skills in general and speaking skills in particular and, according to Mackey (2007), classroom interaction provided by teachers can be lucrative for improving speaking skills.

In addition, learner-learner interaction can contribute to language development by the provision of interactive target language activities in the classroom that makes language learners use the language they are learning (Taous, 2013) learning a second or a foreign language can be facilitated when language learners are actively involved in interactive communications (Nunan, 1991). If language learners, however, do not practise the language they are studying, they will not be able to be fluent speakers, and therefore, this will affect their future career. Considering this issue, the current study seeks to investigate the role of learner-learner interaction in the development of speaking skills of language learners.

The current teaching methods employed by English language teachers do not allow for developing critical thinking and lifelong learning, the new skills reinforced by series. As also mentioned, the aim of ELT at the secondary stage is to equip students with the necessary language, thinking and study skills to communicate effectively and to understand spoken and written English competently. This involves giving students chances to apply these skills both inside and outside the classroom and beyond school in their current and future lives. Unfortunately, this – as noticed by the researchers in their field observations – is not the main focus of teachers at schools. Moreover, although critical thinking skills contribute to the

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development of amore autonomous learner and build confidence in learners, they are not given due attention – as noticed by the researchers

Despite the fact that theoretical work on interactive approaches in teaching literacy is apparent and incorporating interactive techniques in literature courses has been studied extensively prior to this study, there are uncertainties regarding the role and impact of these teaching approaches developing communicative competence among Algerian EFL learners.

In the traditional methods of teaching language, the speaking skills had been neglected massively whereas much attention had been paid on writing and reading skills. The Grammar-Translation method is a good example of that claim. In spite of the fact that speaking skill is crucially important for language learners to converse and communicate, much attention has been paid to other elements of language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). In addition, of all the four skills of language, speaking is seen as the most important skill because people who claim to know a language; they intend to claim that they are able to speak the language (Ur, 2000). Further, many language learners give preference to speaking skill since they believe that if they master the speaking skill, they are seen as speakers of the language.

Long (1981), formulated the Interaction Hypothesis which forms the basic argument for the conversational interaction in language teaching and learning, in which language learners access to comprehensible input, opportunities for outcome and correction in the form of conversation among one another. According to the Interaction Hypothesis, language learners negotiate in meaning which is the process of engaging in interaction in order for learners to concentrate on form and process of the input they obtain. Thus, the Interaction Hypothesis suggests that interaction between a non-native speaker and a native speaker or among non-native speakers creates acute second/foreign language acquisition environment where learners learn through negotiation of meaning. Furthermore, research has shown that input alone is not as effective as interactional modified input in helping language teaching and learning (Ellis & Fotos, 1999; Gass & Varonis, 1994; Wang & Castro, 2010). Thus, the Interaction Hypothesis plays a central role in learning through conversational interaction on improving language learners' speaking skills.

A large body of research has been conducted in the field of second language acquisition to show how second language learning is learned through interaction, in particular learner-learner's interaction. These studies have highlighted the important role of learner-learner interaction in the classroom in improving speaking skills of language learners. In one study, Lourdunathan & Menon (2005) investigated how interaction strategy training affects group interaction in which students can develop their speaking skills. Ten groups of students were trained on the use of interaction strategies. The findings showed that training students based on interaction resulted in significant uses of interaction and therefore, they were able to improve their speaking ability through the course of training.

Cotter (2007) on the other hand found that through practising the target language in verbal skills when comprehensible input and interaction are available through exchanging information and negotiation for meaning, L2 learners will see language as a tool for social interaction. The study further reaffirmed the notion that language must be used as a tool to gain distinct social aims like explaining how something works, to provide information and to

entertain. Hence, learning English language is to improve the capacity to use it efficiently and successfully for some purposes and the ability to talk about the language being used.

On the other hand, communication in class is usually related to interaction because communicating in class requires interaction which contributes to constructing knowledge and improving skills. Learners talk to each other through collaboration where each learner gets his turn to talk. Whereas teachers usually allow learners to take risks and face obstacles and challenges by getting them communicating, and this leads to what we call the communicative teaching approach which focuses majorly on interaction. In fact, Teachers and learners should take into consideration the value of interaction because communication refers to learners' interaction with each other and with the teacher. As Wagner (1994, p.08) viewed interaction as "reciprocal events that require at least two objects and two actions, interaction occurs when these objects and events naturally influence one another" this interaction which occurs as a result of communication leads to what we call communicative competence. According to Hedge (2000), the communicative approach requires sociolinguistics, discourse and strategic competence which all shape the learner's communicative competence. As Johnson (1995) argues that "classroom communicative competence is essential in order for the second language students to participate in and learn from their classroom experience" (p.162) interaction in class contributes a lot in building knowledge and improving language skills. On the other hand,

1.2 Aim of the Research

In addition to different approaches which are used to enhance teaching and learning literature in the EFL context, interactive teaching theories predominated in teaching literature bringing about new pedagogical tools such as performance activities, role-play, the direct method, games, and drills. This study tempted to contribute to the line of research core with interactive teaching by examining the process of applying structural teaching approaches and interactive teaching approaches to two groups, CG and EG; in an EFL educational context. This has been for the sake of promoting the learners' communication skills in learning literature. This study seeks to answer the following research question for achieving the aim of the research:

- How can interactive teaching help or contribute to enhancing EFL learners' communication skills at ENS College of Laghouat? And how can this help them understand a literary text through interaction and render them communicatively competent?

2. Methods

In order to gather the data we need and achieve the objectives of this study, the researcher conducted an empirical study at the College of Laghouat with two groups of fourth grade students. The sample is composed of 20 students who have a literature class every week. They were divided into two groups, and they were taught a literary text of The Animal Farm of George Orwell (1945) through two approaches reader-response teaching approach for the CG, and an interactive approach for the EG for reading and analysing the text in class. After the lesson is done by the teachers of both groups (CG and EG), an observation sheet on task behavior adopted from Formal Classroom Observation was prepared for students and to

evaluate and gather information about the learners' behavior in class and motivation. This was for the sake of validating the research questions and affirming the hypothesis of the study.

The researcher has opted for a specific research tool for the sake of gaining enough appropriate data in investigating teaching the literary text through an interactive approach and responses and attitudes of learners towards the teaching methods used by the teacher. Thus, using a mixed methods research through which the researcher can be conductive to the rigidity of the research design and lead to adequate discussion and interpretation of the findings. Therefore, qualitative research design is an interpretive inquiry in which the researcher interprets what he sees, hears, and understands from the knowledge claims adapted. These interpretations are deeply related to the researcher's background; as readers and participants also give their feedback and interpretations of the study after the conduction of the research. Flick (2013, p.20)

Besides, the researcher also used the quantitative approach for the aim of integrating both approaches of research to determine the research design through triangulation data sources for collecting and analyzing data. Therefore, the research instruments and methods of inquiry are adopted for uncovering the results and findings of the classroom observation sheet. Indeed, observation is considered as a valid research tool for answering research questions and helps in understanding a research phenomenon for many researchers. The process of observing in class helps in eliciting fruitful data for drawing conclusions and making verifications.

Occasionally, Creswell (2006) asserts that observation is the best research tool which offers adequate understanding of the problems between teaching and learning in the literature teaching class. For him, the observation can contribute to the professional growth of the teacher when the researcher is acting as a teacher at the same time. (p.36) In fact, observation is done for examining actual classroom interaction and students motivation in class. The researcher as an observer at the same time participated in the actual classroom and investigated how the teacher used the approaches in class and portrayed the responses and attitudes of the students while learning.

The researcher used the observation to evaluate the students' experience with both the Reader-response and interactive approach. Observation helps researcher to explore the authentic situations and gather first-hand information about what is really happening in the learning environment in class. Bryman (2012) claimed that the data gathered from classroom observation is more authentic and reliable in time and frequency. To quote Cohen et. al (2010) words: "in the structured observational method researchers formulate systematic rules for observing and recording of individual behaviour and a schedule or coding scheme are used to structure the observations" (cited in Haqyar, 2013, p. 56)

Totally, 20 students for Laghouat College were observed (CG= 10) and (EG= 10); the courses took forty minutes long. The researcher was observing the attitudes, motivation, and behaviours of the students in the class and recorded that to the observation checklist. The researcher used ten statements about students' attitudes, motivation and behaviour in class to complete the observation sheet, each statement was scored on a tape of 4 (highly good, good, adequate, and poor) to 1. Thus, the highest possible score was 10 on any one statement during

the four sessions. One each statement, the researcher circled one number (from 1 to 4) with the average mark of 3 on any statement.

Item	Session 1		Session 2	
	EG	CG	EG	CG
a.Engaging learners in active learning	2	0	3	3
b. Using a set of effective instructional strategies and resources	4	1	4	2
c .Reinforcing learning goals during the course	3	3	4	3
d. Using different teaching techniques to meet the learners' needs	4	2	4	3
e. Using learners data and feedback	3	1	4	2

3. Results and Discussion

The main objective of the study was to investigate the use of interactive teaching in English literacy classes. The researcher used quantitative and qualitative research design through which data are gathered, analysed, and interpreted with a classroom observation. The statistical measurement which was used to analyse the data collected with observation was percentage. Besides, classroom observation was described and interpreted, and data analysis was based on summarizing and synthesizing the data for achieving the findings and conclusions of the study.

Excellent= 4   Good= 3   Adequate= 2   Poor= 1

Table 1: Efficiency of Teaching Approaches and Strategies of Learning

f. Incorporating appropriate plans when necessary	3	0	4	1
g. Setting appropriate objectives	4	1	4	2
h. Allowing learners to think critically, reflect, and explore	3	0	4	0
i. Using effective teaching materials	4	1	4	2
j. Appropriate time management in class	2	3	3	3
	3.2	1.2	3.8	2.1
	34%	13%	40%	13%

The scores of the CG and EG students' classes in terms of the chosen approaches and strategies in each session are introduced in *tab 01*. The data showed that the students' motivation of the overall class on session 1 in EG was 3.2 with a score less than 4, while in CG was 1.2 with less than the highest score 4. In session 2, the overall motivation of the class in EG was with a percentage of 40% whereas in the CG it scored with 2.1 less than 4, with 13% on the average score. Based on the above data gathered from the observation sheet of the observer, we can argue that the level of the students' response and performance developed when they were familiarized with the interactive approaches and interaction teaching methodology class.

Graph02: *EG and CG classes' scores on the Use of Approaches and Strategies*
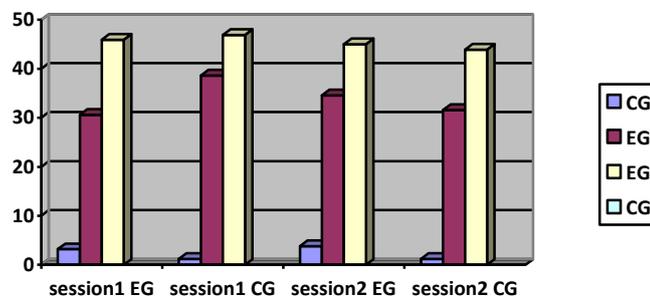
In *tab 03*, we introduced the scores of the EG and CG classroom environment which can affect the teaching and learning processes including the social atmosphere and learners' responses and attitudes.

Table 03: *Learning Environment during the learning process*

Item	Session01		Session02	
	EG	CG	EG	CG
a. Establishing an atmosphere of confidence and trust	4	2	4	2
b. Fostering cultural awareness and sensitivity	3	1	4	3
c. Considering individual differences of learners	2	2	2	2

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d.	Paying attention to learners' needs and responses	4	1	4	3
e.	Increasing learning time by working with learners	4	2	4	3
f.	Establishing group work, pair, and individual work	4	0	4	2
g.	Creating supportive and attractive classroom environment	3	0	4	2
h.	Acknowledging the students' contributions	3	1	4	2
i.	Learner-centred interaction	4	1	4	1
j.	Including all learners in class through interaction	4	1	4	2

3.5	1.1	3.8	2.2
33%	10%	36%	21%

**Graph 04:** *EG and CG scores on the efficiency of the learning environment*
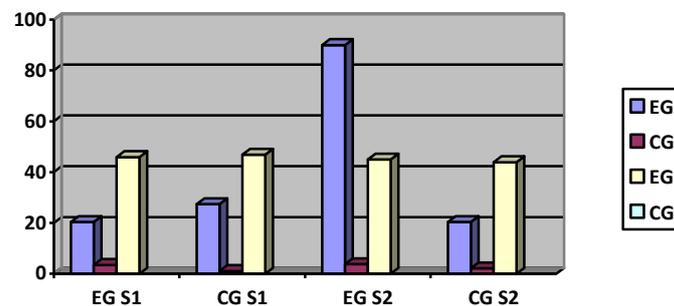
The findings of the CG and EG teaching classes in terms of the appropriateness of the classroom environment in each session are introduced in *tab 03* and scores of all sessions are shown in *graph 04*. The data revealed that the EG students' classroom methodology is characterized with a highly supportive social atmosphere and helpful environment due to classroom interaction. The scores of the overall EG class on session 1 was 3.5 with a score near to 4, while in CG was 1.1 with less than the highest score 4. In session 2, the overall motivation of the class in EG was scoring 3.8 with a percentage of 36% whereas in the CG it scored with 2.2 less than 4, with 21% on the average score. Based on the above data gathered from the observation sheet of the observer, we can contend that the level of the students' response and interaction is deeply related to the classroom environment and social atmosphere of the class, and when leaners are familiarized with interactive teaching methodology.

In the observation sheet, the researcher has devoted a sphere for assessment and meta-cognitive strategies used in any language class, and tried to portray whether assessment has been appropriately given space. Data gathered from this part are revealed in *tab 05*

Table 05: *Assessment of Students Learning in class*

Item	Session 01		Session 02	
	EG	CG	EG	CG
a. Adopting a variety of assessment	2	2	4	3
b. Giving frequent feedback to learners on their learning	3	2	4	3
c. Involving learners to set their goals and monitor their own progress	4	0	4	2
d. Using pre-assessment data to document learning	4	3	4	3
e. Using assessment tools for both formative and summative	4	3	4	4
f. Having self-reflection and self-assessment	4	0	4	0
	3.5	1.6	4	2.5
	30%	14%	34 %	22%

Graph 06: *Scores on Learning Assessment in class*
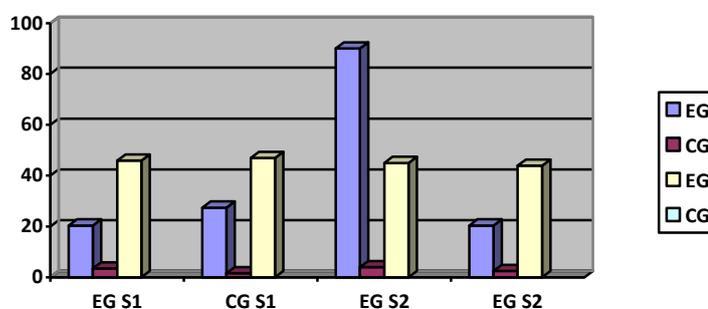
The findings of the CG and EG classes in terms of the adaptation of assessment and self-assessment in each session are introduced in *tab 05* and scores of all sessions are revealed in *graph 06*. The data revealed that the EG students' classroom methodology is characterized with a great use of pre-assessment data and self-assessment of learners for the sake of improving learning and monitoring the learning progress of the students. The scores of the EG class assessment on session 1 was 3.5 with a score near to 4, while in CG was 1.6 with less than the highest score 4. In session 2, the overall motivation of the class in EG was scoring 4 with the highest average score and with a percentage of 34% whereas in the CG it scored with 2.5 less than 4, with 22% on the average score. Based on the above data gathered from the observation sheet of the observer, we can argue that assessment in language and literature classes is more effective in an interactive classroom environment where learners can use their meta-cognition and be allowed to self-assess and monitor their own learning in class.

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4. Conclusion

Promoting communicative competence of EFL learners is somehow difficult since it requires regular practice and interaction to produce language accurately and achieve the messages of other speakers. The most efficient way to reach competence in communicating with others is encouraging verbal interactions in the classroom, since Algerian EFL learners' sample of the study do not highly interact in a literacy teaching class. In this study, we tempted to focus on the learners' production opportunities given by the teachers to achieve the characteristics of communicatively competent learners in learning a literary text. This is confirmed by the findings obtained through the analysis of data elicited from the observation sheet. So, the ultimate aim of this study is to show the possibility to improve communicative competence of learners through classroom interaction along with literary competence. We have explored the fact that learners' high level of performance and interaction, appropriate social environment, and assessment in class can contribute to the development of the learners' communication skills, therefore improving their language ability and interaction.

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