

## Communicative Competence Is About Speaking a Lot: Teacher's Voice on the Art of Developing Communicative Competence

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**Abstract :** The South African English curriculum emphasizes the adoption of the Communicative Approach (CA) using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies to develop English as a second language (ESL) learners' communicative competence in contexts such as township schools in South Africa. However, studies indicate that the adoption of the approach largely remains a rhetoric. Poor English language proficiency among learners and poor student performance, which continues from the secondary to the tertiary phase, is widely attributed to a lack of English language proficiency in South Africa. Consequently, this qualitative study, using a mix of classroom observations and interviews, sought to investigate teacher knowledge of Communicative Competence and the methods and strategies ESL teachers used to develop their learners' communicative competence. The success of learners' ability to develop communicative competence in contexts such as township schools in South Africa is inseparable from materials, tasks, teacher knowledge and how they implement the approach in the classrooms. Accordingly, teacher knowledge of the theory and practical implications of the CLT approach is imperative for the negotiation of meaning and appropriate use of language in context in resource-impooverished areas like the township. Using a mix of interviews and observations as data sources, this qualitative study examined teachers' definitions and knowledge of Communicative competence with a focus on how it influenced their classroom practices. The findings revealed that teachers were not familiar with the notion of communicative competence, the communication process, and the underpinnings of CLT. Teachers' narratives indicated an awareness that there should be interactions and communication in the classroom, but a lack of theoretical understanding of the types of communication necessary scuttled their initiatives. Thus, conceptual deficiency influences teachers' practices as they engage in classroom activities in a superficial manner or focus on stipulated learner activities prescribed by the CAPS document. This study, therefore, concluded that partial or limited conceptual and coherent understandings with 'teacher-proof' stipulations for classroom practice do not inspire teacher efficacy and mastery of prescribed approaches; thus, more efforts should be made by the Department of Basic Education to strengthen the existing Professional Development workshops to support teachers in improving their understandings and application of CLT for the development of Communicative competence in their learners. The findings of the study contribute to the field of teacher knowledge acquisition, teacher beliefs and practices and professional development in the context of second language teaching and learning with a recommendation that frameworks for the development of communicative competence with wider applicability in resource-poor environments be developed to support teacher understanding and application in classrooms.

**Keywords :** communicative competence, CLT, conceptual understanding of reforms, professional development

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