



FROM MEMORISATION TO COMMUNICATION:
TRANSFORMING ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching has traditionally placed considerable emphasis on memorising vocabulary, learning grammatical rules, and completing written exercises. Although these practices can support linguistic development, they do not necessarily prepare learners to communicate confidently in real-life situations. This article examines the transition from memorisation-based instruction to communicative, learner-centred approaches. It explores the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the role of task-based learning, and practical strategies for developing learners' communicative competence. It also considers challenges such as examination-oriented curricula, large classes, limited resources, and learners' fear of making mistakes. The article argues that effective English teaching should integrate explicit language instruction with meaningful interaction, enabling students to develop both accuracy and fluency. Transforming English classrooms requires teachers to create opportunities for purposeful communication while maintaining clear learning objectives and appropriate assessment practices.

Introduction

English has become an important tool for international communication, higher education, and professional development. Consequently, English language teaching must prepare learners not only to understand linguistic structures but also to use the language effectively in different contexts. Nevertheless, in many educational settings, students spend considerable time



memorising vocabulary lists, studying grammatical rules, and completing exercises with predetermined answers. Although such activities may improve knowledge of language forms, learners can still struggle to express their ideas spontaneously. The British Council (n.d.) explains that the communicative approach emphasises learning through the exchange of meaningful information. This perspective challenges the assumption that knowledge of grammar and vocabulary automatically results in communicative ability. Therefore, transforming English classrooms requires a shift from treating language primarily as a subject to be memorised towards viewing it as a practical tool for expressing ideas, solving problems, and establishing relationships.

Memorisation has a legitimate role in language learning. Students need to remember vocabulary, grammatical patterns, collocations, and useful expressions to communicate effectively. The problem arises when memorisation becomes the dominant classroom activity and learners have insufficient opportunities to apply what they have learned. For example, students may memorise the rules for forming the present perfect tense and successfully complete gap-fill exercises. However, they may hesitate when asked to describe their experiences in a conversation. This illustrates the difference between knowing a linguistic rule and using it appropriately in real communication. Another limitation is that repetitive exercises can encourage passive learning. When teachers explain most of the lesson and students primarily listen, copy information, and reproduce model answers, opportunities for independent language use become limited. Littlewood (2007) notes that implementing communicative and task-based approaches requires teachers to adapt instruction to classroom realities rather than simply replace one fixed method with another. Consequently, the objective should not be to eliminate memorisation but to connect it with meaningful practice. Vocabulary and grammar become more useful when learners apply them to authentic communicative purposes. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) places meaningful interaction at the centre of language learning. Rather than focusing exclusively on the accurate production of isolated sentences, this approach encourages learners to communicate information, negotiate meaning, and respond to others. According to the British Council (n.d.), communicative teaching involves meaningful communication at different proficiency levels and often incorporates learner-centred activities and authentic materials. These principles suggest that students should use English actively throughout the learning process. For instance, instead of asking students merely to memorise expressions for giving advice, a teacher could present a situation in which one student has difficulty managing university assignments. Working in pairs, students discuss the problem and suggest practical solutions using expressions such as “You could prioritise your tasks” and “Have you considered creating a timetable?” In this activity, language forms are connected to a communicative purpose. Students practise vocabulary and grammar while developing listening, speaking, and interpersonal skills. Mistakes become opportunities for learning rather than



reasons to avoid participation. Importantly, communicative teaching does not mean ignoring grammatical accuracy. Teachers can provide explicit explanations, model correct forms, and offer feedback after communication activities. The central principle is that accuracy should support communication rather than replace it.

Several classroom strategies can help teachers move from memorisation towards purposeful language use.

First, **task-based learning** gives students a clear objective that requires them to use English. Ellis (2003) explains task-based language teaching as an approach in which tasks play a central role in organising language instruction. Activities might include planning a trip within a budget, comparing university courses, conducting a survey, or proposing solutions to an environmental problem. Such tasks encourage learners to exchange information and use language to achieve a concrete outcome. Second, **collaborative learning** creates opportunities for interaction. Pair work, group discussions, information-gap activities, and role-plays allow students to practise expressing ideas and responding to different viewpoints. Teachers should assign clear roles and provide useful language expressions to ensure that participation is distributed fairly. Third, **contextualised vocabulary and grammar instruction** helps learners connect language forms with real situations. Instead of memorising isolated words, students can learn collocations, common expressions, and phrasal verbs within short texts or dialogues. They can then use these expressions in discussions, presentations, and writing tasks. Fourth, **formative feedback and reflection** help learners recognise their progress. Teachers can identify recurring errors, encourage peer feedback, and ask students to reflect on which expressions they used successfully and which communication difficulties they encountered. This approach makes assessment part of the learning process rather than simply a final judgement.

Despite its benefits, communicative teaching can be difficult to implement. Large classes may restrict individual speaking time, while examination-oriented curricula can encourage teachers to prioritise grammar exercises and test preparation. Some learners may also feel anxious about speaking English because they fear making mistakes or being judged by their classmates. These challenges require realistic solutions. In large classes, teachers can organise simultaneous pair discussions, use rotating group roles, and assess selected aspects of communication rather than attempting to evaluate every learner continuously. Sentence starters, planning time, and supportive peer interaction can help less confident students participate. Assessment practices also need to reflect communicative objectives. Alongside grammar and vocabulary tests, teachers can evaluate interaction, task completion, intelligibility, fluency, and the appropriate use of language. A balanced approach ensures that learners understand both the importance of linguistic accuracy and the ability to communicate meaningfully.



Conclusion

Transforming English classrooms from memorisation-centred environments into communicative learning spaces is essential for preparing learners to use English beyond the classroom. Memorisation remains valuable, but it should be integrated with purposeful interaction, contextualised practice, and opportunities for independent expression. Communicative Language Teaching and task-based learning offer practical ways to connect linguistic knowledge with real-world communication. Although challenges such as large classes, examination pressures, and speaking anxiety remain, thoughtful lesson planning and balanced assessment can help teachers address them. Ultimately, successful English language teaching should enable students not merely to remember English but to use it confidently, appropriately, and effectively.

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