Problems Faced by Iraqi English Language Teachers in Managing Communicative Language Classroom in Primary Schools

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Abstract :

Teaching English as a foreign or a second language is a challenge for every teacher whether beginner or experienced, yet rewarding career choice. Everyday teachers face a variety of classroom management problems which they must learn to a constant deal with, adapt to students needs, find solutions to these problems and most important to achieve successful communicative language teaching. Therefore, incorporating the essential features of classroom management like organizing the classroom, planning, using effective materials, choosing appropriate activities etc., would help school teachers to establish effective classroom management system.

The present study aims at investigating problems faced by Iraqi English language teachers in managing communicative language classroom in primary schools. To achieve the aim of the study, a hypothesis has been constructed stating that Iraqi English language teachers face a variety of problems in managing communicative language classroom in primary schools. To verify this hypothesis, a questionnaire of 18 items has been constructed to be distributed to Iraqi English language teachers. The questionnaire is administrated to (40) English language teachers of different primary schools in Diyala and the study has reached to the following results:

1. Item number (4) which reads "It is too difficult to use authentic materials like video programs, magazines, computers, etc. in teaching English."has got higher percentage which is (92%).

2.The item number (14) which reads " Students are at different levels some with quit competent English, some whose English is not very good, and some whose English is only just getting started." has got the second order with a percentage of (87%).

3. The item number (12) stating "students insist to translate what is happening into their native language" has got a percentage of (77%).

4. Five items have got a percentage of (72%), and these items are:

(3). The teaching materials are not adequate for achieving successful learning atmosphere.

(8). Students keep using their native language.

(9). students do not want to talk because they suffer from a fear of making mistakes.

(11). The time specified for the lesson is not sufficient for performing a variety of activities.

(17).The teachers are used to teach in the traditional way and they feel that they need a training course in communicative language teaching.

5. The items (7, 16) have got a percentage of (62%), these items read:

(7). Students are not cooperating with the teacher in directing the lesson.

(16).In traditional classroom, the desks are organized in rows and it is difficult to organize group work.

6. The items (13, 18) have got a percentage of (57%), and they read: (13). homework is good for students and the more time they spend working with English, the better they get at it. But the students do not usually do it.

(18). The teachers must walk around the room to communicate with students, but because of the large number of students they lose control of the class.

7. Three items have got a percentage of (50%), and these items are:

(2). The size of the class is very large to the extent that the teacher faces difficulty in controlling the lesson.

(10). It is not possible to conduct a lesson based on small groups instead of the traditional classroom organization.

(15). Teachers think that achieving examination results is more important and valued by school than achieving communicative language teaching goals.

8. The items (1, 5) have got a percentage under 50% which is (37%) and these items read (1)" The learning atmosphere is inappropriate for communicative language teaching". (5) "Students lack the motivation for learning English".

9. The item which has got the lowest percentage is (6) which reads" Your English is not good enough for communicative language teaching.", and the percentage is (27%).

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1.Introduction

1.1 The problem of the study and its Significance

No other dimension of teaching causes more concern for beginning teachers than managing the classroom and maintaining discipline. A question which most beginning teachers ask themselves is 'Will I be able to manage and control my classes so I can teach effectively?"(Ryan & Cooper, 2001:201).

Language teachers teaching different aspects of a language usually know what the result of their teaching must be. For example, teachers are familiar with the intended outcome of Communicative Language Teaching, namely, for students to use the new language in speech and in writing for a variety of purposes and in a range of contexts. Teachers also have access to many textbooks setting out activities for doing this. What they often struggle within their own classes is how to manage classroom learning to achieve these ends (Richards & Renandya, 2002: 40).

Managing classroom and choosing the appropriate methods of teaching is influenced by many factors among which are teachers personality, teachers experience, class size, materials, the goals, students age etc. (Al-Khuli, 1996:8).

1.2 The Aim

The study aims at investigating problems faced by Iraqi English language teachers in managing communicative language classroom in primary schools.

1.3 The Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that Iraqi English language teachers face a variety of problems in managing communicative language classroom in primary schools.

1.4 Limits

The study is limited to:

1. Iraqi English language teachers of primary schools for the academic year (2010-2011) in Diyala province.

2.Managing communicative language Classroom.

1.5 Value of the Study

The study is hoped to be of some theoretical and practical values to:

1-Beginning English teachers to be aware of the common problems which they might face in managing the classroom.

2- English language teachers in dealing with their own classroom problems.

1.6 Procedures

The procedures followed in this study include the following:

1-presenting the theoretical background of the study,

 2-conducting a questionnaire to investigate Iraqi English language teachers' problems in classroom management,

3-analysing and statistically tabulating the results, and

 4-drawing conclusions and presenting some suggestions for classroom problems.

2. Theoretical Background
2.1 An Introductory Note

This chapter is concerned with presenting general theoretical background which covers most of the techniques and skills used in managing communicative language classroom.

2.2 Classroom Management: Definition

Classroom management refers to the ways in which students behavior, movement, interaction,etc., during a class is organized and controlled by the teacher to enable teaching to take place most effectively, It includes different procedures like grouping students for different types of activities, use of lesson plan, aids, and directing and managing students behavior and activity(Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 74).

Concerning most complex teaching skills, classroom management requires a thorough understanding of theoretical knowledge and research findings, as well as practical experience. This knowledge comes primarily from educational, social and humanistic psychology (Ryan & Cooper, 2001:201).

2.3 Managing Communicative Language Classroom: Skills & Techniques

The main goal of communicative language teaching is to enable students to communicate in the target language. Therefore, communication requires more than mastering linguistic structures such as promising, inviting and declining invitations within social context (Freeman, 2000: 121).

To achieve such goal in classroom there are certain characteristics which must be focused on:
1. Classroom goals must focus on communicative competence rather than linguistic competence.   .
2. Function is the primary framework through which forms are taught.
3. Fluency may take on more importance than accuracy in conveying a message.

4. In communicative classroom, students have to use the language productively and receptively in unrehearsed contexts (Brown, 1987: 213).

The teacher has two main roles in communicative classroom. The first role is to facilitate the communication process between students in the classroom, and between them and the various activities and the texts. The second role, on the other hand, is to act as an independent communicator within the learning-teaching group (Richards & Rodgers, 1986: 77). To achieve communicative classroom, there are many techniques and skills which may be used in the classroom and as follows:

1. Organizing the Classroom into Small Groups

The traditional classroom organization was a teacher- fronted one, with learners sitting in rows facing the teacher. They spent most of their time repeating and manipulating models provided by the teacher, the textbook and the tape. The desks which are fixed to the floor make any other modes of organization impossible. The students in such classrooms do not learn how to express their own ideas and to share these ideas by communicating in small groups (Nunan, 2001:83).

Teachers believe that such a constraint is stopping them from managing an ideal learning atmosphere and they kept asking "how can we organize group work when the desks are all fixed to the floor in rows?"(Richards & Renandya, 2002: 40).

Arranging students in small groups which match different kinds of learning tasks is an important dimension of teaching to help them learn better. The use of small groups is a characteristic of communicative language teaching since group work is said to facilitate real communication and naturalistic language use (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 23).

2. Motivating Students

Motivation is "the degree to which students, perceiving some goals, have a desire to do something (Harmer, 2007: 278). In language learning, motivation is more specific than any other subject for language is a skill and a skill needs to be applied, not just stored in the head or admired at distance. Teachers can encourage language through both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Through intrinsic motivation, teachers can build on where success can lead like the career and commercial benefits to the students. The extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, can come through using additional learning materials like video show etc.(Richards & Renandya, 2002).

The most problematic issue for teachers is to help students to sustain their motivation. They can do this through a variety of ways like, for example, the activities which teachers ask students to take part in. if these activities involve students or provoke their participation they will help them to stay interested in the subject. Also, teachers need to select an appropriate level of challenge so that things are neither too difficult nor too easy (Harmer, 2007: 20).

3. Using Effective Teaching Materials

Once upon a time classrooms only had pens, board and chalk to work with. But then along came the tape recorder, the language laboratory, video machines, the overhead projector, computers, data projectors and interactive whiteboards. Thanks to technical innovations, students can do things they were unable to do before, and can have more listening opportunities, write their own blogs etc.(Harmer, 2007: 31-32).

Since language is a social practice, there has been a call for the use of 'authentic ' materials rather than the artificial language found in textbooks. Materials need to be authentic in the sense that language is not artificially constrained, and is, amenable to

exploration for language teaching purposes. Authenticity is also important because it concerns the classroom interaction, the more realistic the language, the more easily it can cater to the range of proficiency levels found in classes (Richards & Renandya, 2002: 85).

4. Dealing with Huge Class Size

Another factor which may affect classroom management is the size of the class. As it is known that the teaching methods are more successful with small classes than with large classes (Al-Khuli, 1990: 9).

Most teachers would hope for a small class size in which students are more or less homogeneous in terms of proficiency. Most teachers find themselves working with a class of fifty students or more, and the worse is they often exhibit a wide variety of abilities. Such situation often leads to use teaching methodology which does not promote optimal learning (Richards & Renandya, 2002: 49).

Clearly the size of the class will affect the way of teaching. The most effective way in teaching in large classes is pair work and group work for it gives students more chances for interaction than they would get in whole class teaching. Also it fosters cooperative activity in that the students involved work together to complete a task (Harmer, 2007: 13, 43).

5. Assessing Students' Work

Teachers and students tend to emphasize what tests emphasize. If tests neglect certain aspect of a language, teachers and students usually neglect that aspect (Al-Khuli, 1990:9). In traditional learning environment, assessment practices are characterized by standardized tests designed, administered, and graded by outside authorities. In such environments students do not develop their own ability to assess how much they have learned and how much they need to learn. In contemporary

language teaching, learners are trained to assess their own learning progress, identify their strength and weaknesses in factors that influence effective communication (Nunan, 2001: 85).

As far as assessing communication is concerned, Swan (as cited in Brown, 1987: 231) listed four criteria for the construction of communicative tests:

1.start from somewhere. Tests should build on existing knowledge and principles i.e. theoretical framework.

2.concentrate on content. The tests need to have motivating, interesting, and substantive content.

3.bias for test. The test needs to do everything possible to elicit the very best performance from students.

4.work for washback. "wash back" is the effect of a test on teaching in the classroom i.e., tests can be used as teaching tools instead of teaching towards a test.

3. Procedures

3.1 An Introductory Note

This chapter is concerned with the procedural measures which are adopted to fulfill the aim of the study. It describes the population and the sample, the study instrument which includes the questionnaire and the statistical methods used to calculate the results.

3.2 population and Sample Selection

Population is defined as any set of items, individuals, etc. which share some common and observable characteristics from which a sample can be selected (Richards et al, 1992: 282). The population of the study is the Iraqi English language teachers of primary schools.

In order to achieve the aim of the study, a sample must be selected. The sample is suitable items selected at random from a population for study and used to test hypothesis about the population (Dictionary of English Language, 2003: 1). The total

number of the sample of the present study, which is randomly selected from primary schools, is 40English language teachers from different areas of Diyala.

3.3 Main Instrument of the Study

In order to achieve the aim of the study, a questionnaire has been constructed and distributed to English language teachers of primary schools to investigate the major problems they might face in managing English classroom. The questionnaire is a set of questions on a topic or group of topics designed to be answered by a respondent (Richards & Schmidt, 2002: 438). It consists of 18 items which teachers must agree or partially agree on and the following is the questionnaire used in the study:

Table (1)
Questionnaire Items

THE ITEMS	I AGREE	I PARTIALLY AGREE	SUGGESTIONS
1.The learning atmosphere is inappropriate for communicative language teaching.			
2. The size of the class is very large to the extent that the teacher faces difficulty in controlling the lesson.			

3. The teaching materials are not adequate for achieving successful learning atmosphere.			
4. It is too difficult to use authentic materials like video programs, magazines, computers, etc. in teaching English.			
5. Students lack the motivation for learning English.			
6. Your English is not good enough for communicative language teaching.			
7. Students are not cooperating with the teacher in directing the lesson.			
8. Students keep using their native language.			
9. Students do not want to talk because they suffer from a fear of making mistakes.			

10. It is not possible to conduct a lesson based on small groups instead of the traditional classroom organization.			
11. The time specified for the lesson is not sufficient for performing a variety of activities.			
12. Students insist to translate what is happening into their native language.			
13. Homework is good for students and the more time they spend working with English, the better they get at it. But the students do not usually do it.			
14. Students are at different levels some with quit competent English, some whose English is not very			

good, and some whose English is only just getting started.			
15. Teachers think that achieving examination results is more important and valued by school than achieving communicative language teaching goals.			
16. In traditional classroom, the desks are organized in rows and it is difficult to organize group work.			
17. The teachers are used to teach in the traditional way and they feel that they need a training course in communicative language teaching.			
18. The teachers must walk around the room to communicate with students, but because of the			

large number of students they lose control of the class.			

3.3.1 Face Validity

Corder (1973: 356) states "if our test is to do its job properly it must not, incidentally or accidently, measure anything else". The type of validity which is considered important in this study is face validity. Face validity refers to "the surface credibility or public acceptability"(Ingram, 1977: 18). Or as Harris (1969:7) defines it "the way the test looks to the examinees, test administrators, educators and the like.

To achieve face validity, the test is distributed to a jury consisted of   experts in the field of EFL and linguistics. They were asked to give their viewpoints and remarks as well as suggestions concerning the adequacy of the items of the questionnaire. The jury have agreed that the items are adequate and appropriate to achieve the aim of the study after some slight modifications. The following are the names and the academic ranks of the jury members:

 1. Prof.Khaleel Ismaeel, Ph.D
 2. Asst. Prof. Sami Al-Mamury, Ph.D
 3. Inst. Nizar Hussain, MA
 4. Asst. Inst. Ashwaq Mahdi, MA
 5. Asst. Inst. Liqaa Habeeb, MA
 6. Asst. Inst. Khulud Ibraheem, MA

3.3.2 The Questionnaire Administration

After achieving face validity, the questionnaire in its final version was administrated to 40 Iraqi English language teachers of primary schools from different districts of Diyala. They were asked to either agree or partially agree on the problems they

might face in managing their classrooms. The administration came out with the following results:

Table (2)
The Weighted Mean of the Questionnaire Items

Rank order	Item No.	Percentage of agreement
1	4	92%
2	14	87%
3	12	77%
4	17, 3, 8, 9,11	72%
5	16, 7	62%
6	18, 13	57%
7	2, 10, 15	50%
8	1, 5	37%
9	6	27%

3.3.3 Overall Performance

On the basis of results above, Iraqi English language teachers seem to face a variety of problems in managing communicative language classroom. Accordingly, the hypothesis of the study is verified . As shown in the table above the problem with the highest percentage is (4) which is about using authentic materials in teaching English. Teachers face difficulty in using authentic materials because of time, electricity or because of the huge number of the students which makes things get messy. Yet using them in communicative classroom is important for achieving the learning goals. The second problem which also gets high percentage is (14) about dealing with students of different levels in the same classroom. The percentage of this item is (87%).

The Iraqi English language teachers have agreed on most of the problems and only three of them got percentages under 50%. These items are (1, 5, 6) with percentages of (37%, 27%), accordingly the hypothesis is verified.

4. Conclusions and Recommendations
4.1conclusions

The study has reached to the following constraints which impede teachers from achieving ideal communicative classroom:

1. Item number (4) which reads "It is too difficult to use authentic materials like video programs, magazines, computers, etc. in teaching English." has got higher percentage which is (92%).

2.The item number (14) which reads " Students are at different levels some with quit competent English, some whose English is not very good, and some whose English is only just getting started." has got the second order with a percentage of (87%).

3. The item number (12) stating "students insist to translate what is happening into their native language" has got a percentage of (77%).

4. Five items have got a percentage of (72%), and these items are:

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(17).The teachers are used to teach in the traditional way and they feel that they need a training course in communicative language teaching.

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(18). The teachers must walk around the room to communicate with students, but because of the large number of students they lose control of the class.

7. Three items have got a percentage of (50%), and these items are:
(2). The size of the class is very large to the extent that the teacher faces difficulty in controlling the lesson.
(10). It is not possible to conduct a lesson based on small groups instead of the traditional classroom organization.
(15). Teachers think that achieving examination results is more important and valued by school than achieving communicative language teaching goals.

8. The items (1, 5) have got a percentage under 50% which is (37%) and these items read (1) "The learning atmosphere is inappropriate for communicative language teaching. (5) Students lack the motivation for learning English".

9. The item which have got the lowest percentage is (6) which reads" Your English is not good enough for communicative language teaching, and the percentage is (27%).

4.2 Recommendations
1. Teaching in big classes makes the job more challenging than it already is, yet there are some suggestions. For example, teachers can use pair work and group work since they maximize students'

participation. Also they can use chorus reaction instead of individual repetition.

2. It is essential to incorporate authentic material in the learning process and in particular, audio visual component. Such material can create a learning environment that is rich in linguistic and cultural information and allow teachers and students to explore the nonverbal and cultural as well as verbal, intonation, gesture, mime, facial expression and so on.

3. One of the biggest problems that teachers face is classes where students are at different levels and have different abilities. In such situation, teachers can use a variety of materials and activities in which different groups can be formed and better students can help weaker ones.

4. It is important to remember that, especially at beginner levels, students are going to translate what is happening into their native language. Usually it is a natural process of learning a foreign language but, an English language classroom should have English in it and it is advisable for teachers to use English as often as possible, and not to spend a long time talking in the students' native language.

5. In language learning motivation is a vital thing and teachers have to work on motivating students through both extrinsic and intrinsic way, encouraging by word and deed and offering support and guidance.

6. In communicative language classroom, speaking is important but some students do not want to speak because they are not used to talking freely in a classroom setting. In this situation, pair work may provoke quiet students into talking because they will not be under so much pressure as when they are asked to talk in front of the whole class.

7. Communicative language teaching needs applying a variety of activities. Accordingly, teachers need to be constantly finding out about new ways of doing things. A good way of learning new activities and techniques is to keep up-to-date through reading

the various teachers' magazines, books and websites that contain good descriptions of activities.

4.3 Suggestions for further researches
1. The role of authentic materials in communicative classroom
2. The role of teacher versus role of students in communicative classroom
3. The role of cooperative learning in communicative classroom

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الـخلاصة :

إن تعلم اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة أجنبية أو ثانية هو بمثابة تحدي لكل معلم سواء كان مبتدئا أو ذو خبرة وبالرغم من ذلك فهو اختيار مهني مجز. يواجه معلم اللغة الإنكليزية مشاكل متنوعة في إدارة الصف و التي يعمل بشكل متواصل لإيجاد الحلول لها والتعامل والتكيف مع احتياجات الطلبة لتحقيق النجاح في عملية تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية التواصلية. لذلك فإن اعتماد الخصائص الأساسية في إدارة الصف مثل تنظيم الصف،التخطيط،استخدام الأدوات والمستلزمات الفعالة واختيار الفعاليات والنشاطات الصفية المناسبة الخ، سوف يساعد معلمي المدارس في تأسيس نظام فعال في إدارة صف اللغة الإنكليزية.

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من المشاكل التي يواجهها المعلمون العراقيون للغة الإنكليزية في إدارة صف اللغة التواصلية في المدارس الابتدائية. لتحقيق هذا الهدف تم فرض فرضية نصها أن معلمو اللغة الإنكليزية يواجهون مشاكل متنوعة في إدارة صف اللغة التواصلية في المدارس الابتدائية. لغرض إثبات صحة النظرية تم توزيع استبيان يتألف من ١٨ فقرة على ٤٠ معلم ومعلمة لغة إنكليزية لمدارس مختلفة في محافظة ديالى وتم التوصل للنتائج التالية:

١- حصلت الفقرة(٤) على أعلى نسبه (٩٢ %) والتي تنص" من الصعب استخدام الوسائل الواقعية مثل المجلات ،الكومبيوتر ،برامج الفيديو الخ في تدريس اللغة الانكليزية.

٢- حصلت الفقرة (١٤) على الترتيب الثاني بنسبة (٨٧%) والتي تنص " يختلف مستوى الطلبة في اللغة الانكليزية في الصف الواحد فبعضهم ذو مستوى جيد جدا والبعض جيد أما بعضهم فضعيف جدا".

٣- حصلت الفقرة (١٢) التي تنص "إصرار الطلبة على ترجمة ما يحدث أثناء الدرس إلى لغتهم الأم" على نسبة (٧٧%) .

٤- حصلت خمس فقرات على نسبة (٧٢%) وهذه الفقرات هي :

(٣) إن الوسائل التعليمية غير كافية لتحقيق جو تعليمي ناجح .

(٨) يستخدم الطلبة اللغة الأم بشكل مستمر اثناء الدرس .

(٩) عدم رغبة الطلبة في التحدث باللغة الإنكليزية لخوفهم من ارتكاب الأخطاء .

(١١) إن الوقت المخصص للدرس غير كافي لأداء فعاليات متنوعة .

(١٧)أعتاد المعلمون على إتباع الطرق التقليدية في التدريس وهم بحاجة إلى دورات تدريبية في طريقة تدريس لغة التواصل والحوار .

٥ـ حصلت الفقرات (٧،١٦) على نسبة (٦٢%) وهذه الفقرات هي :

(٧) إن الطلبة غير متعاونون مع المعلم في إدارة الدرس .

(١٦) إن المقاعد الدراسية في الصفوف مرتبة بخطوط مستقيمة مما يصعب توسيع بعض الفعاليات والنشاطات مثل تقسيم الطلبة إلى مجاميع .

٦ـ حصلت الفقرات (١٣،١٨) على نسبة (٥٧%) وتنص هذه الفقرات على:

(١٣) أن الواجب البيني مهم في تطوير مهارات الطلبة ولكن معظم الطلبة لا يؤدونه .

(١٨) يجب على المعلم أن يتحرك في الصف للتواصل مع الطلبة ولكن بسب العدد الكبير للطلبة فانه يفقد السيطرة على الدرس .

٧ـ حصلت ثلاث فقرات على نسبة (٥٠%) وهذه الفقرات هي :

(٢) أن حجم الصف كبيرا لدرجة أن المعلم يفقد السيطرة على الدرس .

(١٠) من الصعب إدارة درس يعتمد على تقسيم الصف إلى مجاميع صغيرة بدلا من الطريقة التقليدية .

(١٥) يعتقد المعلمون أن تحقيق نتائج امتحانيه مرضية هي أهم من تحقيق أهداف تعليم لغة التواصل والحوار .

٨ـ حصلت الفقرات (٥،١) على نسبة اقل من (٥٠%) وهي (٣٧ %) وهذه الفقرات هي:

(١) إن الجو التعليمي غير ملائم لتعليم للغة التواصل والحوار

(٥) لا يمتلك الطلبة الحافز لتعلم اللغة الانكليزية .

٩ـ إن الفقرة التي حصلت على اقل نسبة هي (٦) و تنص" لغة الإنكليزية للمعلم ليست جيده بما فيه الكفاية لتعليم لغة الحوار والتواصل" ونسبة الفقرة هي (٢٧%).