

## Students' Points of View About Learning English as a Foreign Language Through Communication and Interaction in 9-Year Elementary Schools (Albanian Context)

Evis Kapurani

European University of Tirana, Doctoral School,

Profile Pedagogy, Tirana, Albania

[eviskapurani@yahoo.com](mailto:eviskapurani@yahoo.com)

### Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an interactive method which helps learning English language through communication, in a theoretical point of view CLT is a more effective method compared with traditional methods such as Grammar Translation Method and Audio lingual Method, and it is a preferred method to be used nowadays in foreign language learning. This is a descriptive study which aims to analyze and discover the 9-year elementary schools students' opinions and points of view about learning a foreign language based on the principles of contemporary interactive student-centered methods and traditional ones. It is introduced a theoretical analyses about methods of language teaching in general, characteristics description and principles of CLT, accuracy and fluency in CLT, teacher and student role, communicative competence, CLT application, significance, impact, comparison of CLT with traditional methods. The data are collected from students of 9-year elementary schools on sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades through a survey questionnaire. Questions on the questionnaire are focused on finding students' opinions and points of view about language learning in a certain context in practice, according to their needs and preferences on learning a language based on CLT premises about communication, accuracy, fluency, learning grammar and vocabulary, teacher roles etc. and principles of other traditional methods. Results are converted into percentages which show students preferences about the way they are used to, need and want to learn a foreign language and with which principles of the foreign language teaching methods they agree or not. Findings are described and analyzed according to their relation with theoretical issues. From the analyses it results that using CLT may prove to be a very successful method in both learning and teaching because students welcome the principles used in this method despite their "attachment" to the principles of previous teaching methods that they are used to.

**Keywords:** English Language Teaching Methodology, Communicative Language Teaching Method, Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method, Principles of Foreign Language Teaching Methods, Students' Points of View

### 1. Introduction

Methodology of foreign language teaching (FLT) includes different methods with their relevant principles used in teaching a foreign language. Methodology also includes different techniques, lesson plans, materials etc. for teaching language skills. It is important for a teacher to be always provided with contemporary trends of foreign language teaching and learning. Except relevant information that a teacher should have, students' opinions about certain principles and methods are also very important, to teach students in the way they want to learn and in the way that they would be motivated to, and would feel more confident. The aim of this study is to analyze and discover the 9-year elementary schools students' opinions and points of view about learning a foreign language based on the principles of contemporary interactive student-centered methods and traditional ones in Albanian schools. To describe their preferences about learning a language and about the way they want to be taught because Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an interactive method which helps learning English language through communication and in a theoretical point of view CLT is a more effective method

compared with traditional methods such as Grammar Translation Method and Audio lingual Method, and it is a preferred method to be used nowadays in foreign language teaching and learning.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Foreign Language Teaching Methods**

There is a wide range of various methods used in foreign language teaching these methods are divided into:

-structural methods: Grammar Translation Method, Audio-lingual Method

-functional methods: Situational Approach, Oral Language Teaching

-interactive methods: Direct Method, Series Method, Communicative Language Teaching, Suggestopedia, Natural Approach, Total physical Response, Community Language Learning etc.

### **2.2. Communicative Language Teaching Method**

CLT is an interactive student-centered method. Its origin dates from 1960 in Britain. Linguists at that time were focused on the need to communicate in the foreign language learning rather than on structural language. According to Wilkins (1972) a student should be able to express the core of the language through communicative competence rather than describe language through tradition concepts of grammar and vocabulary. He was more for the functional rather than structural use of language. Richards, Jack and Theodore Rodgers (1986) analyze the principles of CLT and state that the principal aim of CLT method is that the student to be able to communicate in the foreign language regarding that communication motivates students to learn and to be more involved in learning. CLT involves different activities that enhance communication such as: oral communication, games, role-plays etc. In CLT the teachers role is very important since he is a facilitator in classroom who creates communicative situations he is also observer and counselor while students are more active in the classroom, communicate and interact with each other and are at the center since the role of the teacher is not dominant and authoritative. CLT also makes use of a variety of materials which affect interaction and communication in the classroom. Richards (2006) states some really useful principles about communication which enhance and facilitate language learning: -interaction and meaningful communication are very important in language learning since they enhance learning and acquisition. -Tasks and exercises give students opportunities to negotiate meaning to use language and expand language resources including meaningful interaction. -Communication helps students to use and develop different language skills. -Language learning is easier if activities that involve inductive rules and analysis and reflection of language are used.

### **2.3. Accuracy and Fluency**

As Harmer (1983) states there is a distinction between accuracy and fluency. Communicative activities are designed to improve language fluency. The immediate and constant correction of all errors is not necessarily an effective way of helping learners to improve their English. During communicative activities the teacher should not interrupt students to point out a grammatical or lexical or pronunciation error since this interrupts communication. Students have to make their attempts to get their meanings across; processing language for communication is the best way of processing language for acquisition. Teacher intervention in such circumstances can raise stress levels and stop acquisition process. Students will learn through communicating. When teachers intervene remove the need to negotiate meaning and deny students a learning opportunity. Intensive correction can be just as unpleasant during accuracy work too. The teacher should not react to absolutely every mistake that a student makes this will de-motivate students but should judge the right moment to correct.

## **3. Methodology and Data Collection**

This is a descriptive study. The data are collected from students of 9-year elementary schools on sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth grades through a survey questionnaire. Questions on the questionnaire are focused on finding students' opinions

and points of view about language learning in a certain context in practice, according to their needs and preferences on learning a language based on CLT premises about communication, accuracy, fluency, learning grammar and vocabulary, teacher roles etc. and principles of other traditional methods. Results are converted into percentages which show students preferences about the way they are used to, need and want to learn a foreign language and with which principles of the foreign language teaching methods they agree or not. This is a quantitative study and for this reason a questionnaire is used for data collection. The questionnaire is designed with two major closed-ended questions which include statements with Yes or No alternatives to choose. It is designed to understand with which statements the students agree most, because statements are formulated based on the principles and characteristics of both contemporary student-centered methods such as CLT and of traditional methods such as ALM and GTM. Since theoretical views claim that CLT method principles are more effective, easier to use and more liked by the students, this questionnaire is designed to understand and discover students' opinions and points of view in learning a language, their needs and preferences. To describe and analyze if students prefer most to learn based on contemporary methods principles or on traditional methods principles. The questionnaire is a reliable method for data collection since the students are not asked to provide their names releasing them from the fear of a non real response, the participation was vulnerable and not at all influenced or obliged by the teacher or by the researcher. In this way students' opinions expressed through the questions are free of constrains and they represent the real thoughts and preferences of them. This method is chosen because it is simple for both students and researcher. The clear and exact questions in the questionnaire make students chose their answer without hesitation while the researcher through the questions designed in a specific way could collect all the necessary data for analyses in a large amount of participants in a short time.

### 3.1. Participants

5 classes on the 6<sup>th</sup> grade-113 questionnaires-Age 11-12 years old

4 classes on the 7<sup>th</sup> grade-71 questionnaires-Age 12-13 years old

7 classes on the 8<sup>th</sup> grade-129 questionnaires-Age 13-14 years old

1 class on the 9<sup>th</sup> grade-11 questionnaires-Age 14-15 years old

Total number of participants and questionnaires is 113+71+129+11=324

## 4. Results and Findings

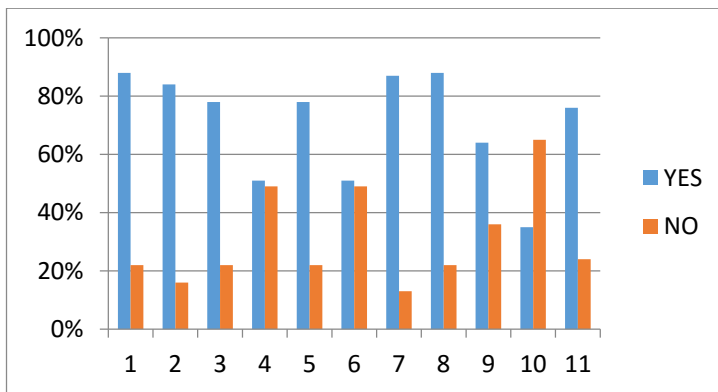
The first question was designed to ask about general information such as students' age and gender. The second question was designed with statements where students had to choose Yes or No as answers. This question was designed to understand **students' points of view** about learning a language. The results are given in percentages in Table 1 for the answers of the total number of participants which are also shown in Chart 1. The fourth question was designed with statements where students had to choose Yes or No as answers. This question was designed to understand **students' preferences and needs** about learning a language. The results of the question 4 are given in percentages in Table 2 for the answers of the total number of participants which are also shown in Chart 2. The eleven statements on Table 1 are the statements included on the questionnaire for Question 2 for which the student had to choose Yes or No alternatives based on their opinions if they agreed or not with them as well as the fifteen statements on the Table 2 are the statements included on the Question 3 of the questionnaire. All the statements used in the entire questionnaire are based on the principles of interactive method CLT and traditional methods ALM and GTM. Students have chosen one of the answers showing their agreement or disagreement or their preferences for the relevant principles.

**Table 1. Students' points of view about language learning for the total number of participants**

Statements of the Questionnaire for Question 2	Yes	No
Fluency in speaking is more important in learning a foreign language	88%	22%
Accuracy in using a language is more important in learning a foreign language	84%	16%
Foreign language learning should be student-centered	78%	22%

Foreign language learning should be teacher-centered	51%	49%
The teacher should focus on speaking skills, communication should be primary	78%	22%
Teacher should be dominant	51%	49%
Communicative competence is as important as grammar competence	87%	13%
Communication is one of the best ways of foreign language acquisition	88%	22%
Tasks and games are important about foreign language learning in communication	64%	36%
Correcting every mistake in communication activities brings de-motivation	65%	35%
Do you feel uncomfortable if you are unable to use English during communicative activities in classroom	76%	24%

**Chart 1. Students' points of view about language learning for the total number of participants in percentages**



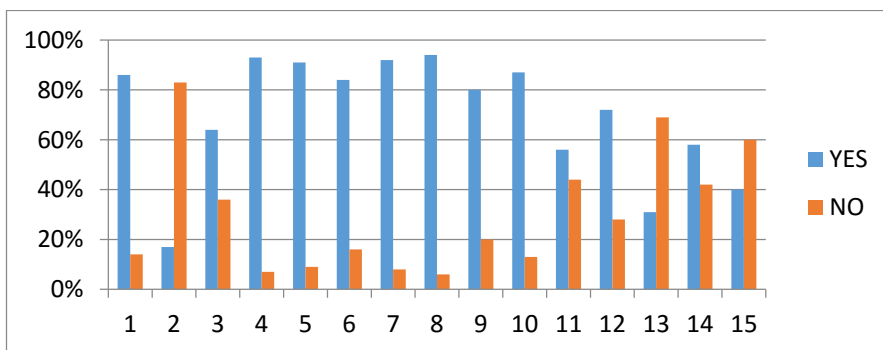
This question was designed with statements which would help to understand students opinions about their own language learning, how they see on their point of view that language learning should better be. A high percentage of the students 88% agreed that only fluency is more important in learning a language and 84% of them agreed that accuracy is more important. This means that students are interested on both fluency and accuracy in learning a language but especially they are interested in fluency. Regarding communicative competence and communication as one of the best ways for language acquisition the percentages of the students which agreed with these aspects were high and varied from 87-88% and 78% stated that the teacher should focus on speaking skills with communication primary and reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary secondary, this percentages make clear the students aims and perceptions which means that students need to communicate more during the lesson and they relate language learning with communication, this represents also their desire to communicate more and to be more motivated to learn. They also want to take responsibility for their own learning and want to manage their classroom activities that is why most of the them (78%) agreed that language learning should be student-centered and 51% of them agreed with teacher-centered learning that is because even though they like contemporary principles they are attached on old ones that is why 51% of them stated that the teacher should be dominant in the classroom. 65% of them answered that correcting every mistake in communication activities by the teacher brings de-motivation for them and that they felt uncomfortable if they were unable to use English during communicative activities (76%). In this case we understand that students' communicative competence is really important for them and they want to be fluent in speaking in order to be more motivated to speak but also to learn. We all know that if learning is not boring and frustrating it motivates students more to be involved in the classroom activities for this reason 64% of the students answered that tasks, games, role-plays are important about accuracy and fluency. As Harmer (1983) states that there is a distinction between non-communicative activities and communicative activities, according to him non-communicative activities are characterized by: non-communicative desire, no communicative purpose, form not content, one language item only, teacher intervention, materials control. While communicative activities by: a desire to communicate, a communicative purpose, content not form, variety of language, no teacher intervention, no materials control. It seems that students prefer

communicative activities and their relevant characteristics. The more students communicate the more they will be motivated to learn and learning would be more effective.

**Table 2. Students' preferences and needs about language learning for the total number of participants**

Statements of the Questionnaire for Question 3		
<i>Do you like or prefer learning:</i> Statement	Yes	No
with authentic materials taken from the real context?	86%	14%
with materials taken from a specific context unknown without interest for you?	17%	83%
by imitating and memorizing a given model?	54%	26%
using real communication?	93%	7%
vocabulary by learning the new given words?	81%	19%
words that you take from a context?	84%	16%
through communicating, playing games and freely expressing your opinions and ideas?	92%	8%
through interaction, working in groups, cooperating with partners and freely communicating?	94%	6%
through activities commanded by the teacher?	60%	40%
when your teacher is a counselor or facilitator?	87%	13%
when your teacher is a leader?	46%	34%
through active participation?	72%	28%
when you are passive in the classroom and follow teacher's authority?	31%	69%
when errors are instantly and constantly corrected?	48%	52%
when errors are not instantly and constantly corrected for not interrupting or affecting communicative fluency because it would be unpleasant?	50%	50%

**Chart 2. Students' preferences and needs about language learning for the total number of participants in percentages**



Students are obliged to learn with a certain material and methods and techniques but with this question and statements we understand their preferences how they need and like to learn a language and how they would be more motivated to learn. Most of the students (86%) stated that they liked or preferred learning with authentic materials, 17% of them stated that they liked learning with materials taken from a specific context because they want to learn more with materials that are based on their interest and materials that make them curious and interested. 93% of the students preferred learning using real communication and only 64% of them by imitating and memorizing a given model and neglecting context, this makes clear students' preferences on interactive methods principles that are focused on real situations communication and interaction rather than on traditional ones which include just a specific context and students are obliged to imitate the model and memorize the examples. 92-94% of the students like learning through communicating, playing games and freely expressing their opinions and ideas and through interaction, working in groups, cooperating with partners and freely communicating rather than through activities commanded by the teacher (60%) but still the percentage is not low it shows that students have been used to be under the wardship of the teacher. This is also seen even in learning new words 84%

of the students stated that they prefer learning vocabulary by learning words that they take from a context but also 81% preferred learning vocabulary by learning the new given words which means that students have been used to this way and have the tendency to be dependent on traditional principles and ways of learning vocabulary. About error correction it seems that students agree that both ways of correcting errors should be used since almost half of them like learning when errors are instantly and constantly corrected and the others when errors are not instantly and constantly corrected for not interrupting or affecting communicative fluency. They also prefer when the teacher is a counselor or facilitator (87%) because this would enhance their motivation in learning and not a leader in the classroom (46%). They also prefer task based learning, games for not being frustrating and active participation (72%) rather than being passive in the classroom and following teacher's authority (31%), in this way students preference is taking their own responsibility on learning and managing their learning activities, this shows that they like being active and interaction with each other rather than just following teachers activities.

From all the above results and interpretation it can be concluded that some of the main principles of CLT are important in both language learning and teaching. According to students' points of view, preferences and needs about learning a language it would be better for them if CLT method would be widely used. Because they prefer learning with authentic materials, learning vocabulary by learning words that they take from a context, learning through communicating, playing games and freely expressing their opinions and ideas and through interaction, working in groups, cooperating with partners and freely communicating. They also prefer when the teacher is a counselor or facilitator, they prefer a task based learning and errors should be constantly corrected only when it is needed in other cases errors should not be instantly and constantly corrected for not interrupting or affecting communicative fluency. Students prefer a student-centered learning and for them communicative competence and efficacy is really important in learning a language, they also prefer communicative activities which create communicative desire, interaction and motivation. Most of them do not like any more traditional methods and their principles such as focusing on accuracy, grammatical rules, frustrating tasks, memorization, imitating models, focusing in specific context, not being able to communicate freely, having a teacher acting as a leader and a teacher-centered learning, lack of classroom cooperation and not being able to use language in communication outside the classroom setting. Richards (2006) states a difference between a traditional method such as GTM that is focused on the deductive way of explaining grammar where rules are presented to the students they have to memorize them and then use in examples and given exercises while using CLT grammar is taught inductively and the students have the possibility to formulate the rule based on the exercises and also they can learn this rules by interaction use in work groups and communication they can acquire better this rules since they do not have just to memorize by heart but they learn the rules in a more natural and effective way. That is why students' tendency was to chose and like more CLT principles rather than traditional methods principles. And based on David Nunan's (1991) listed principles of CLT such as: learning communication through interaction, using authentic materials in learning context, giving students opportunities to manage their own learning, using students own experiences and opinions as a contribution in classroom and linking classroom language learning with language used on activities outside the classroom it seems that this method is very interested in the needs and desires of the learners and on the real use of language not only outside but also inside the classroom and since students develop their communicative competence in an authentic context CLT may be considered as a very useful form of teaching which enhances students learning.

## 5. Conclusions

The main aim of this study was to examine Albanian student's points of view and opinions on CLT theoretical premises. From the results of students it is clear that they welcomed the desire to accept CLT usage and principles but the problem is to put CLT into practice its implementation and innovative change which will depart them from traditional principles they are used to and this needs the relevant time to be familiar with. Even though from the analyses of students opinions and preferences it results that using CLT with its effectiveness may prove to be a very successful method in both learning and teaching despite their "attachment" to the principles of previous teaching methods such as GTM and ALM where students have been teacher-dependent in language learning. Also, there are some other factors that indicate the current situation foreign language learning in Albanian 9-year elementary schools, it is the Albanian context and culture and there are even institutional constrains such as class sizes, limited time or students' level and also teachers training for CLT. Although the findings in this study are limited to the setting, the number and context of participants and somehow prevent generalizations across the country and in a different context with other participants, other findings and problems may be discovered, it contributes as a scientific evidence to the debates over CLT in the Albanian context and it shows the need for other extended researches to be done.

## References

1. D.A. Wilkins. (1972). *Linguistics in Language Teaching*. Edward Arnold.
2. David Nunan. (1991). *Communicative Tasks and the Language Curriculum*.  
<http://ontesolteacherscorner.com/CommunicativeTasksAndTheLanguageCurriculum.pdf>
3. Harmer, J. (1983). *The practice of English language teaching*, London: Longman
4. Richards, J. (2006). *Communicative Language Teaching Today*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
5. Richards, Jack and Theodore Rodgers. (1986). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richards, Jack C.; Theodore S. Rodgers (2001). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.