

Teaching German in the Communicative Method for learners with heterogeneous backgrounds

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INTRODUCTION

The communicative method in teaching foreign languages sets the ideal group of maximum 20 students in a language classroom. However, many foreign languages offered at the University of Kelaniya has over 70 students in one classroom. Therefore, the teacher is compelled to generate mini groups of 20-30 students to make the teaching process less tedious. Although the students come from an analogous linguistic background, they depict diverse strategies of learning. -Since the utilization of Sinhalese as the language of instruction is expected by a majority of students, they already demonstrate a disturbed attitude in the classroom from day one when German is utilized as the target language for instructions. Furthermore, communicative approach of language learning encourages the students to actively participate in learning activities such as role play, singing songs and learning games that are targeted to amplify language competencies of the students effortlessly. This particular type of classroom setting does not encourage student centered language teaching.

BACKGROUND

The Buddhist monks in a foreign language class are considered as a minority, a special group of learners, who are not used to communicative language learning. At the primary and secondary levels, Buddhist monks follow their education in a separate academic organization called “Pirivena”. There are nearly 700 “Pirivenas” in Sri Lanka, which are maintained by the Ministry of Education. Although they have a separate primary and secondary education system in “Pirivena”, they are compelled to learn with other students, once they enter tertiary education; where the majority of their colleagues and teachers tend to be female

Communicative teaching method or the communicative approach is an interactive approach of language learning, which is successfully incorporated in language teaching since 70's; it was introduced in the 90s to Sri Lanka. The Monks who obtained their primary education in the traditional environment of "Pirivena" are also compelled to follow classroom instructions and take part in pair and group activities along with female colleagues. In the "Pirivenas" the monks learn Pali and Sanskrit through Translation Method. Therefore, their initial response to the Communicative Method is perceived as negative. They are also used to memorize rules and structures of target language and it is also noteworthy that oral and listening communication skills aren't prioritized when learning classical languages. Eye contact and physical contact, observing nonverbal communication patterns and interpreting intensions are major components of communicative method; As a result the monks are confronted with further challenges. They are reluctant to sit side by side with females students, although all are equally treated in the environment of communicative language learning. Even though the mistakes of monks are not corrected in the presence people in a "Pirivena" which usually comprises only of monks and other boys from the monastic background, the mistakes they make when learning languages are immediately corrected in front of other students in the foreign language classroom.

PURPOSE

The aim of this research is to examine the complications that are observed by teachers while utilizing communicative language teaching method when teaching monks in the German language classroom at the University of Kelaniya.

METHODOLOGY

Data were collected through classroom observations and mini-interviews with German teachers who have faced with similar issues when teaching

Buddhist monks, Buddhist monks who have experienced diverse strategies of teaching in other subjects and those who learn German as a Foreign Language.

RESULTS

The interviews with the Buddhist monks revealed that they are willing to learn in a communicative language classroom without breaking the religious taboos in a group. Moreover, it was also noted that female students do not refuse to work together with monks. However, they revealed their concern about the perceptions of the society on engaging in classroom activities with other—students. Societal perspectives on the behavior and life style of Buddhist monks were also taken into consideration. Moreover, the lecturers also find complications when teaching themes such as love before marriage, talking about own families and sexuality, which are deemed as usual themes when teaching literature. However, the ongoing nature of this research does not allow the researcher to glean direct results of it.

CONCLUSION

As the Department of Modern Languages comprises many Buddhist monks learning other languages and Buddhist monks in the teaching faculty, the issue was put into discussion with other members of the faculty. It is not possible to alter the communicative approach of teaching and substitute it with another outdated traditional method of teaching, or have special instructions for Buddhist monks by male teachers. It is appropriate to inform the Buddhist monks of the challenges they have to face when being instructed at the university by lay persons – specifically by female teachers and specially of learning language in the communicative method. This ongoing research therefore examines the potentials of taking steps to overcome the complications faced by - lecturers in teaching German for the Buddhist monks. However, the solutions may not always be successfully

applied, for all Buddhist monks undergoing inclusive education at the university.

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KEYWORDS

Inclusive education for Buddhist monks, Communicative Language Teaching Methodology, heterogeneous groups, taboos themes

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