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Bridging Communication and Competence: The Communicative Approach in Arabic Language Education as a Guide for Advancing Learner Interaction and Proficiency

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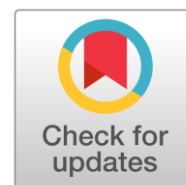
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ABSTRACT

Purpose - This study examines the communicative approach in Arabic language teaching, emphasizing its effectiveness in developing learners' communicative competence beyond grammatical accuracy.

Design/methodology/approach - Using a qualitative descriptive design, the study analyzes relevant literature and current pedagogical practices to explore how communicative activities enhance both grammatical knowledge and functional language use.

Findings/results - The findings reveal that the communicative approach substantially strengthens learners' ability to use Arabic in authentic situations by prioritizing interaction, language functions, and real-life communication.

Originality/value - This study advances the understanding of communicative pedagogy in Arabic language education, underscoring its capacity to promote holistic language proficiency that integrates linguistic, functional, and social dimensions.

Paper type - Research paper

Keywords: Arabic language teaching, Communicative approach, Communicative Competence.

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Introduction

Language serves as the primary medium through which humans communicate, express thoughts, and build social relationships. Beyond a mere system of sounds and



symbols, language embodies the culture and values of its speakers (Kramersch 2014). Ibn Jinni emphasized that language consists of sounds used by a community to convey intentions and influence others' actions (Jalood dan Yasir 2022). Through language, individuals not only exchange messages but also negotiate meaning and construct shared understanding (Elzouki 2024).

In Arabic language learning, the four core skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, function not only as tools for communication but also as means to access and understand Arab culture more deeply (Shoman 2021). The learning process should therefore cultivate accurate language use within social contexts, aligning with Dell Hymes's concept of *communicative competence*, which stresses the ability to use language functionally and contextually (Durbidge 2022). Accordingly, Arabic language instruction should prioritize the development of authentic communication rather than mere mastery of grammatical rules (Nasaruddin 2015).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach views language primarily as a tool for social interaction. CLT encourages learners to use language naturally across diverse communicative situations (Kanwit dan Solon 2022). Empirical findings indicate that this approach effectively enhances learners' participation, confidence, and communicative competence. Abu Bakar (Bakar dkk. 2019) found that project-based CLT strengthens speaking skills and collaboration, while Al-Shareef (AlShareef 2024) highlighted that reflective practices within CLT promote greater communicative awareness.

Most existing CLT research has centered on global foreign languages such as English. In contrast, studies focusing on Arabic remain limited, particularly concerning how CLT can be adapted for beginner learners. This gap raises critical questions about the application of *communicative competence* in Arabic classrooms, the most effective strategies for each language skill, and ways to mitigate recurring learner errors (*fossilization*).

This study examines the implementation of CLT in Arabic language teaching through a systematic review of scholarly articles published between 2015 and 2025. Data were collected from Scopus, Google Scholar, and ERIC using the keywords "*Communicative Language Teaching*," "*Arabic as a Foreign Language*," and "*Communicative Competence*." The reviewed studies explicitly address the application of CLT among non-native Arabic learners.

A **narrative synthesis** approach was employed, involving thematic coding to identify emerging trends, challenges, and pedagogical implications. The review seeks to answer three key questions: (1) How are the definitions and components of communicative competence conceptualized in Arabic language learning, (2) Which CLT activities are most effective for developing each of the four language skills, and (3) How can the risk of *fossilization* be minimized through communicative strategies.

The findings are expected to broaden the understanding of CLT's relevance in contemporary Arabic language instruction and to provide a foundation for developing contextual, functional, and learner-responsive pedagogical models.

Method

This study employs a systematic literature review approach to examine scholarly sources related to the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Arabic language education (Galvan dan Galvan 2024). The reviewed materials include peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, conference proceedings, and other credible official documents.

Literature searches were conducted across three major databases—Scopus, ERIC, and Google Scholar, using the keywords “*Communicative Language Teaching*,” “*Arabic as a Foreign Language*,” and “*Communicative Competence*.” Only publications meeting the criteria of relevance, credibility, and recency were included in the analysis.

Two selection criteria were applied. First, the inclusion criteria comprised empirical studies published from 2015 onward that explicitly discussed the implementation of CLT among non-native Arabic learners. Second, the exclusion criteria ruled out studies focusing on other foreign languages, bilingual contexts, or non-communicative teaching approaches. Foundational works by Hymes (Hymes 1972), Canale & Swain (Canale 1987), and Richards (Richards 1983) were retained as the theoretical backbone to strengthen the conceptual framework.

Data were analyzed through thematic coding, in which each publication was categorized according to its primary issues and grouped under three overarching themes: (1) the conceptualization and components of communicative competence, (2) the most effective CLT activities for developing specific language skills, and (3) the risks and mitigation strategies related to fossilization among beginner learners.

Finally, a **narrative synthesis** was conducted to integrate findings across studies, mapping emerging trends, challenges, and pedagogical implications. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of CLT's theoretical and practical contributions to strengthening communicative competence in Arabic language learning.

Result and Discussion

An Overview History of the Communicative Approach

The development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a critical response to the limitations of structural approaches that overemphasized linguistic form while neglecting the social functions of language (Savignon 2007). Historically, this shift marked a paradigmatic transition from viewing language as a system of rules to understanding it as a tool for communication. In the seventeenth



century, language instruction was largely religious in nature, centered on interpreting Latin and Greek texts without addressing real-life communicative use (MacSwan 2022).

A significant transformation occurred when scholars such as Joff Loew (Loew 1984) redefined language as a medium of social interaction, prioritizing communicative ability over rote memorization of grammatical structures (Oxford 1996). Leonard Bloomfield's critique of traditional methods, which produced learners who "knew the language but could not speak it", further catalyzed the rise of communicative paradigms (Bloomfield 1983).

During the 1960s and 1970s, applied linguistics in the United Kingdom began challenging the dominance of audiolingual and situational teaching methods from the United States. This intellectual movement gave rise to Dell Hymes's (Hymes 1972), concept of *communicative competence*, later expanded by Wilkins (Wilkins 1973) through two core dimensions: *Notional Categories* and *Communicative Functions*. Consequently, CLT represented not merely a methodological innovation but an ideological shift, from linguistic accuracy to meaningfulness, social relevance, and active learner participation.

Implementasi CLT menekankan aktivitas berpusat pada makna, seperti tugas berbasis proyek, *role-play*, dan diskusi, dengan guru berperan sebagai fasilitator komunikasi autentik (Yaman 2014). Evaluasi tidak lagi terbatas pada tes gramatikal, tetapi menilai kinerja komunikatif siswa dalam konteks nyata (Wesche 1983). Transformasi ini menegaskan bahwa keberhasilan pembelajaran bahasa diukur dari kemampuan interaksi sosial yang autentik, bukan semata pengetahuan linguistik.

Tabel 1. Evolusi Pendekatan Pengajaran Bahasa: dari Struktural ke Komunikatif

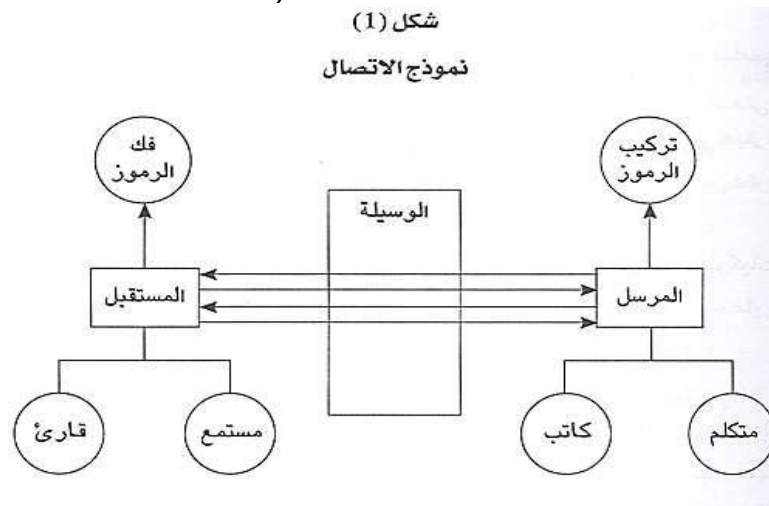
Key Aspect	Traditional/Structural Approach	Communicative Approach (CLT)	Supporting Literature
Learning Orientation	Emphasis on mastering linguistic forms and structures	Emphasis on using language for communicative purposes	Dell Hymes (1972); Michael Halliday (1973); Canale & Swain (1980)
View of Language	A system of grammatical rules and syntax	A tool for social interaction and negotiation of meaning	Michael Halliday (1973, 1978); Vygotsky (1978)
Teacher's Role	Central authority and language model	Facilitator of interaction and authentic communication	Littlewood (1981); Breen & Candlin (1980); Richards & Rodgers (1986, 2001)
Classroom Activities	Pattern drills, translation, and repetition exercises	Meaning-focused tasks, role-plays, and discussions	David Nunan (1989, 1991); Michael

			Long (1985, 1996); Jane Willis (1996)
Assessment	Grammar-based and translation tests	Communicative performance and functional use assessment	Canale & Swain (1980); Bachman (1990); Widdowson (1978)

Critically, the history of CLT reflects a fundamental transformation—from a mechanistic approach focused on formal accuracy to a communicative paradigm emphasizing meaning, social relevance, and authentic practice. CLT, therefore, should be understood not merely as a teaching method but as a conceptual framework that redefines the very nature of language and its learning process.

The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach views language as a process of meaning exchange rather than a mere mastery of linguistic structures. Effective communication occurs when speakers can express ideas clearly while also understanding the messages of others (Swan 1985). Hasan Al-Tujibi’s communication model identifies four key elements of interaction; sender, message, medium, and receiver, which together form an integrated system that connects context, meaning, and social understanding (Haddad 2017). Hence, language learning should cultivate an awareness that communication operates as an interdependent system linking message, context, and social interaction (Murtadho dkk. 2025).



1. Sender: the person who conveys the message.
2. Message: the content or idea being communicated.
3. Medium: the mode through which the message is delivered, such as speech, writing, or other communication tools.
4. Receiver: the individual or group who receives and interprets the message.



Linguistic competence and communicative competence represent two distinct yet complementary dimensions. Linguistic competence, following Chomsky (Chomsky 1998), refers to the conscious understanding and application of language systems, encompassing phonology, grammar, and semantics (Ghaleb dan Alawad 2025). In contrast, communicative competence, as proposed by Swain (Swain 1993), concerns the spontaneous and functional use of language in real-life situations. Halliday (Halliday 1975) extended this view by identifying seven language functions—including instrumental, regulatory, and interactional, that shift the focus from structural accuracy to functional and meaningful use.

According to Al-Asili, the ultimate goal of foreign language learning is the development of communicative competence. This aligns with Canale and Swain's framework, which comprises four components: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence (Murtadho 2025) (Subakir dkk. 2022). The communicative approach does not reject grammar; rather, it positions grammar as a means to achieve natural and effective communication. Thus, communication is understood as an integrative process that unites all linguistic components (Arifin dan Bahrudin 2021) (Hamid dkk. 2024).

However, an excessive focus on communication at the expense of linguistic foundations may lead to fossilized errors, thereby hindering fluency (Murtadho 2025). Therefore, the communicative approach must foster all four competencies in a balanced manner so that learners can use the language both accurately and contextually. In educational contexts, language acquisition occurs not only through formal instruction but also through natural interaction beyond the classroom. Teachers play a central role in creating communicative learning environments that enable learners to attain near-native proficiency (Farooq 2015). This view resonates with Ibn Khaldun, who asserted that language mastery results from continuous practice and habituation rather than rote memorization (Fradana 2023).

This principle holds particular relevance in Arabic language learning, where mastery of Qur'anic vocabulary, Hadith, and classical scholarly texts, combined with exposure to poetry and prose, strengthens communicative ability (Osman 2003). Such an approach bridges traditional linguistic instruction with modern communicative practice grounded in authentic experience. Through an integrative strategy that combines formal grammar instruction with interactive communication, teachers can transform language learning from rote memorization into a process of meaningful understanding and use.

Recent studies reinforce this view, Ahmed Sabri (Ahmed dan Pawar 2018) argue that communicative competence represents the ultimate goal of language education, necessitating communication-based activities from the earliest stages of learning. This shift promotes learner-centered instruction through authentic communicative tasks, moving beyond teacher-dominated methods. The communicative approach thus

guides learners to use language interactively, functionally, and meaningfully in real contexts.

The implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) affirms that genuine language learning arises from authentic communicative practice, not from the mere acquisition of linguistic forms (Alamri 2018). CLT integrates linguistic and communicative competence, places meaning at the core of learning, and redefines the teacher's role as a facilitator of interaction. This transformation marks a paradigm shift from teacher-centered instruction toward learner-centered pedagogy grounded in contextual and functional communication.

Teaching Arabic through a Communicative Approach

Teaching Arabic through a communicative approach emphasizes the integrated development of the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, within real communicative contexts. The goal is not merely to master linguistic forms, but to enable learners to use the language effectively and appropriately in diverse social situations.

Unlike the structural approach, which treats linguistic components as isolated elements, the communicative approach views language as a tool for interaction and meaning-making. Learning focuses on using language in authentic and meaningful contexts so that learners *learn to communicate through the language*, rather than merely *learn about the language*.

This approach highlights the use of authentic texts from real-life sources such as newspapers, magazines, or radio broadcasts, enabling students to engage with living and contextualized Arabic (Hasnah dkk. 2024) (Shidiq dkk. 2024). Arabic becomes an active medium of classroom communication through conversation, discussion, and interaction. The teacher acts as a facilitator who creates genuine communicative situations, allowing students to use Arabic naturally and meaningfully (Wood dkk. 2018).

The structural approach tends to teach linguistic elements in a fragmented manner, without considering their social functions. In contrast, the communicative approach aims to prepare learners to use the language directly in authentic communication. Thus, learning success is not measured by the memorization of grammatical patterns but by the learner's ability to use language effectively to achieve real communicative goals. *Communicative competence* refers to the ability to adapt and apply linguistic rules appropriately in interaction, extending beyond formal knowledge toward practical skills in diverse social contexts.

In the communicative approach, language skills are developed integratively rather than in isolation. The four skills complement and reinforce one another, as genuine communication naturally involves two or more skills simultaneously. For example, in a conversation between a guest and a hotel receptionist, speaking, listening, reading, and writing occur in an integrated sequence, the guest speaks while listening, then reads and fills out a form. Such integration fosters a natural and



meaningful communicative process, making language learning more realistic, functional, and relevant to everyday life.

The communicative approach to teaching Arabic rests on several fundamental principles designed to make Arabic a living and functional means of communication within the learning environment, it emphasizes the use of authentic Arabic texts drawn from real-life sources such as newspapers, magazines, and radio broadcasts. Such materials expose learners to genuine, context-rich Arabic rather than the artificial language often found in textbooks. The core principles of this approach include:

1. Use of Authentic Arabic Texts

Genuine materials from real contexts, such as news articles, radio programs, and magazines—help learners engage with natural Arabic as it is used by native speakers, promoting familiarity with the language's social and cultural dimensions.

2. Arabic as an Active Medium of Communication in the Classroom

Arabic is treated not as a set of vocabulary lists or grammatical rules but as a living language actively used throughout classroom interaction. It should serve as the medium of daily communication through discussions, dialogues, and exchanges between students and teachers.

3. Developing Varieties and Expressions of Language Structure

Learners are encouraged to express the same idea using different linguistic forms, thereby enhancing their expressive flexibility and awareness of nuance. For instance, the sentence *"I came to class yesterday"* can be articulated in multiple ways to reflect subtle variations in meaning or emphasis.

4. Encouraging Freedom of Expression and Opinion

The communicative approach values learners' personal expression. Students are encouraged to share ideas, impressions, and opinions about the texts they encounter. At early stages, minor errors are tolerated to build confidence and promote spontaneous communication.

5. Understanding the Social Context of Language Use

Language learning extends beyond memorizing grammar and vocabulary; it requires understanding the social contexts that shape meaning. True communicative competence involves using language appropriately and effectively across diverse social situations.

6. The Role of Teacher

The teacher functions as a facilitator rather than a lecturer, guiding students to engage in meaningful communication. Their primary task is to create authentic communicative situations that encourage learners to use Arabic purposefully instead of relying on mechanical repetition.

7. Communicative Learning Activities

Interactive tasks such as role plays, problem-solving exercises, and language games are integral to this approach. These activities foster practical communication skills in an engaging and dynamic learning environment.

8. Arabic as a Tool for Communication, Not Merely Learning Material

Arabic is viewed as an active means of communication among teachers and students, not simply a subject to be memorized. It becomes the language of real interaction, enabling learners to think, respond, and express meaning naturally.

The next section compares the traditional and communicative approaches, highlighting their fundamental pedagogical differences and implications for Arabic language teaching:

No	Description	Traditional Approach	Communicative Approach
1	Learning Process	Focuses solely on formal learning aspects.	Emphasizes communication and interactive ability.
2	Determining Language Elements	Treats language as a rigid grammatical structure.	Views language as patterns with meaning and communicative function.
3	Sequencing Language Elements	Chooses language elements based solely on grammatical order.	Selects language elements based on learners' communication needs.
4	Presentation of Materials	Organizes material according to a fixed grammatical system.	Arranges material based on meaning, content, and learner interest.
5	Linguistic Perspective	Sees language as a whole with fixed patterns and key words.	Accepts language variation depending on communication context.
6	Type of Language Used	Uses formal language from textbook pages.	Uses authentic language drawn from everyday life.
7	Success Criteria	Produces grammatically correct language patterns.	Achieves effective communication appropriate to context.
8	Language Skills Focus	Emphasizes reading and writing skills.	Focuses on verbal interaction (listening and speaking) equally with reading and writing.
9	Role of Teacher/Learner	Teacher-centered instruction.	Learner-centered learning process.
10	Attitude Toward Errors	Errors are unacceptable as deviations from standard grammar.	Errors are seen as incomplete expressions, not fatal mistakes.



11	Language Learning Procedure	Focuses on language patterns rather than meaning.	Prioritizes meaning (content) over form.
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From the explanation and comparison above, it can be concluded that the traditional approach emphasizes mastery of linguistic structures and memorization of patterns, while the communicative approach focuses on the ability to engage in real interaction. Teaching Arabic through a communicative approach enables learners not only to understand the language but also to use it effectively in everyday contexts, rather than limiting their skills to written examinations.

The implementation of this approach makes Arabic learning more meaningful, relevant, and contextual. Learners move beyond knowing grammatical rules to being able to apply them in expressing ideas and understanding others. Therefore, integrating the communicative approach into Arabic language instruction is essential for developing active, functional, and dynamic language competence, in harmony with the true nature of language as a tool for human communication.

Conclusion

The communicative approach to language teaching emphasizes that language is not merely a set of grammatical rules but a primary tool for social interaction, expressing ideas, and conveying emotions. This paradigm highlights the functional and meaningful use of language and promotes the integration of the four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing, in an interconnected manner that reflects real-life communication.

The findings of this study indicate that applying the communicative approach enhances learners' ability to use the language actively, meaningfully, and contextually, rather than merely memorizing linguistic structures. Instructionally, the teacher serves as a facilitator who creates authentic communicative situations, while learners take on active roles through communicative tasks relevant to their daily experiences.

The limitations of this study include its focus on selected literature and practices, which may restrict the generalization of findings across different Arabic teaching contexts. Future research is recommended to explore the practical implementation of CLT in real classroom settings, including the influence of social, cultural, and motivational factors on communicative competence development.

In conclusion, the communicative approach reinforces that effective language learning centers on meaning, function, and social context, while integrating all language skills within authentic and meaningful learning experiences.

The implication of Finding

The findings of this study suggest that Arabic language educators should integrate the communicative approach into their teaching practices. This approach emphasizes not only grammatical accuracy but also the practical use of language in real-life contexts. Implementing the communicative approach promotes learner-centered instruction, enhances student engagement, and supports the goal of developing competent Arabic users capable of functioning effectively in social and professional settings.

Furthermore, curriculum development and language education policies should encourage the inclusion of communicative strategies in Arabic instruction. Such support is essential to ensure that language learning goes beyond theoretical understanding and becomes meaningful and applicable, enabling learners to acquire linguistic competence relevant to everyday communication and professional demands.



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