**CHAPTER I**

**INTRODUCTION**

1. **Presentation**

This chapter provides details about the background and the purpose of the study, the research statement and questions, the problem statement, the significance of the study and the limitations.

* 1. **Background of the Study**

English language teaching and learning techniques have been continually modified according to the students’ needs and interests in order to discover the most effective way to improve the quality of learning. An English as a foreign language (EFL) lesson has been taught in line with grammatical rules and practised utilising mechanical activities in a traditional way. However, during recent studies, it has been proven that researchers consider investigating the learners’ interest as an important aspect of learning. As a result of this, EFL instructors have been working on various methods and techniques with the intention of improving students’ learning abilities as well as encouraging them to be more motivated to learn English. EFL instructors have realised that it would be more suitable for the students to learn a language for communicative use rather than basic grammatical use. This is due to the fact that basic grammatical use does not actually teach students how to use the language in real life scenarios rather it concentrates on teaching the language with a set of rules. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach was introduced to overcome this concern.

Nunan (1988) points out that the communicative views of language teaching was incorporated into syllabus design during the 1970’s. The main question for the supporters of this approach was ‘What does the learner want/need to do with the target language?’ rather than ‘What are the linguistic elements which the learners need to master?’ (p. 11). According to him, language teaching is based on the students’ interest in the target language. The instructors teach the language structures to students. This can be beneficial but the ability to use the language in a suitable context outside the classroom can be considered as an important aspect as well. If students do not know how to use the language, communication would not take place between peers. This will result in an inability to express their needs and it will defeat the purpose of learning English. Therefore, students should learn the language for communicative aims as well. He also states that this new syllabus both contains linguistic structures as well as communicative functions and it truly reflects what the students want to do with the target language. Before designing the syllabus, the needs of students in the target language are investigated and finally determined as learning the language in the classroom is not just based on linguistic rules. Learning how to use language in suitable contexts in real situations is also important and necessary. Students should learn the language for communication in real situations rather than mechanically established contexts where they only focus on grammar rules.

Savignon (2002, p. 4) states that Communicative Language Teaching is an integration of a number of multidisciplinary perspectives such as sociology, psychology, linguistic educational research and philosophy. The aim of focusing on these concepts is to advance the improvement of functional language ability and join them in communicative events. Communicative Language Teaching focuses on the needs of the learner therefore it supplies a framework for detailed programme aims. According to Savignon, the most essential purposes of CLT consist of developing learners’ communicative competence and improving the objectives of programme according to the learners’ needs. Developing the learners’ language skills by using CLT techniques may help to develop the learners’ accomplishment level to the programme goals and in reality, a needs analysis may not be necessary since CLT make the learners ready for managing most situations in the target language successfully.

Finnocchiaro and Brumfit (1983, p. 94) state that the traditional teaching methods limit the production of the foreign language of learners because the teachers focus on forms rather than language usage. In the classroom, the teacher does accuracy-based work like presentation of linguistic rules and the application of them in exercises. There is an artificial environment in the classroom. Furthermore, no one can communicate naturally inside the classroom yet alone outside the classroom, people pay attention to students’ ideas or views to get the message across and they do not attempt to correct their incorrect sentences. Therefore, it is necessary to take part in conversations, share ideas or views and to be comprehended by the listeners. Learning the language for communicative needs is an important aspect as well.

Richards and Rodgers (1986) point out that the variations of the language teaching methods are to be expected as students’ needs change from reading to oral proficiency.

Richards and Rodgers (1986, p. vii) also state that when we choose the method and materials for classroom use, we should think about our learners’ needs as well as the teachers’ preferences and limitations of the school.

Kleban (2002) and Bygate (1987) indicate that knowing how to speak is vital for students because it gives them an opportunity to communicate by describing their thoughts, ideas and feelings and also allows them to have social ranking, social solidarity and professional advancement. Teachers believe that students’ interests are in communication. They are taking courses in English to be able to communicate in English. Firstly, they need this skill to communicate with their English teachers and department instructors when they study in their department. Secondly, communicating in English accurately and fluently will be a worthy quality in their future careers and finally speaking practice will not only give students an opportunity to communicate in another language but also assist them to gain self-confidence in learning the foreign language for their future professions. However, the teachers cannot spend much time on this skill because the syllabus is overloaded. The students are taught grammar topics and then given mechanical exercises such as fill in the gaps. Mechanical exercises limit the students’ ability to practise the language in a communicative way. However, the primary problem that students in Preparatory School face is similar to all other students of English Foreign Language (EFL) in the world. Most of the students do not have an opportunity to live in an English-speaking country. This problem illustrates the importance of providing students with an English-speaking environment in the classroom which enable students to learn English without translating it into their native language. The students actually have difficulties with the classroom’s atmosphere, background information, error correction, the topics and the teacher’s attitude while participating in speaking activities.

On the other hand, Zhenhui (1999, pp. 27-29) points out that ‘‘with the rapid development of English language teaching in non-English speaking countries, English teachers have become more aware that the exclusive use of either the Communicative Language Teaching or Grammar Translation method does not suit all English teaching situations. Teachers have also discovered that no single teaching method deals with everything that concerns the form, the use, and the content of the language’’.

Swan (1985, p. 98) states that teachers should apply new techniques without giving up on beneficial older methods. According to Swan, learning can be improved with different kinds of activities. We should not think that there is something wrong if we involve some rote learning, translation, structural drilling and repetition that is seen to have no immediate communicative worth to our teaching activities.

The institutions that provide education in English hold the view that besides having knowledge of their own subject areas, having a good command of English is becoming important for students in their future careers.

In an English-medium University, students are required to have an adequate level of grammatical and communicative competence in the language instruction to cope and be successful in their departmental studies. Moreover, students in such universities should acquire certain skills that involve the primary and productive skills of reading, writing, listening and speaking and therefore be able to ask questions, share ideas, take notes, do research and so on. The researcher believes that learners’ limited English speaking skills affect the students’ performance in their departmental studies which require students to ask and answer questions, make comments, have discussions and give presentations on a topic within their field. Furthermore, effective oral communication between students and instructors is also important for the office hour in the departmental studies. This requires sufficient speaking skills as much as the other skills in the departmental studies at English-medium universities.

In the light of the above discussion, the English language teaching methods in the NEU Preparatory School needs to be thoroughly investigated. Based on this investigation a new teaching technique will need to be developed leveraging advantages of other methods mentioned earlier in this research.

* 1. **Aim of the Study**

The aim of this study was to investigate the effects of using communicative activities to enhance the speaking skills of elementary students studying in the Preparatory School of Near East University.

In order to realize the aim, the following research questions were asked:

1. How is CLT implemented in the Preparatory School of NEU and what are the effects

of the newly implemented communicative activities on the elementary students’ performance in speaking?

1. What is the role and place of the speaking skill in learning English as a foreign

language in the Preparatory school of NEU and what are the students’ and teachers’

opinions about the speaking skill in terms of students’ needs?

1. What are the factors that prevent the elementary students in Preparatory School from

speaking?

1. How can elementary students in Preparatory School be assisted to participate more in

communicative activities that focus on speaking?

1. How do students perceive the communicative activities used in the class to enhance

their speaking skills?

* 1. **The Significance of the Study**

It is anticipated that the findings of this study will help the teachers in the EFL field understand the English language interests of elementary students and their preferences in the communicative activities that are based on speaking in English. Through considering these factors, it is trusted that this study will be beneficial in proposing effective and suitable communicative activities and techniques to encourage and motivate students to speak. It is also expected that this study will contribute to the development of students’ whole performance on communication skills and to the preparation of materials for teaching the speaking skill.

* 1. **Limitations**

This research study is limited to ten elementary and ten pre-intermediate and intermediate level classes and thirty-three teachers where English is studied as a foreign language in the Preparatory School during the fall and spring semesters of the 2007 and 2008 academic year in Nicosia, North Cyprus.