THE NEEDS OF ADULT ESL LEARNERS: IMMIGRANT LEARNERS NEED TO INTEGRATE VERSUS INTERNATIONAL LEARNERS NEED FOR SHORT-TERM ESL

By

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Introduction

Many adults study ESL (English as a second language) in Canada and the USA creating an ESL industry. However, too often, the distinctive needs of various groups of adult ESL learners are not identified, creating less effective programming. In Canada and USA the two primary classifications of ESL learners are adult immigrant ESL learners and international student ESL learners. This paper will, first, explore the different characteristics and needs of these two groups of adult ESL learners to derive the key similarities and differences in learning needs. Second, this paper will review the various approaches to ESL and then, third, demonstrate the strength of the communicative approach to language teaching, as it draws upon the key strengths of other approaches. Fourth, this paper will demonstrate the kinship between the communicative ESL approach and the situated cognition approach in the general adult education field. Fifth and finally, this paper will discuss the ways in which the communicative approach can be adapted by ESL teachers to meet the unique needs of these two different types of adult ESL learners. In particular, immigrant learners need ESL to integrate into their new English speaking country as part of a new formation of identity, whereas international ESL learners come to learn ESL as temporary visitors to improve their English language skills.

Learning Needs and Characteristics of New Immigrant ESL Learners

Adult immigrant or new Canadian/American ESL learners is one group of ESL learners. “… [I]n recent years, the major burden of adult education has been teaching English as a Second Language (ESL) to an ever-increasing immigrant population in North America. For this reason, adult education has, to a great degree, become
synonymous with ESL” (Hilles & Sutton, 2001, p. 385). New immigrants need to learn ESL to integrate and survive in their new English speaking country. They also need to learn ESL to find employment and increase education levels. One of the main characteristics of immigrant ESL learners is that they need to permanently integrate into a new English speaking community. “The new arrivals are faced not only with having to learn a new language but also with having to adapt to U.S. [or Canadian] culture. For some, that is relatively easy. For others, it can be a major frustration and one that can affect their ability to function effectively both in and out of the classroom” (ProLiteracy America, 1996, p. 8). Immigrant ESL learners need to learn ESL to adapt and integrate into their new English speaking community and society.

The LIDS\(^1\) data thereby permit identification of the adult immigration population arriving in B.C. from outside of Canada which cannot speak English at all. However, this means of identification is obviously a gross underestimation of the population which may need or benefit from ESL instruction, given the nature of the information obtained. The resulting figures might best be considered as an estimate of the population which is most severely in need of English instruction for basic communication needs and some participation in society (Cumming, 1991, p. 8).\(^1\)

New immigrants need to be able to integrate and participate in their new English speaking society. Thus it can be summarized that one of the characteristics or needs of immigrant learners is to learn ESL to integrate into a new culture. By learning ESL

\(^1\) LIDS means Landed Immigrant Data Systems
immigrants will be able to integrate and create their new home in their new English speaking country.

Along with the need to integrate into an English speaking society, another need for immigrant ESL learners is to learn functional English to survive in their new English speaking country. Immigrant learners need to learn basic functional skills to survive in their new English speaking society. “When people move to new country or region, they may find themselves ill-equipped to handle a million everyday tasks simply because they don’t speak the language. Tasks that were previously taken for granted, such as taking the bus, making a phone call or coping with shopping, can suddenly become obstacles” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p. 8). New immigrants need to learn functional English through ESL classes. Day to day functions like ordering food in a restaurant or going to the doctor are difficult for new immigrant ESL learners because of the lack of English language skills.

The need to carry out familiar tasks in an unfamiliar cultural environment can magnify the difficulties experienced by immigrants. When simple tasks suddenly become difficult or impossible because their language skills are limited or they are unfamiliar with the culture, their self-confidence and self-esteem can be weakened (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p. 8).

Thus it can be summarized that one of the needs of new immigrant ESL learners is to learn functional English.
Besides the need to learn functional English new immigrant ESL learners also have the need to learn ESL to improve their communication skills. For example new immigrants need to learn ESL to communicate with co-workers, their children’s teachers, clerks at the grocery store, and the general English speaking community. New immigrants also need to learn ESL to communicate with their new English speaking neighborhoods and family members.

One class with which we are familiar comprised almost entirely Korean grandparents who didn’t particularly want to speak English, but wanted very much to understand their grandchildren. We have known other learners who wanted some sort of communicative system but were not particularly concerned with grammatical accuracy. Still others felt that language without grammatical correctness was no language at all (Hilles & Sutton, 2001, p.387).

Therefore it can be summarized that learning how to communicate in English is an important need of immigrant ESL learners.

Another need that is linked with the need of new immigrant ESL learners to learn communication skills is to find employment. New immigrants need to learn English communication skills to communicate with English speaking individuals in their new English speaking community and also communication skills can help new immigrants find a job.
Current ESL and immigrant services were said to be assisting adult immigrants to B.C. with limited English by: improving people’s functional English for communication, helping to find work, or improving work relations; providing a transition into mainstream society, reducing isolation, and facilitating self-confidence, social participation and a sense of belonging to Canadian society; fostering improvement in specific language skills (e.g. reading, pronunciation); or providing translation or interpretation to facilitate communication in a specific circumstance or understanding of Canadian society (Cummings, 1991, p. xvi).

In the hopes of finding a job new immigrants are motivated and interested in learning ESL.

Although ESL students may not specify employment-related reasons as their primary motivation for attending ESL classes, both those who are currently employed and those who intend to seek employment may identify general language and literacy skills that are, in fact, related directly or indirectly to their employment goals. For example, when questioned for details as to why they want to improve their speaking skills, learners often indicate a desire to communicate better with individuals such as supervisors or co-workers (Marshall, 2002, p.29).

New immigrants need to learn ESL as a second language to communicate and survive in their new English speaking community. “A second language is therefore, for many people, simply a normal and necessary extension of their communicative repertoire for coping with life’s demands. In this respect, it is a process similar to the acquisition of
different styles of speaking, to suit different kinds of situation, in a monolingual
community” (Littlewood, 1984, 54). Therefore learning a second language is like
learning different styles of speaking used, whether business, medical or legal English.
Learning to communicate in English is the key to finding employment and
communicating on the job with employers and co-workers for new immigrant ESL
learners. Thus it can be summarized that learning ESL to find employment is a major
need for new immigrant ESL learners.

Also related to the need of new immigrant ESL learners to find employment, is
the notion of workplace ESL classes. Many employers offer ESL classes for new
immigrants to further their skills and training for their existing job. “However, the
agendas of workers may be different from that of their employers. Many workers want to
improve their language and literacy skills to get out of low-paying or dead-end jobs, to
get better jobs within an organization, or to better support there roles in family life”
(Weinstein, 2001, p.176). Thus workplace ESL learning is a good example of the need
for new immigrant ESL learners to learn ESL skills for improved employment
opportunities and acquiring additional credentials.

Finding a job and communicating in English is closely related to another need of
new immigrant ESL learners, the need to further their level of education in the new
English speaking country. Getting training or increasing education level, after learning
ESL can greatly assist in the success of new immigrants finding employment in their new
English speaking country and increasing their income.
Those with work experience may possess education, training and skills that will help them learn. They may be motivated by the prospect of landing jobs once they become more proficient speakers of English. Others may be unemployed or seeking further education and training in preparation for entering the job market. Those with no history of work may look forward to training for a job as well as learning English (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.10).

There is a direct connection between the need to learn ESL to find employment and the need to learn ESL to further education. New immigrant ESL learners have the desire to learn English skills to further their education to find employment in their new English speaking country. “The learners, on the other hand, may want to develop comprehensive language and literacy skills that would make higher level education and training and better paying jobs more accessible. These mismatched goals can have an impact on an individual’s motivation to succeed” (Marshall, 2002, p.18). New immigrants use ESL training to survive in their new English speaking country in a step by step process, in that first they learn ESL to increase their English communication skills, then to further their education or receive training to eventually find a job, preferably a good-paying job. Thus, learning ESL allows new immigrants to communicate and survive in their English speaking community.

These non-English speakers not accommodated in current programs were at all levels of English proficiency, represent a variety of language and ethnic backgrounds, and were said to want to improve their English to better their
employment prospects or communication at work, to further their academic or occupational credentials, to participate more fully in Canadian society, and to communicate with family members (Cumming, 1991, p.xiv).

Thus it can be summarized that one of the needs of new immigrant ESL learners is to further their education level and/or acquire training for employment purposes.

The needs of immigrant ESL learners can be summarized as follows: first, these new immigrant learners need to integrate into their English speaking community; second, they need to learn functional English to survive in their new English speaking country; third, they need to learn ESL to find a job and communicate in the workplace; fourth, they need to further their educational credentials in their new country; and fifth, they are undergoing an identity change as a citizen in a new country. Now that the learning needs of new immigrant ESL learners have been examined, the needs and characteristics of international ESL learners will be examined.

Learning Needs and Characteristics of International ESL Learners

International ESL learners are another type of adult ESL learner group. International ESL learners have very pragmatic, task-oriented, short-term needs which include cultural exposure, academic improvement, professional improvement and preparation for writing an International Test of English. The first need of international ESL learners is that they come to English speaking countries to learn ESL on a short term basis and sometimes to holiday. International students may learn ESL for a period of time and then return to their native country with their newly acquired English skills. “On
the other hand, international students are temporary residents whose motives for learning English may be limited. For example, they may want to learn formal English because knowledge of business English is valued in their native countries” (Brickman & Nuzzo, 1999, p.54). It can be argued that English learned in an English speaking country is highly given more credit in foreign countries.

Due to the fact that international ESL learners come to English speaking countries for a short term, they also want to learn about the new culture they are in and visit cultural and geographical sites of interest. Therefore international students are often taken on activities and field trips during their ESL programs to experience the new culture and country. “In addition, the international student program has scheduled a series of parties, dances and field trips to familiarize students with the city and its resources” (Brickman & Nuzzo, 1999, p.59). Therefore international ESL learners need an experiential learning segment included in their ESL learning programs rather than just learning ESL purely for communicative purposes as they return home to their native countries they will not be communicating with English speaking people only.

These students have every intention of returning to their native countries. Since they may regard themselves as temporary visitors in the United States, they retain as much of their culture as they can and many times live together with people of their nationality, thereby decreasing their opportunities and need to use communicative English (Brickman & Nuzzo, 1999, p.54).
Thus it can be summarized that one of the needs of international ESL students is to take part in short term ESL and improve their English skills for use in their native country.

Even though international students study ESL only on a short term basis, they still have other needs as adult ESL learners which are important to understand as an ESL teacher. International learners often use ESL to assist them to increase their English skills for academic purposes. They want to learn ESL to pursue further education either in the English speaking country where they are studying ESL or back in their own native country. Therefore ESL learners need to learn ESL as a prelude to higher or further education.

The former are restricted mainly to foreign students who are in the United States on student visas. Students participating in these programs must be present in a classroom a specified number of hours per week and must be making reasonable progress toward a degree objective to retain their visas. They are allowed up to two years to master English before beginning their higher education. Most visa students plan to return to their respective countries after finishing their higher education in the United States (Hilles & Sutton, 2001, p.386).

Thus it can be summarized that international ESL learners not only come to English speaking countries to learn and study ESL, but often to pursue higher education credentials. To assist international ESL students to gain the appropriate study skills needed to pursue higher education, some ESL programs for international students also teach study skills like note-taking and writing skills.
The community college is also offering intensive study skills classes specifically for international students. These classes emphasize note-taking techniques as well as different styles of classroom interaction. Students take study skills upon entering the program and are made aware of the educational differences between their native countries and the United States (Brickman & Nuzzo, 1999, p.59).

Examples of the educational differences can be as follows: program differences, educational requirements, study techniques, and classroom or teaching style differences. Thus it can be summarized that international students need to be taught study skills if their goal is to pursue further education in the English speaking country after studying ESL. To facilitate such international students some institutions have special ESL programs for academic preparation. “English for academic purposes (EAP) programs were often predicted on the belief that these required skills should inform syllabus design. The productive skills of academic speaking (e.g., leading a seminar discussion) and writing (e.g., related to reporting on research) are typical examples of skills targeted in EAP programs” (Cheng, Myles & Curtis, 2004, p.51). Therefore it can be stated that one of the needs of international ESL students is the need to learn ESL to pursue higher education either in the English speaking country where they are studying ESL or back in their native countries.

Another need of international students related to the skills for higher education is the need to increase English skills for employment and professional reasons. Through
business ESL programs international students are able to learn the English skills necessary for specific business professions.

English for Business programs are the most popular in the English as a Foreign Language world. Businesses, or individuals, require classes in negotiation, correspondence, bid and report writing, and in supervising bilingual and ESL/EFL workers. Not surprisingly, program design comes in many shapes and sizes depending upon the large variety of contexts and students served (Johns & Price-Machado, 2001, p.52).

Therefore it can be summarized that international students do have employment and professional reasons for needing the study of ESL and business English is one example of this need. ESL programs like business English or ESL fall into the category of English for specific purposes (ESP). “However, ESP continues to be even more common in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts, where an increasing number of adult students are eager to learn business English or academic English in order to pursue their careers or study in English-medium educational institutions” (Johns & Price-Machado, 2001, 43). Thus it can be summarized that one need of international ESL learners is to improve English skills to develop their professions, careers or jobs and to travel and work in many global contexts.

Continuing with the notion of improving English skills for employment, professional, or academic reasons, is the need of this group of ESL learners to take part in ESL programs as preparation for writing a test on English skills. “In addition, learning
English may help them attain a certificate or pass a university entrance examination” (Brickman & Nuzzo, 1999, p.54). The need to write and pass an English proficiency test can motivate the international ESL learners to study ESL.

Extrinsic motivation is caused by any number of outside factors, for example, the need to pass an exam, the hope of financial reward, or the possibility of future travel. Intrinsic motivation, by contrast, comes from within the individual. Thus a person might be motivated by the enjoyment of the learning process itself or by a desire to make themselves feel better (Harmer, 2001, p.51).

Motivation is important in helping ESL students succeed in improving their English skills and one motivating need is to learn ESL to write and pass a language proficiency test, such as the TOFEL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) or TOEIC (Test of English for International Communications). Thus it can be summarized that one of the needs of international ESL learners is to improve their English skills in order to write and pass an English language test.

The needs of international ESL learners can be summarized as follows: first, international ESL learners need to learn short term English and improve their English skills for return to their native countries. International learners also have the need to learn ESL for academic purposes and enhancing their educational credentials. Also related to this need, is the need for international ESL learners to learn ESL to increase their English skills for employment and professional reasons. Finally international ESL learners also have the need to study ESL to write and pass a test of English. Hence, these
needs of international ESL learners in English speaking countries are more functional by relating to specific instrumental skills rather than involving deep identity changes.

**Comparison of Immigrant ESL Learners and International ESL Learners**

The needs of both international ESL and immigrant ESL learners have been described above and now the needs of these two types of ESL learners need to be compared. Immigrant ESL learners need to learn ESL to integrate and assimilate into their new English speaking country. This requires an identity shift but they also need to learn functional ESL to take part in day to day tasks in their new society. In other words, immigrant learners need to learn survival English and English communication skills to make their new English speaking country their new home.

International students, on the other hand, come to learn ESL in an English speaking country for a short term to improve their English skills and generally return to their native country. International students come to learn ESL as well as about the culture and country they are studying ESL in. For some international ESL learners it may be a holiday with English instruction or as preparation to write an international test of English, for example the TOFEL. International learners have largely functional needs that do not reshape one’s identity. Hence these are the learner needs of both international and immigrant ESL learners that are very different among the two groups of ESL learners, requiring unique programming.

Nevertheless, these groups have overlapping needs common to both international and immigrant ESL learners. Both immigrant and international ESL learners study ESL for academic or educational purposes. Immigrant learners learn ESL to further their
educational level in their new English speaking country, whereas international ESL learners learn ESL to either pursue a higher level education program either in the English speaking country they are in or back to their native country. The other similarity between the needs of immigrant and international ESL learners is to learn ESL for employment or professional purposes. Immigrant learners need to learn ESL to learn job finding skills and English skills appropriate for employment in their new English speaking country. International learners also need to learn ESL to improve their skills for employment or to increase their professional competence in their native countries. Hence these are the similarities between the needs of immigrant ESL learners and international ESL learners.

Description of ESL Approaches and Communicative Approach

The needs of both international ESL learners and new immigrant ESL learners have been explored and discussed above, however the question remains how ESL teachers can meet these different needs. There are many different approaches used to teach ESL. The most common approach to ESL historically is using grammar. “Often referred to as the grammar-translation approach, this method emphasized learning grammar rules and translating text, a focus that carried over to the teaching of modern languages” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.18). ESL learners only learn syntax and language structure but often can only communicate in English in a limited way. This approach is very different from the communicative approach where grammar is not the focus.

Another approach to teaching ESL is the using language form and linguistics. “Called the audio-lingual approach, this method emphasized correct form and was greatly
influenced by behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.18). A third approach used to teach ESL is the cognition method. “The cognitive-code approach, on the other hand, emphasized the mental capabilities of learners. It involved learning and applying the rules of grammar. As a result, many students learned the grammar but had trouble creating the language they need to communicate” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.18). This approach is different from the communicative approach in that the communicative approach allows learners to learn to communicate in English, where as the audio-lingual and cognitive-code approaches do not focus on this.

Another approach used to teach ESL is through functional use. “The functional-notion approach emphasizes the functions of language and the various forms that can be used to fulfill functions such as apologizing, making requests and giving compliments” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.19). Similar to this approach is the task approach. “Advocates of the task-based approach believe that learners must be involved in making meaning and negotiating meaning with others. They need to use language while carrying out tasks and attend to form in the context of making meaning” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.19). Also when teaching ESL for special purposes, the content approach is used. “Content-based instruction is associated with English for special purposes and academic study. Subject matter relevant to the needs of the student is used to teach language” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.19). This approach allows the ESL teacher to focus on the content the ESL learners need to learn relevant to the special purposes they are preparing for.
Another approach used to teach ESL is through situational teaching. “The connection between language and the situations in which it is used is paramount in what is called the situational approach, while meaning and cultural appropriateness of language in specific contexts is of great importance in communicative language teaching. Both these approaches focus on communicating meaning in real or realistic contexts” (Robinson & Selman, 1996, p.19). Therefore it can be argued that the situational approach is the most similar approach to the communicative approach.

ESL teachers can use the Communicative approach to teaching ESL to meet the needs of these two different groups of ESL learners. The communicative approach is the best approach for ESL teachers to use as it meets the different needs of adult immigrant and international ESL learners and draw the best aspects of many of the foregoing approaches. In this approach students are taught to learn ESL through actual communication and drawing on their social environments to learn ESL. One definition is: “Communicative Approach: The purpose of language (and thus the goal of language teaching) is communication” (Celce-Murcia, 2001, p.9). Communicative language teaching (CLT) is another term used interchangeably for the communicative approach. “Communicative Language Teaching aims broadly to apply the theoretical perspective of the Communicative Approach by making communicative competence the goal of language teaching and by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication” (Larsen–Freeman, 2004, p.121). Hence communicative approach and communicative language teaching are similar notions. Larsen-Freeman (2000) states:
The most obvious characteristic of CLT is that almost everything that is done with a communicative intent. Students use the language a great deal through communicative activities such as games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks…

Another characteristic of CLT is the use of authentic materials. It is considered desirable to give students an opportunity to develop strategies for understanding language as it is actually used…Finally, we noted that activities in CLT are often carried out by students in small groups. Small numbers of students interacting are favored in order to maximize the time allotted to each student for communicating (p.129-130).

Communicative language teaching uses activities that allow students to practice their speaking and communication. In other words, practicing the language as it is spoken in society.

Communicative language teaching puts the learner in control of his or her language learning. “By definition, CLT puts the focus on the learner. Learner communicative needs provide a framework for elaborating program goals in terms of functional competence. This implies global, qualitative evaluation of learner achievement as apposed to quantitative assessment of discrete linguistic features” (Savignon, 2001, p.18). The communicative approach focuses the learners need to learn how to use the language, not just focusing on words and lexical structures.

“The ‘what to teach’ aspect of the Communicative approach stressed the significance of language functions…rather than focusing solely on grammar and
vocabulary. A guiding principle was to train students to use these language forms appropriately in a variety of contexts and for a variety of purposes…The ‘how to teach aspect’ of the Communicative approach is closely related to the idea that ‘language learning will take care of itself’…and that plentiful exposure to language in use and plenty of opportunities to use it are vitally important for a student’s development of knowledge and skill. Activities in CLT typically involve students in real or realistic communication, where the accuracy of the language they use is less important than successful achievement of the communicative task they are performing” (Harmer, 2001, p. 84-85).

Thus it can be argued that the communicative approach uses aspects of the other approaches, such as functions to teach ESL but also associating learning activities with real situations.

**Theory of Situated Cognition and Connection to Communicative Approach**

There are many parallels between the communicative approach in teaching ESL and the theory of situated cognition used more generally in adult education. In situated cognition the place where learning occurs is important. “In situated cognition, one cannot separate the learning process from the situation in which the learning is presented” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.241). In the theory of situational cognition adult learners can use their environments to learn. “In another words the physical and social experiences and situations in which learners find themselves and the tools they use in that experience are integral to the entire learning process” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.
Situated cognition is part of the cognitivist approach to teaching adults. “The middle ground is occupied by cognitive-constructivists and social learning practitioners, both of whom focus on the learner’s process and experiences as mediated by the social context or as filtered through various ways of processing information” (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000, p.320). Learning through problem solving is a central point to situated cognitivists. “By changing these models, or cognitive structures, the cognitivist seeks to enable increasingly effective symbolic processing and problem solving abilities—cognitivist practice would begin with a carefully structured overview, intending in this way to provide learners with adequate “anchors” for the new knowledge to follow” (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000, p.357).

The cognitivist orientation to learning in adulthood also involves considering how information is processed cognitively. “Situated somewhere between instructor-focused and learner-focused orientations, cognitivists pay greater attention than social learning theorists to the internal mental processes of learners. They also structure the content of learning activities to improve learners’ information-processing abilities to affect future learning” (Taylor, Marienau & Fiddler, 2000, p.358). Thus is can be argued from the theory of situated cognition in adult education that the environment of the learner and information processing are important in the learning of adults.

Thus, the theory of situated cognition in adult education and the communicative approach to teaching ESL to adults are similar approaches. “The outcomes of cognitive apprenticeships are twofold: (1) internalizing what has been learned so learners can do the task or solve the problem on their own, and (2) generalizing what they have learned as both a way to apply this learning to similar situations and as a starting point for further
learning” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.245). This is similar to the communicative approach in that students learn language and then practice language both in the classroom and in the English speaking community. They can apply the language learned to real situations where they can use those language structures learned. “Traditionally, we have viewed classroom instruction as a structured, deliberately sequenced process leading to predetermined goals within given time limits; and it may difficult to think of the classroom as an acquisition environment when language acquisition outside the classroom depends on internal structures and processes that we are only beginning to understand” (Leemann Guthrie, 1984, p.50). Situation cognitive theory argues that the environment of the learner affects the learner’s learning. “Foremost among these critiques is a challenge to the fundamental notion that learning is something that occurs within the individual. Rather, learning encompasses the interaction of learners and the social environments in which they function” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1999, p.242). Similarly in the communicative approach to teaching adults ESL, language is taught to learners how they will use in real English speaking situations. Thus, they develop sociocultural competence.

*Sociocultural competence* extends well beyond linguistic forms and is an interdisciplinary field of inquiry having to do with the social rules of language use. Sociocultural competence requires an understanding of the social context requires an understanding of the social context in which language is used: the roles of the participants, the information they share, and the function of the interaction. Although we have yet to provide a satisfactory description of
grammar, we are even further from an adequate description of sociocultural rules of appropriateness. And yet we use them to communicate successfully in many different contexts of situation (Savignon, 2001, p.18).

Thus it can be argued that the communicative approach to teaching ESL and the theory of situated cognition are similar and a direct connection between them both can be demonstrated.

**Communicative Approaches to Meet The Needs of ESL Learners**

The communicative approach or situated learning can be used to meet the similar as well as different needs of ESL learners. There are five components that normally comprise the communicative approach, according to Savignon (2001). They are the: 
*Language Arts* component, *Language for Purpose* component, *My Language is Me: Personal English Language Use* component, *The You Be, I’ll Be: Theater Arts* Component and *Beyond the Classroom* component.

For the common needs both these ESL populations share, various components of communicative language teaching can be applied. New immigrant and international learners have the need to learn ESL to further their education or for other educational purposes, such as credentialing or passing a test of English proficiency. Thus, the *Language Arts* component of the communicative approach can be used to meet these needs of adult ESL learners.
Language Arts includes those things that language teachers often do best. In fact, it may be all they have been taught to do. This component includes many of the exercises used in mother tongue programs to focus attention on formal accuracy. In ELT, Language Arts focuses on forms of English, including syntax, morphology, and phonology. Spelling tests, for example, are important if writing is a goal. Familiar activities such as translation, dictation, and rote memorization can be helpful in bringing attention to form (Savignon, 2001, p.20).

Thus it can be argued that using Language Arts component of the communicative approach helps adult ESL learners learn skills that are necessary academically.

Another component of the communicative approach that can be used to meet the needs of both these ESL learners is the Language for a Purpose component. New immigrants need to learn functional ESL to survive and integrate in their new English speaking community as do international students during their short term stay.

Language for a purpose, or language experience, is the second component. In contrast with language analysis, language experience is the use of English for real and immediate communicative goals. Not all learners are learning English for the same reasons. Attention to the specific communicative needs of the learners is important in the selection and sequencing of materials. Regardless of how distant or unspecific the communicative needs of the learners may be, every program with a goal of communicative competence should give attention to opportunities
for meaningful English use, opportunities to focus on meaning rather than on form (Savignon, 2001, p.20).

Thus *Language for Purpose* component can be used to meet the needs for new immigrants and international students to learn English communication skills.

Another component of the communicative approach that can be used to meet the need of immigrant learners who are adjusting their identities as part of a new country as well as the more instrumental needs of international students is the *My language is Me: Personal English Language Use* component. “*My language Is Me: Personal English Language Use*, the third component in a communicative curriculum, relates to the learner’s emerging identity in English. Learner attitude is without a doubt the single most important factor in learner success. Whether a learner’s motivations are integrative or instrumental, the development of communicative competence involves the whole learner” (Savignon, 2001, p.21). While the needs of both sets of learners are different, this component addresses both an emerging identity as an English-speaker whether for integration or functional use.

Both international and new immigrant ESL learners have the need to study English to find a job or to increase their English skills for employment or professional reasons. The *You Be, I’ll Be: Theater Arts* component of the communicative approach best addresses this need. “And on this stage we play many roles, roles for which we improvise scripts from the models we observe around us. Child, parent, sister, brother, employer, employee, doctor, or teacher—all are roles that include certain expected ways of behaving and using language” (Savignon, 2001, p.22). By doing role plays, ESL learners
can practice situations that may encounter them at their place of employment. Thus theater arts can help ESL learners meet their employment and professional purposes need to learn ESL. The final component *Beyond the Classroom* of the communicative approach can help ESL learners meet the need of finding a job or professional reasons.

*Beyond the Classroom* is the fifth and final component of a communicative curriculum. Regardless of the variety of communicative activities in the ESL/EFL classroom, their purpose remains to prepare learners to use English in the world beyond. This is the world upon which learners will depend for the maintenance and development of their communicative competence once classes are over. The classroom is but a rehearsal. Development of the *Beyond the Classroom* component in a communicative curriculum begins with discovery of learner interests and needs and of opportunities to not only respond to but, more importantly, to *develop* those interests and needs through English language use beyond the classroom itself (Savignon, 2001, p.23).

Therefore ESL learners can use what they have learned in the classroom in the real world. Thus it can be argued that the communicative approach to teaching ESL to adults can be applied to meeting the needs of both international and new immigrant adult ESL learners.

**Pedagogical Innovations**

It is evident that the communicative approach and situated cognition can be used to meet the common needs of immigrant and international ESL learners. The final
question is how the existing ESL curriculum can be modified to meet both the unique and common needs between immigrant and international adult ESL learners.

Immigrant adult learners need to learn ESL to integrate into and survive in their new English speaking country. They also need to learn functional English and basic English communication. Therefore, a recommended modification to the ESL curriculum for immigrant learners is to include topics about general information about the new country, social customs, and political processes to help prepare for possible citizenship. Functional English should be taught, such as grocery shopping, driving laws or child-rearing practices, as part of long-term survival. Also immigrant learners should also be given the opportunity to practice skills learned in the classroom by going on teacher-assisted field trips. Real situations can be the best tools to learn ESL, such as ordering food, first taught in the classroom and then augmented on a field trip to a restaurant. The other need unique to immigrant learners is learning basic communication. Immigrant ESL curriculum should include lessons on communication topics that are most relevant to immigrant ESL learners, such as greetings, asking for directions, or talking to a teacher about their children’s school progress. These ideas incorporated in the curriculum for immigrant ESL learners can help ESL teachers better meet their needs.

International students on the other hand have different needs. One of the needs that are unique to international ESL learners is the short-term nature of their stay. International learners want to be exposed to as much English as possible in the short time therefore intensive ESL programs are most appealing to international learners. They also want to explore the new culture they are visiting, therefore lessons for international students can be held at different tourist attractions, allowing for both ESL learning and
sightseeing. International learners generally have a wide range of English fluency so international students should be in the ESL classes to fit their level of fluency. While international students need to be taught reading, writing, speaking and listening, speaking is most important given that many international students may know the structure or syntax of English but have difficulty communicating in the language. Thematic communicative lessons on a variety of different topics would help students concentrate on speaking skills and improve their English communication overall. Many international ESL students study ESL to prepare to write a test of English and thus should be taught the basic fundamentals of the test. Instead of just working on practice tests, other activities that focus on the topics in the test could be taught in lessons through a communicative manner rather than rote learning. Thus these are the pedagogical innovations and modifications ESL teachers can make to the ESL curriculum to meet the common and unique needs of adult immigrant and international ESL learners.

**Conclusion**

In this paper the common and different needs between new immigrant and international adult ESL learners have been examined. New immigrants are making a new home in an English speaking community, whereas international ESL students come to an English speaking country to learn ESL over a short term and then return to their native countries. The needs of new immigrant adult learners focus on integrating and surviving in their new English speaking community. On the other hand, the needs of international learners focus on short term ESL learning focusing on education and professional development. Therefore it can be argued that new immigrant and international adult ESL learners have different needs and thus the communicative approach needs to be modified
to best suit the needs of each group. In this paper the communicative approach and its similarity to the theory of situated cognition for adult education have been analyzed. The communicative approach and situational cognition can be applied effectively to meet the different needs of new immigrant and international adult ESL learners.
References


