

# COMMUNICATIVE METHOD X GRAMMAR TRANSLATION METHOD: IMPACT ON MULTIPLE-CHOICE TEST SCORES

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## ABSTRACT

Facing the importance of English Learning and the low proficiency rates in Brazil, besides the importance of this language to high education admittance, this research aimed to understand the score difference in multiple-choice tests after students participated in lessons that approached reading and writing (Group G) in comparison to those (Group C) who were part of a lesson that balanced the 4 skills — reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Although most of the students considered highly necessary to learn English, most of them were not highly motivated to learning this language at school. The scores in the Verb Agreement Section of the test were higher in the Group G (1.56). On the other hand, in the Critical Thinking Section, the Group C (2.74) had better scores. The final scores were slightly higher (5%) for the Group G, which obtained a score of 4.17, while the Group C obtained 3.96. It is important to highlight that the score difference in this study should not be taken as significant when considering that in one of the groups the students were exposed to all 4 skills, which benefits the students more consistently.

**Keywords:** TEFL. Public Education. Grammar-Translation Method; Communicative Method.

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**MÉTODO COMUNICATIVO X MÉTODO DE GRAMÁTICA E TRADUÇÃO:  
IMPACTO EM ESCORES DE TESTES DE MÚLTIPLA ESCOLHA**

**RESUMO**

Diante da importância da aprendizagem da Língua Inglesa e os baixos níveis de proficiência no Brasil, além da importância dessa língua para a admissão no ensino superior, este estudo objetivou entender a diferença nos escores em testes de múltipla escolha após alunos participarem de aulas que abordaram as habilidades de leitura e escrita (Grupo G) em comparação àqueles (Grupo C) que fizeram parte de uma aula que balanceou as quatro habilidades — leitura, escrita, escuta, e fala. Apesar de a maioria dos estudantes considerarem aprender inglês altamente necessário, a maioria deles não estavam altamente motivados a aprender esta língua na escola. Os escores na Sessão de Concordância Verbal do teste foram mais altos no Grupo G (1.56). Por outro lado, na Sessão de Interpretação Textual, o Grupo C (2.74) obteve melhores escores. Os escores finais were levemente maiores (5%) para o Grupo G, que obteve um escore de 4.17, enquanto o Grupo C obteve 3.96. É importante ressaltar que a diferença nos escores encontrada neste estudo não deve ser entendida como significativa ao considerar-se que um dos grupos de estudantes foram expostos às 4 habilidades, o que os beneficia de forma mais sólida.

**Palavras-chave:** TEFL. Educação Pública. Método de Gramática e Tradução. Método Comunicativo.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

The more affluent in Brazil have had access to English learning for many years. However, overall English proficiency levels in Brazil are still very low, with only around 5% of Brazilians stating they have some knowledge of English. The level of knowledge of the English language amongst Brazilians reflects both the educational opportunities available and, more broadly, the provision of education in Brazil (BRITISH COUNCIL, 2014).

Statutory and the National Curricular Guidelines make the teaching of a foreign language at elementary and high school compulsory. However, teachers and experts acknowledge that English teaching - both public and private - is unable to provide students with a usable level of English. They identify similar reasons to those that cause other problems in basic education: the lack of language teaching equipment and over-filled classrooms. There are also fundamental problems with the amount of time set aside for teaching English and it is hard to find adequately qualified teachers (TEACHING THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN BRAZIL, 2011). In these conditions, English teaching is reduced to the basic rules of grammar, reading short texts and learning to pass multiple choice exams for university admittance.

Most public universities in Brazil utilize for admittance the scores of students in the High School National Exam or ENEM (In Portuguese: Exame Nacional do Ensino Médio). The ENEM is a non-compulsory, standardized Brazilian national exam, managed and operated by the Ministry of Education's National Institute for Educational Studies and Research (INEP). The English Language is part of the language, code and technologies section of the ENEM. This section is composed of 45 questions, being 5 of them designed to assess the English Language knowledge. The student, however, has the option to choose between English or Spanish as the second language in their exam.

### 1.1 THE GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD

The Traditional Approach, according to Germain (1993 apud MARTINS, 2017), also known as the grammar-translation method, historically

known as the first language teaching methodology was used when teaching classical languages such as Latin and Greek. The objectives of this method, which was popular until the beginning of the 20th century, were to transmit knowledge about a language, allowing the access to literary texts and the mastering of normative grammar. It suggested the translation and a version as base for comprehension of the studied language. Therefore, the dictionary and the grammar book were useful work instruments.

The Grammar-translation was in fact first known in the United States as the Prussian Method. It is a way of studying a language that approaches the language first through detailed analysis of its grammar rules, followed by application. Grammar is taught deductively--that is, by presentation and study of grammar rules, which are then practiced through translation exercises (RICHARDS; RODGERS, 2014).

The first important movement against the grammar-translation method happened, according to Fabiano (1999), in the 50s, when the behaviorism in psychology and the structuralism in linguistics were both popular. Linguists from that time were starting to value language in its oral form. They supported that language learning would be related to conditionate reflexes, and that mimicking, repeating, memorizing and exercising words and phrases would be effective to reach communicative skills. This view led to the origin of the audio-oral and audiovisual methods, based on automatism and associated with didactic plans such as Book 1, Book 2, etc. These methods do not require instructors truly proficient in the foreign language taught, and in consequence, are easier to be set and cheaper to maintained, for this reason being still currently popular in language schools in Brazil. However, with the popularity decline of the audio-lingual method, some programs partially returned to the grammar-translation method, adding workbooks for written exercises.

## 1.2 THE COMMUNICATIVE METHOD

According to Larsen-Freeman (1990), the primary goal of language teaching is enabling students to use the language to communicate. Communication involves using language functions as well as grammar structures. Language is used in a social context and should be appropriate to setting,

topic, and participants. Students should be given an opportunity to negotiate meaning, i.e., to try to make themselves understood. Students should be able to express their opinions and share their ideas and feelings, i.e., learn to communicate by communicating.

For Martins-Cestaro (1997 apud Nespoli, 2008) the Communicative Approach focus the production of the students once it favors this process through giving students a variety of scenarios to produce in the foreign language, helping overcoming barriers without correcting them systematically. The learning process is focused on the student, not only when it comes to content, but also when choosing techniques for the classroom.

The Communicative Approach defends the idea that the basic block of a language is the communication act, instead of the sentence. The focus turns to meaning and not the form. The communicative competence is the objective and not the memorization of rules. For this competence to exist, it is affirmed that daily situations should be recreated to students when teaching. This way they will be able to learn the grammar forms through the realization they are useful and can be used daily. On top of this, according to this approach, students should be able to develop the listening, reading, writing and speaking skills in the target language (LIMA, 2013).

For some, Communicative Language Teaching means little more than an integration of grammatical and functional teaching. Littlewood (1981) states, "One of the most characteristic features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language." For others, it means using procedures where learners work in pairs or groups employing available language resources in problem-solving tasks (RICHARDS, RODGERS, 2014).

### 1.3 RELATION BETWEEN THE LDB AND THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM PARAMETERS

The LDB (Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação Nacional) is the law that regulates education in Brazil since 1996. It is composed by 92 articles which contemplate all the aspects of education that deserve focus, such as the mandatory teaching of a Foreign Language. The LDB brings that at least one Modern Foreign Language must be added to the school curriculum, starting

in the fifth grade, being the school community responsible for choosing the language to be taught, within the possibilities of the institution.

The National Curriculum Parameters (PCN) were elaborated as a main to execute the LDB regulations. They started to be created in 2000 due to the necessity to discuss and reflect on High School Public Education.

Keeping in mind the several problems faced in the Public Education System in Brazil, the approach for grammar teaching remains as the priority when it comes to the ways these subjects are taught. According to the National Curriculum Parameters, in Brazil, even though previous legislation indicated that the teaching of a Foreign Language should have been in a practical way, not always did this happen. Factors as the short periods reserved to the study of Foreign Languages and the lack of teachers with appropriate linguistic and pedagogic training, were the responsible for the inefficient execution of those regulations. Instead of engaging students into speaking, reading and writing in a new language, the classes would assume a monotonous and repetitive aspect which demotivated teachers and students at the same time that ignored relevant topics to the students' education.

The teaching of Foreign Languages at regular schools became almost always focused on the studying of grammar structures, rule memorization and the prioritizing of the written language, in general, out of context and detached to reality.

Facing the importance of English Learning and the low proficiency rates in Brazil, besides the importance of this language to high education admittance, this research aimed to understand the score difference in multiple-choice tests after students participated in lessons that approached reading and writing in comparison to those who were part of a lesson that balanced the 4 skills — reading, writing, listening, and speaking.

## **2 METHOD**

This study was divided into three parts: first students signed a consent form and answered a questionnaire. Then, classes approaching the same topics were executed to two different groups of students (G and C). The last step was the testing of the groups through the same test to finally compare their scores.

## 2.1 PARTICIPANTS AND CONSENT FORM

The participants in this study were public school students from two cohorts in the same school grade and with approximate number of students. The research was conducted in the Guiomar Vasconcelos State School which is a middle and high school level public institution in the city of Canguaretama, RN, Brazil. The chosen groups were not and had not had any of the authors of this study as their teachers.

By accepting to participate in this study, all participants signed a consent form (Attachment A) acknowledging them about the study and asking their permission to use their answers in the tests, besides guaranteeing the confidentiality of their identities. The researchers explained the Consent Form and clarified questions prior collection of signatures.

## 2.2 QUESTIONNAIRE

Participants filled out a questionnaire (Attachment B) in which the following information was registered: name, age, sex, school grade, as well as Likert Scales on the participants' self-referred level of motivation towards the English subject and the necessity of learning English to them, besides stating if they studied or had studied English in a private institution.

## 2.3 CLASSES

Only one of the researchers in this study conducted the classes. The Group G was part of a class which focused on reading and writing. The Group C participated in a class which balanced all the 4 skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking). Both classes had as their main topic the Simple Present Tense, including verb agreement (s-ending) and its auxiliaries (do/does), in the affirmative, negative and interrogative forms. There was an activity in both lessons, using a text created by the authors of this study. The text was a short story in the Simple Present Tense.

For the Group G, the topic was presented deductively. Portuguese was the main language used for explanations and words were written on the blackboard with their respective translations, including words that

were part of the text. When the texts were handed, students of the Group G were not told which language to use during the task. After the students read the text individually, the story was read by the teacher and the vocabulary was clarified, while the Simple Present structures were pointed.

For the Group C, the topic was presented inductively. English was the main language for explanations and students read the short story in groups. Students were asked to only use English during the task. After the reading, the story was read while using flashcards to clarify meaning. Students were asked to repeat sentences aloud and stress was given to the Simple Present pronunciation features (*s*-ending) and the use of auxiliaries (*do/does*).

## 2.4 TEST

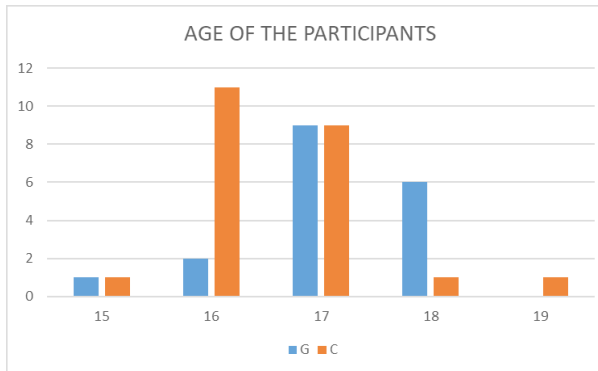
Students had 30 minutes to answer a 10-question test (Attachment C) assessing the topics discussed in class. The test was divided into two sections. Section 1 contained items related to Verb Agreement (*s*-ending, *do*, *does*) when building sentences in the affirmative, negative and interrogative forms. The Section two was composed by items which required critical thinking and demanding active reading and inferring.

## 3 RESULTS

A total of 41 students participated in this study. The Group G was composed by 18 students and the Group C by 23. There were more girls ( $G = 11$ ;  $C = 13$ ) than boys ( $G = 7$ ;  $C = 10$ ) in both groups. The age of the participants (Image 1) varied from 15 to 19 years old. In the group G, the average age was 17.1 years old, and 16.6 in the group C.



**Figure 1: Age of the participants.**



**Source:** Elaborated by the author (2018).

Only one student in the Group G referred to have studied English in a private institution, while two students in the Group C did.

**Table 1: Self-referred motivation and interest levels.**

	<i>What is your motivation level towards learning English at school?</i>			<i>How necessary is learning English nowadays?</i>		
	G	C	A* (%)	G	C	A* (%)
<i>Very low</i>	1	0	2.4	0	1	2.4
<i>Low</i>	2	5	17.1	1	4	12.2
<i>Regular</i>	15	18	80.5	3	4	17.1
<i>High</i>	0	0	0	9	8	41.5
<i>Very high</i>	0	0	0	5	6	26.8

\*A % = Average Percentage (n = 41).

**Source:** Elaborated by the author (2018).

The scores in the Verb Agreement Section of the test were higher in the Group G (1.56). The results in the Group C were 21.8% lower (1.22). In the Critical Thinking Section, the Group C (2.74) had better scores than the Group G (2.61).

**Figure 2: Test results.**



**Source:** Elaborated by the author (2018).

Each section was worth 5 points. Both groups obtained better scores in the Critical Thinking Section than in the Verb Agreement Section of the test. The final score showed a slightly higher (5%) result for the Group G, which obtained a score of 4.17 while the Group C obtained 3.96.

#### **4 CONCLUSION**

Forty-one students participated in this study. Although most of the participants considered highly necessary to learn English, most of them were not highly motivated to learning this language at school. According to Moita Lopes (1996), some of the aspect that may lead to frustrations are classes with too many students, few hours dedicated to learning a Foreign Language, lack of appropriate didactic material, and discredit towards the teaching of Foreign Languages by students, parents, and school staff.

The scores in the Verb Agreement Section of the test were higher in the Group G (1.56). This may have happened due to the use of a more prescriptive approach and the use of the students' native language when explaining content. On the other hand, in the Critical Thinking Section, the Group C (2.74) had better scores. The final scores were slightly higher (5%) for the Group G, which obtained a score of 4.17, while the Group C obtained 3.96.

The results of this study should be interpreted taking into considerations that in the Group G only reading and writing were practiced in class, while in the Group C the students had the opportunity to develop all 4 skills, which benefits the students more consistently. In addition, the students from the Group C behaved in a better way and were more engaged during class which might be related to the participation in a lesson based on a more inductive approach. The results from this study are relevant once they help to understand some differences when students are tested after being part of lessons based on different approaches. However, it would be positive to have other studies conducted with the goal of evaluating the use of methods that are unconventional to the public education scenario, for longer periods and with deeper assessment, having in mind that students should be taught a language not only to be able to read, write and succeed in reading tests, but also to communicate orally and reach some level of proficiency.

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## ATTACHMENTS

### Attachment A

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO NORTE  
ESPECIALIZAÇÃO EM ENSINO-APRENDIZAGEM DE  
INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA

Caro participante,

Você está convidado a fazer parte desta pesquisa conduzida por Bruno Jonatan de Sousa e William Felipe, alunos do curso de Pós-graduação em Ensino-Aprendizagem de Inglês como Língua Estrangeira da UFRN (Campus Natal).

Esta pesquisa tem por objetivo avaliar a desempenho de dois grupos de estudantes de escolas públicas em testes após ter aulas com no método comunicativo e no método tradução-gramática.

Este estudo segue uma metodologia quantitativa e sua contribuição será participar de aula de Língua Inglesa conduzida por um dos pesquisadores e responder um teste contendo 10 questões após a mesma.

Suas respostas e escores nos testes serão confidenciais e utilizados apenas neste estudo e suas publicações. Sua identidade também será mantida em sigilo. Sua participação neste estudo é completamente voluntária, e o declínio da mesma não trará quaisquer consequências.

### TERMO DE CONSENTIMENTO LIVRE E ESCLARECIDO

Ao assinar este termo, confirmo minha participação voluntária nesta pesquisa. Li e entendi a descrição da pesquisa acima, e confirmo que recebi informações suficientes sobre este estudo.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Nome do aluno

\_\_\_\_\_  
Assinatura do aluno

\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/2017  
Data

## Attachment B

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO NORTE  
ESPECIALIZAÇÃO EM ENSINO-APRENDIZAGEM DE  
INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA

Caro participante,

Este questionário tem por objetivo registrar informações relevantes sobre os participantes de nossa pesquisa. Ele deve ser preenchido utilizando caneta esferográfica azul ou preta. Por favor, levante sua mão e iremos até você caso tenha alguma dúvida quanto ao preenchimento.

Nome: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_/ 2017  
Idade: \_\_\_\_\_ Sexo:  Feminino  Masculino  
Turma: \_\_\_\_\_ Turno: \_\_\_\_\_

1) De acordo com a escala abaixo, como você classifica sua motivação em relação à disciplina de Língua Inglesa?

Muito baixa  Baixa  Regular  Alta  Muito alta

2) De acordo com a escala abaixo, como você classifica a necessidade de aprender inglês nos dias atuais?

Muito baixa  Baixa  Regular  Alta  Muito alta

3) Você estudou ou estuda inglês em uma instituição privada?

Não.  SIM. Se sim, qual? \_\_\_\_\_  Não recordo.

Obrigado por sua participação!

## Attachment C

UNIVERSIDADE FEDERAL DO RIO GRANDE DO NORTE  
ESPECIALIZAÇÃO EM ENSINO-APRENDIZAGEM DE  
INGLÊS COMO LÍNGUA ESTRANGEIRA

### PROVA

- 1) Marque a maneira correta de escrever: "Ela gosta de chocolate."
- a) She is like chocolate.
  - b) She like chocolate.
  - c) She likes chocolate.
  - d) She liking chocolate.
- 2) Marque a maneira correta de escrever: "Nós vamos à escola pela manhã."
- a) We goes to school in the morning.
  - b) We go to school in the morning.
  - c) We don't go to school in the morning.
  - d) We does go to school in the morning.
- 3) Marque a forma correta da seguinte pergunta: "Eles sabem o caminho para casa?"
- a) They knows the way home?
  - b) Does they know the way home?
  - c) Does they knows the way home?
  - d) Do they know the way home?
- 4) Marque a forma negativa da frase: "I sing in the shower."
- a) I sing not in the shower.
  - b) I don't sing in the shower.
  - c) I not sing in the shower.
  - d) I doesn't sing in the shower.

5) Marque a forma negativa da frase: "Pedro forgets his keys."

- a) Pedro doesn't forget his keys.
- b) Pedro doesn't forgets his keys.
- c) Pedro forgets not his keys.
- d) Pedro don't forget his keys.

João:	Hi! I want to go to the movies. Do you really have to work tonight?
Maria:	Yes, I do. Doesn't Cristian want to go?

6) De acordo com o diálogo acima, marque a alternativa correta:

- a) João quer ir ao cinema amanhã, mas tem que trabalhar.
- b) Maria quer ir ao cinema com Cristian.
- c) Maria sugeriu que o João convide o Cristian.
- d) Maria está livre, mas não quer ir ao cinema.

Laura:	Do you know the new guy? Matheus? I don't like him. He speaks too loudly.
Isabel:	I don't like him either. He always calls me Bell. Doesn't he know my name?

7) De acordo com o diálogo acima, marque a alternativa correta:

- a) Laura é nova na escola.
- b) Isabel não gosta de ser chamada de Bell.
- c) Isabel gosta de Matheus.
- d) Laura não gosta de Matheus pois ele fala muito baixo.

Sophia:	You don't eat meat, do you? I make a great meat pie.
Lorene:	I actually love meat! I don't know where you got that from.

8) De acordo com o diálogo acima, marque a alternativa correta:

- a) Sophia não come carne.
- b) Lorene não come carne.
- c) Sophia tem alergia à carne.
- d) Lorene gosta muito de carne.



Steven gets up at 6:30 am. Then, he takes a shower and has breakfast. At 7, he goes to school. Steven's parents, Andrew and Melissa, wake up before him. They make breakfast together and read the newspapers. They take Steven to school and go to work. Steven doesn't arrive home before 1 pm, when the bus drops him off in front of his house.

De acordo com o texto acima, responda:

9) Sobre Steven, podemos dizer:

- a) Steven dorme às 6:30.
- b) Steven toma café às 5.
- c) Steven chega em casa antes das 13.
- d) Steven vai para a escola às 7.

10) Sobre os pais de Steven, podemos dizer:

- a) Eles acordam antes do Steven.
- b) Eles acordam depois do Steven.
- c) Eles não tem tempo de ler o jornal.
- d) Eles pegam o ônibus para o trabalho.