



A STUDY OF THE CURRENT SCENARIO OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN BENGALI MEDIUM SCHOOLS OF WEST BENGAL: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

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ABSTRACT

In recent times the English Language Teaching (ELT) scenario in India in general and West Bengal in particular has turned towards a Communicative language teaching (CLT) framework from the traditional Grammar Translation Approach. Many applied linguists and language teachers advocated Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as one of the most effective approaches to teaching of English as second language. But the implementation of CLT in ESL contexts has proved to be very challenging. The aim of this research paper is to study the challenges in the process of implementing CLT and its possible remedies. The authors have taken up the context of West Bengal as a particular case in this research paper with a view to finding out the current scenario of communicative language teaching in West Bengal to highlight major issues and challenges with special reference to Bengali medium schools under WBBPE, WBBSE & WBBCHSE.

Keywords: CLT; ELT ; ESL; Communicative Competence; Language skills.

1. INTRODUCTION

“A language is not a subject which can be taught; It is a subject which must be learnt”

- Micheal West

Language is the means through which a child anticipates the past, comprehends the present and approaches the future. It has a vital role in child's mental, emotional, and social development. English language, through introduced in India due to colonial legacy, was adopted as second language in India. English as lingua franca of the world occupies an important role in educational scenario of India. It became compulsory for all Indian citizens to learn English as second or third language. To fulfil this aim English was introduced in initial stage to learners learning so that learners learn English along with their mother tongue and be able to communicate with the global world. Various western methods and approaches were adopted to teach English in India. But it is very sad to note that there is something wrong with teaching of English in Indian schools. According Prof.V.K Gokak, the study of English in our schools is in a chaotic state today. Pupils are taught English for about six periods a week for six years. But it has been estimated that they hardly know 1500 words, by the time they join a university (Gokak, 1964). This means that they have hardly been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period. They do not know how to use the commonest structures of English. In order to make up the gap in teaching of English methods and approaches are changing day by day. Recently the English Language Teaching (ELT) scenario in India in general and West Bengal in particular has transformed towards a Communicative language teaching (CLT) framework from the traditional grammar translation approach. Many applied linguists and language teachers advocated Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as one of the most



effective approaches to teaching of English as second language. But the implementation of CLT in ESL contexts has proved to be very challenging.

Communicative language teaching was introduced in India in 1980s as a substitute of traditional approaches which failed to reach the level of current demand of English language learners; but the problem is that Indian context was not ready to adopt CLT in its ESL classroom (Das, 2014). The tide of globalization brought a drastic change in teaching-learning situation in India around the year 2000. Socio-economic factor also played a major role in this change and is true even today. Liberalization led to the entry of many international corporate sectors in Indian business scenario which needed young personal fluent in English to communicate with the world through the emergence of MNCs, call centres, trade fares etc. Failure of traditional methods and approaches in school setting gave a space to growth of private institute and academies offering a whole range of proficiency courses in English. The internet has played a major role in creating a resource-rich environment by giving a wide range of exposure to English.

ELT in India has been affected by all contextual changes caused by the globalization which shows some positive sign of modification like introduction of CLT by CBSE in all its affiliated school, introduction of ESP in some schools in India, infusion of technology with the teaching of English in the form of Language Labs, availability of the native English Language to the Indian people with the widespread availability of cable and satellite television in India (Daisy, 2012). In spite of all these developments in English Language Teaching and popularity of CLT in many parts of the country as a comprehensive approach, there are many regions in India where English language is still facing a very precarious situation (Sur, 2013). These include mainly the north Indian states. This paper tries to explore the challenges in the process of implementing CLT and its possible remedies. The authors have taken up the context of West Bengal as a particular case to deal in this paper with a view to finding out the current scenario of communicative language teaching in West Bengal with special reference to Bengali medium schools under West Bengal Board of Primary Education, West Bengal Board of Secondary Education & West Bengal Council of Higher Secondary Education.

2. Background of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The roots of CLT can be traced back to late 1960s when the British Situational Language Teaching approach was in its heyday (Rodgers & Richards, 2001). Gaps created by traditional approaches like grammar-translation method and audio-lingual paved the way for CLT. Dell Hymes re-framed concept of language competence - language is deemed as comprised of abstract grammatical rules proposed by Noam Chomsky and advocated communicative competence in addition to linguistic competence. Hymes argues that language should not only be regarded as phenomenon composed of de-contextualized syntax and linguistic forms, but also as a social and cognitive phenomenon. Learners need to acquire communicative competence along with linguistic competence to be able to communicate effectively by knowing when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner (Hymes, 1972, p. 277). According to Canale, in order to compensate and enhance communication learners need to develop sociolinguistic competence –ability to produce language and understand it in different socio-linguistic contexts, discourse competence - the ability to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres, and strategic competence- ability to master verbal and non-verbal communication strategies (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 160).

3. Communicative Language Teaching

Many researchers advocated CLT as most suitable approach for language teaching and learning which emphasises on meaning and communication with an aim to develop learners' communicative competence. Its aim is to develop learners' ability to communicate and facilitate them to use the language learnt in real communication. Communicative competence is the major concern of this approach in teach-learning process. Communicative competence means learners ability which is not to produce correct sentences but to



produce appropriate sentence according to social context, participants, information and function of interaction. CLT has two main objectives - (a) To make communicative competence the goal of teaching and (b) To develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 155).

The Prominent Features of CLT are:

- Learner-centred.
- To learn it, do it
- It encourages individualized learning.
- Mistakes are not always mistakes.
- It emphasizes on learning communication rather than grammar.
- Its objective is the development of communicative competence and not linguistic competence.
- It encourages fluency rather than accuracy.
- Language functions are more important than language forms.

4. CLT in West Bengal

English is being taught from elementary level in west Bengal till 1982. But English was withdrawn from elementary level based on recommendation of Majumder commission of 1979. The logic behind this recommendation was that English would interfere in the way of learning mother tongue (Sau et al.,2015). The Kothari commission (1964-66) advocated teaching of English as second language at upper primary stage but was not in favor of introduction of English at elementary stage. Accordingly English was introduced as second language in schools of West Bengal class V onwards. But people of West Bengal raised their voices against this step. They are supporting introduction of English in school and they want that the teaching of English should be started from class I. In 1998 another one man committee was formed and the committee recommended that English should be introduced in second half of class II and it was implemented. But this initiative failed due to lack of adequate infrastructure, lack of required number of teachers, teacher-training, motivation and supervision. In 2004, Govt. nullified the recommendation of Mukhopadhyay committee that withdrew English from primary stage and re-introduced English from class I onwards. Interestingly English as a second language and third language is introduced in Class V/VI elsewhere and even in most parts of the country. Educationists suggested CLT as suitable and effective approach to adopt in schools to enhance the teaching – learning process.

NCERT proposed a change of focus in teaching-learning process from teacher centric to learner centric and from structural approach towards communicative approach in National Curriculum Framework 2005 (NCF). The Communicative Language Teaching Approach lays emphasis on meaning, function and learners autonomy where teachers play the role of facilitator, and is advocated in NCF as suitable learner centric approach. This approach is also considered as eclectic approach but in West Bengal it is generally known as Structural Functional Communicative Approach. Present schooling system imposes burden on learners and to remove these burden NCERT recommended some initiatives in NCF 2005. According to educationists the behind reason of this burden on learner is transfer of knowledge from teacher to learner. Teachers consider knowledge as external reality which learner cannot gain by experience. With the wave of transformation in terms of suitable methodology for teaching –learning English in ESL classroom, CLT is adopted and incorporated into curriculum for teaching English in West Bengal to give learners good learning experiences. But implementation of CLT in ESL Classroom in West Bengal faces some challenges.

4.1. Issues &Challenges:

- Text books are not designed covering all aspect of communicative approach. Activities in text book do not provide equal emphasis on development of four language skills. Text book gives much emphasis



on development of reading and writing skills but listening and speaking skills are totally avoided particularly in Bengali medium schools. There was no shade of communicative approach in text book of primary and secondary level till 2010. Activities for development of listening and speaking skills are introduced textbook in 2011. But whatever modifications brought into text book after 2010 are limited to textbook only.

- Teacher lays emphasis on development of reading and writing skills in ESL classroom. While CLT talks of giving equal emphasis to all the four skills. Because in the process of language learning development of four language skills are most important. Teachers are not concerned with the development of listening and speaking skills. Teachers are avoiding activities of listening and speaking skills by saying that these activities will not be asked in examination. They think that listening and speaking skills will develop automatically. There is no need to practice it in classroom.
- During interaction with various English language teachers in West Bengal it is observed that concept of communicative approach is not clear to many of them. Some of them labelled it as Structural-Functional-Communicative Approach, whereas structural and communicative are different approaches. Communicative approach evolved as a reaction against structural approach, aiming to fill up the gap created by other traditional approaches.
- Reducing the class size to 35-40 students is one of the main concerns of RTE 2010 but this type of classroom could not be found in schools of West Bengal particularly in rural areas. In an overcrowded class room with 80-90 students, it is very difficult for teachers to implement Communicative language teaching approach.
- Problem of effective methodology for teaching English as Second language is still haunting language classroom. Teachers are not sure about effective method to adopt. Grammar Translation Method is the most preferable method for language teaching for them. They don't want to adopt innovative techniques and various activities in classroom.
- Purpose of teaching English is not clear to teachers as well as learners. Different text and activities are covered in class but they consider it as knowledge based subject not as language (Sachdeva, 2005)
- Teachers do not motivate the students towards the teaching learning process in which they are participating. That's why students do not participate in teaching learning process actively. They don't know what they are doing and why they are doing. Lack of motivation is also a hindrance in the path of CLT.
- Most of the teachers who teach English language in rural schools are not actually trained to be successful language teachers. Language learning is a natural process. A learner learns the first language without any formal classroom, instruction and teaching but in case of second language; it needs time frame, planning, instruction and special teaching skill.
- Examination mindedness is the vital problem in scenario of English language teaching. Teachers are teaching English and students are learning but both are doing this only for the sake of examination. They do not consider it as second language which we will need in every sphere of our future life. Examination authority does not consider language skills to be tested. They set paper to test reading and writing skills but they ignore testing listening and speaking skills.
- Teachers do not have any research bend of mind. Classes are conducted in the way it used to be in ancient times. The teacher rarely gets a chance to think of his learner's difficulty, deficiency or inefficiency. Teachers should study the learners' difficulties and conduct an action research to find out the way of overcoming those difficulties, but in reality there are some teachers engage themselves in such activities.



- The NCF 2005 also talks of joyful learning. But joyful learning is completely unheard of in the ESL class in West Bengal. Teaching –learning Process in most of the schools in West Bengal is somewhat teacher centric. Neither students are getting any opportunity of actively participating in teaching learning process nor do they have any scope to show their creativity. Learners are just passive receiver of knowledge.
- Interference of parents in teachers work is great problem for language teachers. Parents want that teacher should teach their kids same way as they were taught. If any teacher wants to do some innovative activities in classroom like listening and speaking games, the parents feel as if nothing has been taught. Facing this kind of situation, teachers change their way of teaching according to parents' wish.
- There is a problem of infrastructure is everywhere in India, West Bengal is not spared from that. But existing infrastructure can be used to adopt CLT as effective method in ESL classroom. There is need of modern equipment's like recorder earphone etc. without which many listening activities and sounds and pronunciation cannot be practiced.

4.2. Remedies

- Teachers' training is the most important part of being a teacher. It should be made compulsory qualification for the recruitment of teachers. Training programme will help to develop trainee teachers' knowledge, positive attitude and teaching skills. Through the process of training they will be aware of different teaching method and approaches like CLT and learn technique in order implement these in the classroom. Pre-service training as well as in-service ELT training should be compulsory for English teachers at school level (NCFTE, 2009).
- NCF strongly advocates an integrated approach to teaching of different skills of language i.e., listening, speaking, reading and writing. Textbook should be updated according to the need and level of the students, and suitable teaching approaches and methods. Expert committee should not only design activities in textbook by giving equal emphasis on all language skills but also make provision for testing all language skills equally. So that no one can de-emphasis any language skill (NCERT, 2005).
- Teacher should be a person of quality research mind. Wherever in class room they are facing some problem; they have to investigate the reason behind it. They have to apply different approaches to solve these problems. Teachers have to learn from the children what to teach them (Kapoor, 2007)
- Purpose of teaching English should be clear to both the teachers and students. Without any clear purpose neither teachers nor students will be interested in the teaching-learning process. Teachers have to motivate the students to learn. Learner must know about the importance of English and how they can benefit if they learn the language very well. Different ways of teaching may attract them as it gives them a taste of variety in learning process.
- Class size should be reduced in the schools, especially in rural areas. So that teachers can apply various suitable approaches and methods in classroom to make the teaching-learning process effective.
- Education is not expenditure; it is an investment. Teaching-learning materials should be more in quantity and variation. Audio visual electronic gadgets, computers, internet should be among them.
- Teachers have to create environment of language acquisition in classroom. So that learners can pick the language same way as first language. Learner should be given exposure to creativity through world experience (Tagore).
- Students should be encouraged to listen to English news on TV or radio.

5. Conclusion



The author has analysed challenges which are lingering in the way of adopting CLT as suitable approach in ESL classroom of West Bengal and has also tried to provide some remedies to these challenges. According to analysis, success of CLT depends on many factors which are analysed in this paper. But all the factors cannot be considered as an excuse to adopt CLT as a suitable approach in ESL classroom when it comes to learning English as second language. Considering English as global language in today's context, there is a strong need to create conducive learning environment, where learners can learn language at their own pace of learning to achieve certain specific needs. In Indian educational scenario teacher centred method is a predominant feature. Hence, no marked change in behaviour is perceived with respect to the knowledge of the learner, though English has been introduced at the Class I level. In this context John Mason, principal of Calcutta's St. James' school, for one, is of the opinion that "four or even six years of learning English do not provide sufficient grounding for switching over from Bengali medium to English medium instruction at the college level"(India today, 2013). If the Communicative Approach is used in the English class, we shall be able to meet our objectives easily. This study has just ignited a spark as a preliminary and descriptive research. There is a burning need for large scale research that will provide us a more concrete picture, including the views of other stakeholders, such as administrators and curriculum developers.

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