



THE EFFICACY OF CLT IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOMS OF THE RURAL SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in the English language classrooms of the rural secondary schools in Bangladesh. It also examined the attitudes of the EFL teachers towards CLT as a method to teach English in rural schools in Bangladesh. Using semi-structured interviews with the EFL teachers of a rural school in Bangladesh, this study determined whether CLT is appropriately and effectively applied in the English language classrooms of the rural schools situated in the extreme interior in Bangladesh. The findings of the study showed that CLT was not successful for teaching English in rural schools and revealed a number of significant reasons for its failure. The attitudes and opinion of the EFL teachers indicated that rethinking the suitability of CLT for English language teaching in rural schools was very crucial for the government, the education boards and the Ministry of Education. The researcher believed that the information drawn from this research would provide supplementary data for all who are responsible for promoting English language education through CLT in Bangladesh.

Keywords: CLT in Bangladesh, CLT in rural schools, implementation of CLT, rural EFL teachers.

Introduction

In the early of the twentieth century, the importance of English Language Teaching (ELT) and learning in Bangladesh got more force and gusto. That time, the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) proposed new ELT curriculum and set the aim and objectives of teaching and learning English. Their prime goal was to prepare learners as communicatively competent so that when they finish academic education they can compete in the modern era of business, technology and science where English is a dominant language and a pre-requisite. The NCTB chose CLT to achieve the aim and objectives of learning English because CLT is based on developing learners' communicative skills as well as linguistic skills. According to the principles of CLT approach, the NCTB introduced textbooks, materials, techniques and other resources for teaching English at secondary and higher secondary levels. It is now a decade that CLT schools and colleges have tried this method in their English language teaching classes. However, investigations and research reports show that CLT method has not been effective in all cases of English language teaching for various reasons. As a result, the education boards and the ministry of education have been trying to overcome the challenges to implement CLT in classrooms. They have taken measures all through these years such as launching teacher training workshops and seminars on CLT and changing the content and tasks of the textbooks etc. (Hamid and Baldauf 2008; Rahman and Karim 2015)

The number of investigations on the effectiveness of CLT in English language classrooms is huge. Many EFL teachers, ELT specialists and educators have tried to report on the application of CLT in classrooms



and brought very significant issues on it that helped immensely helped the education boards and ministry to take further steps for productive English language classrooms. These researches were done mostly in urban and semi-urban schools and colleges. However, there was no focus on the schools and colleges situated in the extreme interior of Bangladesh. Although the people in these interior and rural places are socio-economically poor they can send their children to the schools because the students in these schools get government allowance for secondary education. In such schools, whether teaching and learning English is important, how English language is taught and learnt, whether CLT is applied there are very important prompts for research.

Therefore, the present study examined the recent trends of English language teaching through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in one of a rural secondary schools in Bangladesh. The researcher approached the research with the following questions:

1. Is CLT a success or a failure for English language teaching in the rural schools?
2. If CLT is a success there, what are the trends that made it so? If CLT is a failure, what are the factors that have caused the failure?
3. What are the EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT as a language teaching method for rural schools?

The researcher conducted this investigation to find answer of these questions. The findings reveals significant issues regarding the dynamics between the what is expected in the curriculum and what really happens in real teaching and learning of English through CLT. This will provide vital data for the ministry of education, curriculum planners, education boards, and other people concerned with promoting ELT through applying CLT in classrooms.

The literature

CLT is commonly defined as an approach of teaching a second or a foreign language, the aim of which is primarily to achieve communicative competence for real life communication. There are other secondary competence that are also important: grammatical competence, discourse and strategic competence and sociolinguistic competence. So, it not only focuses on the practical application of language but it also focuses on the relation between language and its accuracy, strategies for speaking in different situations and people and the dynamics between language and society. This approach appeared in the 1970s as a breakthrough in foreign and second language teaching. Soon afterwards it replaced audiolingual method which only focused on oral competence by extensive oral drilling, and the Grammar-Translation method that focuses on the acquiring of grammatical rules of the language. GT method was very popular worldwide but CLT replaced it surprisingly within a very short time. Since its inception many EFL and ESL countries started adopting this method in EFL and ESL contexts. Till now it is considered an effective method and is applied in many countries such as South Asian countries like India, Bangladesh Nepal.

CLT is grounded in some principles. It presents language as both oral and written medium of communication in the real life setting. It claims that learning a language is also learning the culture, the social norms and behaviour, the linguistic components such as grammar and language skills: reading writing, listening and speaking. It states that to learn a language learners must be involved in communicative activities that represent real life situations and discourses. Fluency should be more than accuracy. Errors in language learning process is accepted however should be as less as possible in the advance level. This approach suggests learners to use the language in and out of the classroom. Learning is conducive that is it is a learner-oriented learning approach where the learners speak and do most of the language task and the teacher performs the role of a monitor, a leader, a facilitator and so on (Richards and Rodgers 1986).

The core idea of CLT is communicative competence. It refers to the ability to use the knowledge of language in real life situations to negotiate meaning to other people. It takes into account not only the linguistic meaning but the social and contextual meaning as well. It focuses on the ability to have strategies of discourses in different contexts, the ability to produce contextual language and the ability to pass as well as to



receive the meaning of the language (Hymes 1972). Hymes (1972) argued that learning a language is not only learning the grammatical components, rather it is learning the social, cultural and situational factors that create meaning in the language. A learner who is able to speak a language in varying social and cultural contexts. Therefore, learning a language is not just learning the grammar, rather it is learning to use the language appropriately in different contexts.

In the context of Bangladesh the CLT approach for teaching English as a foreign language is always the much talked over issue. Most researchers (Ahmed 2014; Ansarey 2012; Shurovi, 2014) reported that in Bangladeshi education institutions it is difficult to apply this method because of some problems and challenges related to the teaching system, administration, classroom infrastructure etc. (Barman, Sultana and Basu 2006). The problems can be noted briefly here: low language proficiency of the English language teachers, absence or lack of training for the teachers, social, cultural factors, and classroom limitations, administrative and economic limitations and so on.

These are truly practical problems of applying CLT in the language classrooms of Bangladesh. However, these might not be the same for rural schools which have not been experimented so far. Hence, the researcher of this present study took an attempt to examine CLT in English language teaching in rural schools.

Methodology

The Participants: This study interviewed 5 EFL teachers at a school named 'Balahar High School' situated in the Ghoraghat Thana in the Dinajpur district in Bangladesh. This school was chosen because the researcher studied here and he was much familiar with the school authority. The teachers were chosen considering two important issues: their teaching experience in the school, their knowledge on language teaching. The teachers are aged between 30-35. They speak Bangla as their first language and they are teaching English as a foreign language. Two of them have 10 years of teaching experience in that school and the rest three 6 years of experience. They studied English literature in the local colleges under National University. Two of them have Bachelor degrees in English and the rest three have Master's degree in English literature. They are economically quite solvent and socially belong to the middle class group in the rural context. They have much respect in the area as English language teachers and have good image for being the teachers of English. These teachers were given pseudonyms to sustain anonymity and confidentiality. The pseudonyms are: Nasir, Shihab, Saifullah, Arefin, Jasim.

Data collection: The study used semi-structured interview method to get original views of the participants. This interview method is effective in generating open and free responses from the participants (Seligar and Shohamy, 2003). Before the interview, the researcher met the Head of the school and took his permission to conduct the interviews with the teachers. The Head of the school assisted the researcher immensely in this procedure as he was a familiar person of the researcher and knows him personally. He called the teachers and introduced them to the researcher and requested them to cooperate him for the interviews. Then, the researchers talked to them and took their schedule for the interviews. Before the interviews the researcher prepared the interview questions according to the aim and objectives of the research. Then according to the schedule he took interview of the teachers. It took him 5 days to complete the interviews because each teacher was interviewed on different days in the school premises.

Data analysis: The interview data are transcribed and translated manually in English. Then, the data are analysed using qualitative content analysis approach (Randolph, 2007). At first, the data are coded and then categorized and sub-categorized into major themes. Then, these themes were analysed. The following are the major themes:

- Success or failure of CLT in the last decade in rural schools: This issue looks at how effective has the CLT approach been in teaching English in the rural schools in a decade



- Problems and challenges behind implementing CLT in the rural schools: this includes the factors that hinder effective application of CLT in English language teaching in the classrooms
- Attitudes and perspectives towards CLT for classroom language teaching: this explains the EFL teacher's attitudes towards CLT as a language teaching method and notes their suggestions on how they can overcome the problems and apply CLT perfectly in their classes.

Results

Success and failure of CLT in rural secondary schools: To evaluate the success and failure, the researcher set some criteria according to the principles of CLT and the objectives of the NCTB for English language education at secondary level. The first important criteria was communicative competence. The teachers were asked about whether learners achieved communicative competence in English at the end of the secondary school. They answered that although the textbook was designed to develop all the four language skills: reading, writing, listening and speaking, the students here only developed some of reading and writing skills. They explained that in language classes they taught some reading passages and showed the reading strategies to answer the questions from the passage. Regarding writing skills, the teachers provided some paragraphs and essays and asked the students to memorise them for examinations. Although the examination question items are designed for free-handed and creative writing, the teachers seldom practice free writing in classes. Other two skills, speaking and listening, are never practiced in the class.

Next important criteria was grammatical competence. The teachers claimed that the students developed quite good knowledge about the rules of the grammar. They said that they taught each rule by explaining them with an example sentence. However, they did not teach the rules through activities and real life examples.

Finally, all the teachers admitted that they did not apply CLT fully in their English language classes over the years. They said that if the method was not applied practically then its success and failure could not be measured. They added that personally they tried to follow the communicative activities and tasks of the textbook in their classes, but they could not make it a complete success. They noted that since the beginning of their teaching in this school, they did not see any initiatives taken to improve the situation. Some of their comments are quoted below:

... How can you measure its success and failure? We have not tried it in our classes partially or fully. (Saifullah)

...We do not have any institutional or governmental support to apply this method wholly in the classrooms. (Arefin)

These responses of the teachers indicated the objectives of the NCTB behind using CLT for English language learning were not achieved. When the students finish their secondary schooling, they only developed some knowledge and skills on reading comprehension. However, they did not develop free and creative writing skills, fluency and accuracy in speaking and understanding skills in listening. The method CLT was not applied fully in their language classrooms in that school. The method was not in practice because there was no instruction or emphasis on applying the method from the authority. As a result there is no criteria to assess an overall success or failure. However, it can be claimed that when the EFL teachers individually try to apply the CLT approach, they fail to make the class effective. In that sense, CLT is a failure in their classes.

Problems and Challenges to apply CLT in the English language classrooms:

The participant teachers were asked the reasons behind their failure to implement CLT in their classes appropriately.

The first important reason was lack of awareness and motivation for English language education. The teachers explained that the school authority were not very much progressive in thinking about English language teaching. They were not aware that the language teaching methods and techniques were always



changing and our NCTB was updating the teaching principles and adopting textbooks and materials. They were concerned with the results of the examinations. If the pass rate in English was high then they think language teaching was going on absolutely fine. The teachers added that the students were not motivated to learn English because nobody developed their idea about the importance of English in their life. What the students believed was that they had to learn English only to pass the examinations and get promotion to the next class. This was related to the social-economic condition of the rural areas. Most of the students belong to the poor or lower middle class group of the area. These group had very less exposure to the city life and to the modern world of language, science and technology. They did have any idea that English is a very important requirement for employment, higher education, and so on. What the parents advice their children was that they should know English to pass examinations. In addition, the teachers also did not explain the practical reasons for learning English. All these created a vacuum in their minds and they learnt English as an obligation for promotion to other classes not as a vital need for their life.

The second reason was the classroom infrastructure. The teachers said that they could not arrange pair work and group work activities because they always had a challenge of managing sixty to seventy students in their classes. In their school the classrooms were very big that could accommodate around eighty students at a time.

...I have seen that the textbook suggests many pair work and group work activities on everyday language use, but we just cannot follow them because it is very difficult to arrange the large classes into groups and ask them to do group works. (Arefin)

...We got only a table, a chair, a board on the wall and marker to write on that board, and the textbook. They did not have any computer or tape recorder facilities to use audio and video in classes. (Shihab)

The third reason was the insufficient duration of classes. The teachers deemed it important to either increase their class timing or decrease the number of students in each class. They explained how 45 minutes were not enough for a sixty students' classroom. They said only 20-25 minutes were actually used for teaching the lesson and the rest of the time was spent for roll calling, explaining instruction etc. They raised the question that how much a teacher could teach in 20 minutes to a class of 60 students.

The fourth reason revealed that CLT was not in practice because the textbook was not followed properly. The teacher informed that they had to skip the textbook tasks and activities such as role play, drillings, drama, presentations, in classrooms. The students were also reluctant to do these activities because they are not part of the examination questions.

The last reason was the absence of teacher development programmes. The teachers regretted that in their teaching career in that school they had never had any training on teaching in general and on teaching English through CLT in particular.

Attitudes and perspectives towards CLT as a method for English language teaching in rural schools: All the teachers expressed positive attitudes towards CLT. Although they had very little idea about the principles of CLT, techniques and benefits, they believed that it would be helpful for the students. They predicted that if we had taught in this method our students would be fluent speakers of English. Students would also score good results in examinations. They added that this method would encourage students to learn English and this would lessen the failure rate in English language examinations. Some of their comments are as follows:

..CLT is a very good method. It recognized worldwide. It is very helpful for developing students speaking skills. (Jasim)

.....If we can teach English through CLT our student will be fluent speakers of English and this will give them many opportunities for higher education and employment. (Arefin)



The teachers also provided some suggestions regarding improving the ELT situation in the rural schools. They recommended that the government and private organizations could raise awareness raising programmes or workshops in the rural areas. This would develop a general sense of the importance of learning English. The rural people would be then inspire their children to focus more on learning English. This would also urge the authority of the schools to arrange everything for productive English language classes. They added that most of the rural schools direly need standard classroom infrastructure. The teachers said the classroom size should be limited to thirty to fourth students. The class should be well-equipped with required instruments such as computer, tape recorders, ventilation, and air circulation. The teachers should be provided teaching materials that can make the lesson easy for the students.

Conclusion

CLT has always been regarded a very effective language teaching method. Therefore, the researcher investigated its effectiveness in the rural secondary schools in Bangladesh. The rural areas are socio-economically poor and the schools there do not get enough attention of the authority for effective language teaching. As a result, the schools do not meet the requirements that a classroom applying CLT method needs. They do not provide the kind of resources, materials, equipment and teacher training that are highly essential. As a result, CLT method remains vague in the minds of the teachers and it remains absent in the classroom language teaching.

From the interview with the teachers, it is found that a number of factors are responsible for that: inappropriate classroom setting, inadequate time for language classes, ignorance towards textbook activities, and absence of teacher development programmes. In such a situation, it is very crucial to take initiatives to support the rural schools with all they need for applying CLT in their language teaching classes. The schools should be provided with enough fund to break the classrooms into smaller units, to arrange equipment for each language class, to introduce language labs for listening and speaking activities, to use various audio video materials, to use printed materials and supporting handout of the textbook, to arrange teachers training. The most important thing in this regard is some willingness and initiatives by both the school authority and the administration. They need to make appeal to the concerned authority to help them apply the method and promote successful English language learners who will be fluent speakers and efficient writers in English by the time they finish secondary education. In addition, an awareness about how good a method CLT is and why and how teachers should apply this method should be raised in the school teachers. All should focus on the aims and principles of English language teaching.

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