

TESTING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) THROUGH ENGLISH FOR TODAY (EFT) IN BANGLADESH: CHALLENGES FACED BY TERTIARY STUDENTS INITIALLY

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ABSTRACT

The idea of using language as a tool of communication is the main principle of the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. English for today (EFT) as a textbook was designed to develop the overall English language competence at a higher secondary level. This paper aims at justifying the suitability of EFT for implementing communicative language teaching in Bangladesh. This study shows English for today is not effective for creating communicative competence among its learners. Moreover, the tertiary students initially face challenges while enrolling in undergraduate programs under the medium of instruction is English. Data have been collected through classroom observation, interviews with teachers, students, and experts. Structured questionnaires for students, teachers, and experts have been used as tools for data collection. Finally, the paper concludes that revised abbreviations may be suitably adaptable to impose a communicative language teaching approach by overcoming the challenges in the large classrooms in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Grammar-translation Method (GTM), English for Today (EFT), Four Language Skills, Tertiary Students, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Since the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, there have been many policy changes regarding the teaching and learning of English. The English textbooks also underwent a lot of changes and revisions. The existing English for Today (EFT) was designed and introduced as a textbook among the students of higher secondary level in 2001 to introduce Communicative language teaching (CLT) replacing the earlier method known as Grammar Translation Method (GTM). At first, CLT was introduced in 1997 in-class Seven, in 1998 in-class Eight, in 1999 in class nine, and in 2001 at Higher Secondary level. Despite all these changes, no remarkable improvement has been found in the overall English competence of students in Bangladesh. According to the preface, this book is based on the principle of learning a language by practicing it. This practice covers four skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing to facilitate students to use English appropriately for practical purposes in different situations. But in reality, only two skills- reading and writing are evaluated with the other two skills not tested in the final examination. This leads to neglecting the development of listening and speaking skills. Every lesson of each unit of the textbook contains one or two passages that do not sometimes meet the purpose of the students' learning. Some of the units contain backdated and irrelevant content in the passage. As a result, when the learners of higher secondary level passed and enrolled in an English based undergraduate program, they face failing in communicative competence initially. Thus the CLT cannot justify the proper communication buildup strategy from the root level.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In 1972, Hymes coined the term communicative competence and emphasized not only the knowledge of the language but also the ability how to use the language in communication to contrast a communicative view of language.

In 1981 Littlewood stated CLT is that it advocates going beyond teaching grammatical rules of the target language and recommended that by using the target language in a meaningful way, learners will develop communicative competence.

In 1986, Richards and Rodgers agreed with Hymes's law and figured out CLT is the modification of the British language teaching convention dating from the late 1960s. They emphasized the basic structures in meaningful situation-based activities in the CLT approach. In 2000, Larsen- Freeman said the communicative approach in language learning and teaching considers that the primary focus of language learning is to build up communicative competence and to be able to use the language appropriately in a given social context.

In 2006, Richards defined Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a set of principles about the objectives of language teaching, the types of classroom activities that effectively promote learning, and the responsibility of teachers and learners in the classroom. But in 2007 Savignon argued CLT as a teaching method rather, CLT is an approach that understands the language to be inseparable from individual identity and social behavior. But in 2014 Shurovi and in 2015 Rahman and Karim agree the goal of CLT is improving learners' communicative competence. Later in 2019, Ahmed added the conversation capability should be ensured by enduring the efficiency of self-driven exercise for students.

In 1997, NCTB guidelines uphold in the secondary and higher secondary level, public examinations in Bangladesh should test English language skills rather than students' ability to memorize and copy without understanding matching with the principle of the CLT approach.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main objective of the study is to explore how far the book English for today for classes XI-XII is suitable for creating communicative competence among its learners. To achieve this objective, the study determines the following specific objectives-teachers' evaluation of the textbook, teaching methods-techniques in the classroom by teachers, the system of education prevailing in the country, and tools used by the teachers and students in the classroom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Multiple triangulation approaches that include classroom observation, interviews, and questionnaires have been followed to generate data to answer the research questions. This study has involved subjects of 3 categories: experts knowing syllabus design and evaluation, teachers teaching EFT at the higher secondary level and Students reading this book as their textbook. All the subjects have been interviewed with 3 different structured questionnaires- questionnaires for experts, questionnaires for teachers, and questionnaires for students. Subjected are from both urban and rural areas of Bangladeshi living in Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, Rajshahi, and Sylhet. The data have been collected from higher secondary classes that follow the national curriculum. The target group of this study was the students of classes XI-XII, teachers, and experts of different colleges and universities. The participants are 30 teachers from five colleges, 50 students from each college in five separate districts, and 5 experts from three universities in Dhaka and Chittagong. The collected data have been analyzed by simple count and percentage and shown in the form of tables according to the nature of the information.

DISCUSSION

Application of CLT through EFT in Bangladesh

The textbook EFT for higher secondary classes prescribed by the NCTM was designed focused focusing on the communicative functions of language. The syllabus based on the principles of the CLT was designed to serve the purpose of making the learners competent in both receptive and gives importance to functional aspects of language learning. The textbook aims at providing ample opportunities for learners to use English for a variety of purposes in different situations. Some of the lessons of every unit of this book contain a range of tasks and an activity framed to enable learners to practice four basic skills both individually and in pairs or groups but the scenario throughout the country regarding the implementation of these communicative functions of language is sorrowful. The reality is that in classroom activities life pair work, group work, role play, etc for creating meaningful communication. Moreover, teachers do not use

Target language as a medium of communication in the classroom and they also never encourage the learners to speak in the target language. The untrained teachers of Bangladesh do not have a clear idea about the CLT approach. They simply read out the passages of the lessons and translate them into Bangla. They try to make the students understand everything in Bangla avoiding the target language. Besides, the textbook lacks proper exercises that can help learners for meaningful communication in an interactive way. The textbook prescribes various classroom activities at the end of some lessons to develop learners four basic skills- listening, speaking, reading, and writing but practically teachers of this country emphasize reading and writing skills

ignoring the other two major skills which are vitally essential for meaningful communication. On the other hand, many educational institutions do not have the requisite number of well-trained teachers and so they have to manage a very large classroom where class activities suggested by CLT are impossible. Besides, educational institutions can do not provide enough logistic support to motivate them and make their language learning interesting. The large size of the classroom, lack of well-trained teachers, lack of logistic support, lack of motivation among the learners, faulty examination system, poor infrastructure, etc hurdle to the success of the CLT approach in achieving communicative competence among the learners of higher secondary level in Bangladesh.

Assessment of Experts' View

From the table 1, of the five experts, two say the book EFT for classes XI-XII is written on CLT pattern. The other two opine that the book maintains CLT. The rest one views the book is written partly in CLT pattern. Of the five experts, three think the book is not enough to create communicative competence among its learners and the rest are positive in view. All the experts believe that without listening and speaking skills, the book cannot create communicative competence. So they suggest the inclusion of these skills. Three experts opine that students do not feel interested in reading this book and rest one says they do and another expert partially agrees on this point. As a weakness of the book, they mention the exclusion of listening skills and literary pieces. They, therefore, suggest their inclusion and exclusion of irrelevant and unnecessary lesson contents.

Table 1. Experts' view from experts as respondents

1.	Did EFT write in CLT pattern?	Yes: 2	No: 2	Partially: 1
2.	In the textbook effective for creating communicative competence?	Yes: 2	No: 3	
3.	Listening and speaking skills should be included in EFT?	Yes: 5	No: 0	
4.	Is the textbook effective without evaluating listening and speaking skills in the final exam?	Yes: 0	No: 5	
5	Are students interested in reading the textbook?	Yes: 1	No: 3	Partially: 1
6	The weakness of the book	Ignoring listening speaking skills, exclusion of literary pieces, introducing backdated, irrelevant, and uninteresting lessons, the gap between the textbook contents and the test contents.		
7	Suggestions for standardizing the book	Reducing the book in size and content, the inclusion of literary pieces, having language materials with exercises, exclusion of irrelevant, unnecessary, and uninteresting lessons		
8	Strength of the book	Having some materials relevant to present globalized situation, life, culture, education, etc.		

Source: Survey Report

Assessment of Teachers' View

From the table 2, of the teachers interviewed, 37% have an additional degree and 63% do not. 37% of teachers have received training on how to teach English following CLT, and the rest 63% do not have. In the classroom, 3% use English always, 7% sometimes, 80% most of the time, 5% seldom, and 5% never. 95% of teachers speak more than students do in the class. 63% of teachers let their students do pair/group work and the rest 37% do not. They generally use a textbook, grammar book, board, chalk, duster, and marker. 56% of teachers say students do not feel interested to read this book and the rest say they (students) do. 76% of teachers feel interested to teach books and 24% do not. 24 % of teachers do not let their students relate their personal experience and 76% do. 73% of teachers opine that the book is not enough to create communicative competence among its learners and the rest 27% think it to be enough. To comment on the strength of the book, the teachers say that it is written on the communicative method. It teaches students how to write letters, reports, and paragraphs. It is good for pair/group work. It has some lessons on ideas related to culture, environment, life, etc. To comment on the weakness, the teachers say the book excludes literary pieces. It ignored listening and speaking skills. So, it is an incomplete book which should include listening and speaking skills to the question of rearrangement to be excluded. Lessons are to be selected to interest the students.

Table 2. Teachers' view from teachers as respondents

1	Having any additional degrees in language teaching?	Yes: 37%	No: 63%			
2	Receiving training on how to teach English?	Yes: 37%	No: 63%			
3	Making students participate in pair work or group work?	Yes: 63%	No: 37%			
4	Is EFT effective in creating communicative competence?	Yes: 27%	No: 73%			
5	Are teachers interested in teaching the book?	Yes: 76%	No: 24%			
6	Teachers' using English in the classroom	Always: 3%	Often: 80%	Sometimes: 7%	Seldom: 5%	Never: 5%
7	Strength of the book	Written on the communicative approach, teaching culture, how to write reports, letters, paragraphs, etc. some lesions on an idea related to life, culture, and environments.				
8	the weakness of the book	Excludes literary pieces, ignores listening and speaking skills, contents fail to satisfy learners' needs. Lengthy and boring text lacking good materials, having impractical passages without effective exercises for students' practice.				
9	Suggestions to improve the textbook	Listening and speaking skills to be evaluated, question item rearrangement to be excluded, lessons to be selected based on students' need and interest, dialogues for the real-life situation to be included, irrelevant and unnecessary passages to be excluded, and effective exercises to be introduced after every lesson for students' practice.				

Source: Survey Report

Assessment from Students View

From table 3, of the 50 students interviewed, only 3% speak English always, 5% most of the time and 7% sometimes, 5% seldom and 80% never. 3% of students always participate in pair work or group work, 10% usually, 7% sometimes and 80% never. Again 85% of students get never interactive classes, 5% always get and 10% sometimes get. 60% of the student feel interested to read the book and the rest do not. 50% of students are satisfied with the book and the rest 50% are not satisfied. 75% of students say that the book is not enough to create communicative competence and 25% say it is enough. To comment on the weakness of the book, the students say the book does not have literary pieces. Grammar is ignored in it. The lessons presented in it are boring. The book does not have the material needed for communication. So, it is not a standard book for class XI-XII. To comment on the strength of the book, the students say the book gives its readers cultural information. It follows communicative methods. It reflects their culture. It also reflects a global concern. It gives ideas about gender discrimination, world heritage sites, and some famous personalities home and abroad. Some students suggest the inclusion of good content, authentic materials, and effective exercises according to their needs and interests for developing their speaking and listening skills.

Table 3. Students view from students as respondents

1	Using English in the classroom	Always: 3%	Most of the time: 5%	Sometimes: 7%	Seldom: 5%	Never: 5%
2	Students engaged in pair work, group work, or discussion:	Always: 3%	Usually 10%	Sometimes: 7%	Never: 80%	
3	Having interactive classes	Always: 5%	Sometimes: 10%	Never: 85%		
4	Students interested in reading the textbook	Yes: 60%	No: 40%			
5	Book effective enough to help learners communicate in English	Yes: 30%	No: 70%			
6	Strength of the book	Providing cultural information, following communicative methods, having good vocabularies, reflecting our culture, global concern, ideas about various aspects, etc.				
8	the weakness of the book	Having no literary piece, ignoring grammar, boring lessons not effective for communication, in many lessons difficult language.				
9	Language activities are done in the classroom	Reading the textual passage, translating the passage into Bangla, practicing grammatical rules, vocabulary, various question items, and free handwriting.				
10	Suggestions to improve the textbook	The inclusion of literary pieces by native writers, listening and speaking skills to be evaluated, rearrangement to be excluded, question patterns to be changed, selection of good contents according to learners' needs and interests, having topics on a real-life situation.				

Source: Survey Report

Limitations of tertiary students in Bangladeshi Context

In Bangladesh, English is taught from grade one to grade twelve as a compulsory subject. However, many students in Bangladesh cannot develop the ability to use English appropriately in real-life communication even after completing twelve years of education. After the Higher secondary level, the vast size of the student gets admitted in the undergraduate programs taught in English. But they lack communicative competencies which were the main concern of the CLT approach. Fifteen years have passed since CLT was introduced in Bangladesh, and still many students in Bangladesh do not have the expected level of communicative competence in English. Therefore, it is important to look into the factors that hinder the successful implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. Based on the previous research, shows that large class sizes, mismatches between curriculum and assessment, cultural inappropriateness, lack of training, and poor socioeconomic conditions are the major challenges to implementing CLT in Bangladesh. Furthermore, teachers' evaluation, teaching methods, and techniques, the system of education, and tools used for teaching and learning have been focused on this study.

FINDINGS

The textbook EFT for higher secondary classes proves itself a failure to meet the objectives of the CLT approach. It was found to be unsuitable and inadaptable for the students in the Bangladeshi context. The large size of the classroom, lack of well-trained teachers, lack of logistic support from the government and institutions, lack of motivation among the learners, faulty examination system, poor infrastructure, and learning atmosphere, the textbook without good contents and curriculum, etc. altogether hurdle the suitability and adaptability of the textbook in applying CLT to achieve communicative competence among the learners of higher secondary level of Bangladesh.

RECOMMENDATION

In the Context of CLT

Though CLT has been used for many years in Bangladesh for teaching and learning the English language, it still has not been adequately used to develop critical thinking. CLT is based on learning by doing approach and focuses on participatory processes where every student can get equal opportunity and learn accordingly even in a classroom with a large number of students. However, CLT is only exercised to get fluency in communication. The data of this study support this. Students were found to be doing better in written skills comparing oral skills. However, functional communicative competence in English in itself is not enough to fulfill the aspiration of preparing Bangladeshi students to become global citizens. Our students need not only improved communication strategies but also strategies to examine and critique received ideas to live and negotiate one's position in terms of international influences and to understand, and balance, power status in this age of internationalism. CLT could be utilized using appropriate themes in classrooms to facilitate students thinking about others and evaluating positions in this world. So my suggestion is that our Bangladesh curriculum needs a mix of critical literary topics in the textbooks, use of student responsive pedagogy, and a positive attitudinal change towards learning English as a language. Such change could extend language learning into developing critical awareness about global needs, possibilities, and limitations.

In the Context of EFT

To get the expected outcomes from the communicative language teaching approach, the following suggestions are proposed for EFT. First of all, listening and speaking skills ignored in EFT are to be included. The book must be taught and read as suggested in it. Instructors are to be trained to teach the book. The size of the class must be smaller. It should consist of 25-30 students to ensure their active and equal participation in classroom activities. Therefore, English teachers have to be properly trained to teach the English language according to the communicative language teaching approach. However, if the examination system is not properly taken care of to prevent the students from memorization, no measure will work for the improvement of the English language skills of the movement.

Finally, for implementing all these measures, proper coordination is needed among all the factors influencing English education in Bangladesh. The realization that brought about the changes in the national curriculum by introducing compulsory English for all levels of education will go in vain without a concerted effort in the total procedure of policy-making to make the policies successful and sustainable.

CONCLUSION

The textbook EFT for higher secondary level, to a great extent, fails to create communicative competence among its learners making them able to communicate with others in different situations. Although the textbook EFT is designed on the principles of CLT, the lack of proper coordination among the factors of the CLT approach has brought about its failure in Bangladesh. These discrepancies among the factors are so-called teaching methods (GTM), faulty examination systems, untrained teachers, unusually large classrooms, lack of proper learning atmosphere, lack of logistic supports, de-motivated students, etc. If the teachers are well-trained in the CLT approach and if the teachers and learners play their proper roles imposed by the CLT curriculum, the concept of the CLT approach will be successfully implemented. Finally, the book EFT is an attempt to introduce communicative English. As an introducer, it has initiated some loopholes. It is edited and revised; it may be a good book that will keep pace with the demand of the day.

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