

TEACHER TRAINING: THE MAJOR REQUIREMENT OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) has become a buzz word these days in the field of ELT (English Language Teaching) in Bangladesh. Although the CLT approach has been adopted in Bangladesh aiming at achieving a glaring change by our learners in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context, it has ultimately brought forward a disastrous outcome of ELT letting the learners receive higher grades only. And, the reason behind this is mainly the mass group of unskilled and inefficient teachers in the CLT practice. The present study has been conducted in observation method, accumulating information from a number of previous relevant works by different researchers, and has tried to show the magnitude of teacher-training as the major requirement for effective implementation of CLT approach in the present context of the country, followed by some concluding remarks for a positive outcome in the field.

Keywords: *Teacher-Training, CLT, ELT, EFL, Bangladesh*

1. INTRODUCTION

Bengali is the native language of Bangladesh and more than 95% of the people here speak in Bengali; other 5% speak their own dialects, and English is also widely spoken. General educational achievement in Bangladesh has been seen to lag behind other countries in the region. For example, literacy rates in Bangladesh are lower than that in India and Sri Lanka (National EFA 2000 Assessment Reports: Asia-Pacific Literacy Database). The need for childhood and adult education cannot be stressed enough. Part of this basic education is the tremendous need for English as a second language education at every level. Though English is an unofficially accepted second language in Bangladesh,

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there is widespread recognition that public schools and post-secondary institutions are failing to equip students with adequate English language proficiency to communicate in English, the international language for commerce, science and development. At present, it is believed that current English instruction in Bangladesh is inadequate for global communication (National EFA 2000 Assessment Reports). Many students with brilliant results are not able to take part in higher education in western countries because of the lack of communicative skill in English. In Bangladesh for English Language Teaching (ELT), Grammar Translation Method (GTM) had been in the practice for a long time, but in June 1997 the Ministry of Education (MOE) introduced a new method in ELT, that is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). GTM was not fully a bad method for the context of Bangladesh, rather it was faulty. From 1999 this new method, CLT, is being followed till today but unfortunately, this method has also failed as there has been no proper plan or any pre-preparations to lounge a new idea in curriculum.

The CLT approach requires interactive classroom activities with the integration of the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Nevertheless, for the construction of sufficient interaction and quadruple-skilled integration in classrooms, there awaits some barriers for the English language teachers in Bangladesh. The English language teachers of the country are facing some barriers in making the classrooms interactive and integrative with the tasks and activities engaging the four language skills along with their compatible pragmatic solutions. (Sarwar, F., 2016)

Interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feeling or ideas between two or more people, resulting in a reciprocal effect on each other. Theories of communicative competence emphasize the importance of interaction as human beings use language in various contexts to negotiate meaning, or simply stated, to get an idea out of one person's head and into the head of another person and vice versa. (Brown 2001).

1.1. Objectives of the Study

The two main objectives of the research are: (i) to show the hindrances occurring in the CLT classrooms in Bangladesh on the part of the role of teachers, and (ii) to show the importance of teacher-training as the major requirement in the existing practice of CLT approach in the country. The research has been conducted in observation method. To precede with the study several research works on the related topic have been studied with close observation. Textual references and classroom discussions on the theoretical aspects are considered with thoughtful deliberation to develop the background of the study. Articles published in different research journals have been of good help to develop the review part, followed by an overall discussion with some concluding remarks.

1.2. Scope & Justification

The present research on 'teacher-training' as the 'major requirement' of CLT in Bangladesh covers the limitations of the English language teachers in their proficiency

level in adjusting with the teaching tools and tactics and adapting the theoretical concept of the CLT approach in the local context. Several works have already been conducted with arguments on the effectiveness of CLT and the necessity of blending it (CLT) with some other language teaching methods, as Prabhu (1990) has rightly opined, “there is some truth in every method”. But, the present research brings a newer dimension in the Bangladesh context logically showing the significance of ‘training’ for the English language teachers as the ‘foremost requirement’ in bringing moderately acceptable development among the English language learners of the country.

2. REVIEW & DISCUSSION

2.1. English Communication Concept

English is generally acknowledged to be the world’s most important language (Randolph et al, 1985). Although in Bangladesh, English is compulsorily studied starting from primary level to the completion of higher secondary level for long twelve years, students cannot express themselves in acceptable English (Ahmed, 2000). Again, outside the primary and secondary schools there appears to be a large number of students in the institutions of higher and further education who are interested to learn English for a variety of purposes in Bangladesh (Rahman, 1999). In our context, some institutions and coaching centers demand that they can develop the competence in English among the learners within short time-duration, but we must not forget that, “you can’t expect to learn a foreign language in a week” (Hornby, 2000).

2.2. Theoretical Concept of the CLT Approach

In the CLT approach, language is taken into consideration as the media of communication where meaning is given the highest priority. Here the exact pronunciation ability like the native speakers is not suggested; rather the development of a good communicative competence is emphasized (Richards and Rodgers, 1995). In the theory of language in the CLT approach, we see, language is considered as a system of expression of meaning, and interaction and communication are considered as its primary functions. According to the CLT learning theory, the activities suggested are related to real communication, and the learners are to carry out the meaningful tasks. Here objectives are supposed to reflect the needs of the learners, and the learners are to include functional skills as well as linguistic objectives. In this method, the syllabus will include structures, functions, notions, themes and tasks – either some or all of them are to be included in the syllabus. And the ordering of the elements of the syllabus is guided by the learners’ need. Accuracy of pronunciation is not that much emphasized in the CLT approach unlike some other language teaching methods; rather it strongly suggests that the learners are to be engaged in communication, and they are also to be involved in the processes like information sharing, meaning negotiation and interaction. Unlike some other language teaching methods, in the CLT approach, learners play the role of active participators in the class, whereas the teacher is supposed to act like a passive catalyst. Here learners act as negotiators and interactors, and their duty is to share meaning with

each other – giving as well as taking. On the other hand, the teacher, here, is the facilitator of the communication process who is to act as the counselor and the process manager in the class. Finally, the required materials in the CLT approach are authentically task-based to promote the communicative language in practical use or in real life situation. (Numan, 1989).

2.3. Teachers' Perception & Training for CLT in Bangladesh

Teachers' perception for CLT is done in Bangladesh in two ways: in-service and pre-service (Mazumder, 2011). The Bangladesh Government started providing in-service training to English teachers in 1999 because the English teachers are responsible for implementing the communicative English curriculum. By March 2007, a total of 28,886 secondary school English teachers nationwide had received training as part of the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) (Podder, 2007). Since 2007, ELTIP has continued to provide training to the remaining secondary English teachers through its seven Regional Resource Centers (RRCs) and twenty-seven Satellite Resource Centers (SRCs) throughout the country. The Female Secondary School Assistance Project (FSSAP) reported that despite the potential benefits of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the teaching and learning activities undertaken in classrooms have remained much the same, owing to a lack of competent and well trained teachers in English (Podder, 2007). Eight thousand English teachers from selected schools are being trained by FSSAP-II in an attempt to improve the situation. By March 2007, FSSAP-II was able to train 5494 English teachers countrywide (Podder, 2007). The Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP) has been in progress since 2005 and is ongoing and the Enhancement Project (SEQAEP) began in 2009. All of these programs are providing training to secondary English teachers for their professional development based on CLT. (Mazumder, 2011).

The current practice is for the in-service preparation of English teachers through short term secondary English education programs. In government teacher training colleges, in-service teachers are trained through government projects. In in-service training programs, English teachers from different government and non government schools are trained for 14 to 21 days for their professional development in subject teaching. They are recognized as the English teachers who warrant training on the basis of the Head teachers' authorization and also the letter from the district education officer (DEO). They are all existing secondary English teachers. This short term training does not contribute towards a B.Ed. qualification. The training manual was prepared for them by foreign and national experts on CLT, in collaboration. The manuals form the foundation for the training of existing English teachers in how to teach English language at secondary level using communicative methods. Teacher educators in in-service programs model CLT based teaching methods, techniques and skills. The aim is to increase teachers' awareness and confidence through workshops, simulations, micro-teaching, feedback and exchanging views with each other. (Mazumder, 2011).

While on the part of pre-service training, there are 14 government teacher training colleges (TTC) including one for women, as well as 68 non-government TTCs, the Bangladesh Open University, and some private universities which provide Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degrees. Bangladesh Open University conducts B.Ed. and M.Ed. degrees through distance teaching and learning programs. Although it is not mandatory to gain the B.Ed. degree to be a teacher at the secondary level in Bangladesh, it is expected that teachers should have this degree and some financial benefits are given by the government for achieving it. This type of degree may be regarded as a post-graduate diploma according to many other countries' qualification structures, because one is enrolled in this course after graduating in any discipline. One cannot enroll until gaining a prior degree. A B.Ed. degree is preferred when teachers are recruited in secondary schools, but it is not mandatory. A secondary teacher in government secondary schools must complete a B.Ed. within five years of teaching. In non-government schools this rule is flexible. However, all teachers are financially benefitted when they have gained their B.Ed. degree. (Mazumder, 2011).

The 14 TTCs as well as private TTCs are run by the National University of Bangladesh. All these government and non-government training institutes follow the B.Ed. curriculum implemented by the National University. On the other hand, the Institute for Educational Research (IER), University of Dhaka and that of Rajshahi, Bangladesh along with other private universities are autonomous and conduct the B.Ed. (or, Diploma in Education) and M.Ed. degrees according to their own curriculum, which is different from that of the National University. In addition, there are a number of other projects which are working under relevant TTCs to train in-service secondary teachers, e.g., the Secondary Education Development Project (SEDP), the Female Student Stipend Assistance Project (FSSAP), and the Teaching Quality Improvement in Secondary Education Project (TQI-SEP). (Mazumder, 2011).

The regular B.Ed. English courses are organized around some major developmental themes. The objectives state that trainees will have a clear understanding of the secondary English curriculum (grade 6-10) (Ministry of Education (MOE), 2006). The B.Ed. curriculum aims to enable trainees to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and practices to function effectively in the language classroom (MOE, 2006). This B.Ed. English curriculum is based on two parts, theoretical and practical. The theoretical parts help future English teachers to understand English teaching approaches, methods and techniques in diverse situations. In practical parts, teacher educators teach students through lectures, activities and by sharing ideas and discussion. (Mazumder, 2011).

In Bangladesh, from the National University the regular B.Ed. degree is a 12-month full-time course and is the most common one for teacher education. The other institutions confer a B.Ed. degree that can be studied on a full-time or part-time basis. During one

year courses or programs, student teachers are sent to practice teaching for two months in a school, to get practical experience of teaching. During this practice time they learn how to use English text books effectively, prepare lesson plans, engage students in participatory activities, and use teaching aids to support language teaching as they are instructed in teacher education classrooms. Student teachers use CLT based English textbooks for instruction and teaching. Also during this teaching practice, teacher educators visit and observe the student teachers in classroom teaching, evaluate their teaching and give feedback to them by demonstrating simulation classes. During the 12-month course, there are two internal assessments while external assessment is done by a formal examination set by the National University, Bangladesh. Throughout the year all student teachers have to do a variety of tasks in relation to the teaching of English as a part of the curriculum. These include records of performance, written reports and presentations. During the teaching practice, the trainee teachers are instructed how to teach in the English classes effectively through CLT, the challenges they may face in the classrooms and how these challenges can be minimized. (Mazumder, 2011).

2.4. Major Requirements to set out the CLT Approach

The major requirement to set out the CLT approach is no doubt ‘the highly skilled and trained teacher’. In order to make a general enhancement of the English language teaching in Bangladesh, the curriculum and instruction these CLT teachers receive needs to reflect a model of language teaching practices, which will contribute to improved education for all. Teacher Training is extremely important in the CLT approach. It was found that teachers of the CLT approach express their opinions about the most important priorities of teacher training in Bangladesh mostly correspond with teachers’ perceived difficulties in using or adopting the CLT method and their opinions on the current ELT situation in Bangladesh.

The research, *Teachers’ perceptions, attitudes and expectations about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in post-secondary education in Bangladesh* by Mahmud and Karim (2002) shows that, 88.89% of the teachers felt the need of training in this area as ‘extremely important’. This expressed need corresponds with teachers’ perceived difficulty *not enough authentic teaching materials to use* which was identified by 47.22% of the teachers as ‘major difficulty’. It further corresponds with their expressed current ELT situation regarding ‘effective teaching material’, which was identified by 33.33% of the teachers as ‘currently not successful’. The union of several items shows that the EFL teachers are very concerned about effective teaching materials and the need for expertising in material development in Bangladesh. Materials and resources are likely to be limited in a country like Bangladesh which are not wealthy and it may be that teachers in this study are also focusing on the needs of English teaching materials that are appropriate and effective for the English language context in Bangladesh. Looking for more teaching materials is also a trend among teachers as it is a part of the development of the teaching profession.

The same research, by Mahmud and Karim (2002), also reflects that, 80.56% of the teachers felt the need of training in CLT techniques as ‘extremely important’. This expressed need corresponds with teachers’ perceived difficulty of lack of training in CLT, which was identified by 58.33% of the teachers as a ‘major difficulty’ and also corresponds with lack of success in preparation of ELT teachers. It is found that, EFL teachers in Bangladesh may need training in understanding and developing CLT techniques. These teachers may have expressed their concern about CLT techniques for other EFL teachers. 69.44% of the teachers felt the need of training in assessing students as ‘extremely important’. This expressed need corresponds with teachers’ perceived difficulty of lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments of communicative competence, which was identified by 63.89% of the teachers as ‘major difficulty’. Teachers’ opinions on the priority of training in assessing students seem logical here as they may know how and have lots of experience to assess grammar from years of experience but they may not know how to assess the communicative abilities of students, which naturally creates frustration among them. Traditional grammar-based examinations certainly are the major impediments for proper assessment of communicative language learning. Communicative language learning and teaching cannot be successful if the examinations do not reflect what has been practiced and taught in the EFL classroom as a part of the communicative syllabus. Therefore, training in communicative assessment of students needs to be considered seriously and it is a major issue for further implementation of the CLT approach in Bangladesh.

2.5. Teachers’ Misconceptions

While exploring the literature concerning the suitability of CLT approach in EFL contexts, it also becomes evident that some major barriers in implementation and success of the CLT method, i.e., misconceptions and misinterpretations of the CLT approach are related to cultural values and practices of the EFL countries. Teachers’ beliefs and knowledge cause misinterpretations of the CLT approach. The study findings of Li (1998), Penner (1995), Ellis (1994), and Lewis and McCook (2002) show that although different educational values and practices are the main reasons for difficulties in implementing the CLT method in the respective contexts, misconceptions and misinterpretation of the CLT approach among teachers are also playing the significant role as a hardcore barrier.

3. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The increasing demand for competent users of English in the era of globalization has had a significant impact on English Language Teaching in Bangladesh. Among the number of changes to improve the quality of ELT, teachers of English have been encouraged, even required, to adopt a communicative language teaching approach (Raqib and Phan, 2008). To facilitate the successful implementation of these changes, teachers should be given necessary trainings and also should participate in classified or customized programs to familiarize with the CLT approach. But due to the lack of proper planning for teaching

techniques, teachers are facing numerous problems. Teachers should have the opportunity to retrain and refresh themselves in the CLT approach and more importantly “teachers should receive help in revising, refining, or changing their educational theories” (Li, 1998). The English language teachers of Bangladesh need continuing support with the CLT method and this can be achieved by appointing highly qualified teaching consultants and conducting in-service teacher education programs (Li, 1998). Proper training can teach them how to implement the CLT approach in their classrooms and how they can be motivated to overcome the difficulties.

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