

The CLT Approach in ELT : Its Effectiveness in the ESL and EFL Contexts—with Special Reference to the Context of Bangladesh

Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam *

Abstract

In the field of language teaching, many methods are now considered as outdated ones and some of them are said already to have been obsolete. Now-a-days, the language teaching method that gets much priority is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This priority is given in both ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts. But there lies a question: whether the CLT approach solves all the problems in teaching a second or foreign language or not. And, when we are considering the English language teaching (ELT), obviously there come the two different contexts in the discussion: the ESL and the EFL—while the former deals English as a second or official language, the later treats it as a foreign one. And, for the effective implementation of ELT in Bangladesh, we must keep in our consideration that, English is not given the status of official or second language in our context, rather, here it is a foreign language like any other language apart from Bangla –i.e., German, French, Arabic, Hindi, Urdu, Sanskrit, etc. Considering all these mentioned above, and also considering the theoretical suggestions of the CLT approach, this article goes on showing the effectiveness and/or problem factors of the CLT approach in the ESL and EFL contexts in general, followed by a specific focus on the context of Bangladesh.

* Ahmad Mahbub-ul-Alam, BA (Hons), MA (English), DCS (ICSTED Dhaka Centre), CEFPI (Alliance Francaise de Dacca), Senior Lecturer, Department of English, Manarat International University, Gulshan 2, Dhaka 1212, Bangladesh

Broader Objectives

Any approach to language teaching and learning results in its effectiveness which has to be measured on the basis of command of language obtained by the learners.

This article deals with the effectiveness that may be defined in brief as the outcome of the effort made in the mechanism of exerting the CLT approach regarding ELT in the classroom context for the learners to be developed with the skills and practices of the same.

Specific Objectives

- (i) To highlight the functions of the English language teaching and learning in the context of Bangladesh
- (ii) To uphold the methodologies of ELT
- (iii) To review the approaches of ELT in the classroom environment
- (iv) To interpret a comparative study of ELT and CLT
- (v) To convey the suitable way of teaching and learning English in Bangladesh

Keywords : CLT, ELT, ESL, EFL, Effectiveness, Bangladesh

Introduction

"English is generally acknowledged to be the world's most important language."⁶ In Bangladesh English is compulsorily studied starting from primary level to the completion of the higher secondary level. But even after the completion of the long twelve years' studies, students cannot express themselves in acceptable English.¹ 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.⁷ 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."² We are to keep in mind that the function of any language is to make communication among the speakers and listeners of the language, and consequently, the purpose of language teaching is supposed to develop the communicative competence among the learners which is the expected outcome as suggested theoretically in the CLT approach in the context of ELT. So, this article, first, tries to clarify what communicative English is, and then goes on highlighting the theoretical suggestions of the CLT approach, its relevancies in the ESL and EFL contexts finding out its effectiveness and/or limitations in our context suggesting any possible effective approach for a better English teaching and learning in Bangladesh.

Literature Reviews

This article is mainly a critical evaluation of the CLT approach as found in the theoretical suggestions in Chapter 5 of *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching* by J. C. Richards and T. S. Rodgers after making a thorough discussion on the chapter in the classrooms for the "Applied Linguistics and ELT" course in two different universities (Darul Ihsan University, Dhaka, Bangladesh and Manarat International University, Dhaka, Bangladesh). ELT Thinking Log & Course Assignments of students in the MA class also contributed in preparing this article. In addition to that, reading and understanding different language teaching issues as explored in the *Encyclopedia Britannica 2002 Deluxe Edition CD-ROM Version* and also in different websites found by making online search using the <http://www.google.com> helped a lot to develop this article. N. S. Prab-

hu's (National University of Singapore), article, "There Is No Best Method – Why?", TESOL Quarterly (Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1990, p. 161 – 176) and D. Numan's *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press: 1989, p. 194) are read, understood and critically viewed in furnishing this paper. Moreover, for finding out the relevance of the CLT approach for an effecting ELT in the context of Bangladesh, *Learning English the Easy Way* by Sadruddin Ahmed also contributed as guidelines for this article.

What is Communicative English?

Before going into the depth let us discuss the features of the Communicative English in the context of its theoretical dealings.

- Communicative English in a sense is not a term to be introduced of late rather defined and studied in a broader sense, although it has taken a dynamic position in our academic environment at school and college levels now a days in Bangladesh
- To many concerned, communicative English is going to be interpreted and applied as one of the methodologies in enhancing language proficiency. Whatever may be the definition of the said terms *communicative English*, it is generally meant to be a means of exchanging views of interpretation between at least two persons or groups.
- It has been observed that the *Communicative English Methods* can be illustrated as follows :

SPEAKER(S) $\longleftrightarrow$ LISTENER(S)

- In the said process, English is used by a speaker and a listener, and the act of speaking and listening may be performed by two or more individuals in the way of asking or answering.

Many things have been chosen to concentrate on the communicative use of language by speakers with a reason for speaking to the listeners

in the context of effective approach of communicative English leading us to a view of the spoken language which owes a great deal in its approach to the rapidly developing study of the analysis and research of discourse or discussion measured by the language scientists and thinkers of the modern language arena. It has to be remembered that language learning and teaching is a dual method to be used by a speaker and listener. So there should be a suitable practicing environment to ensure the smooth practice of the language learners.

Theoretical Suggestions in 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.⁸

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 that are 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.⁴

So far the things pointed out in the above two paragraphs is just a brief idea about what is suggested in the CLT approach. Now we have to figure out the role and effectiveness of the CLT approach in the ESL and EFL contexts.

Effectiveness in the context of Categorization of the English Language

One well established categorization makes a three-way distinction between a native language and a second language. As a foreign language English is used for international communication but as a second language it is chiefly used for international purposes distinguishing its five types of functions for which English is different from other languages and characteristically serves as a medium.³

- **Instrumental Language** : for formal education
- **Relative English** : for government administration and the law courts
- **Communicative English** : for interpersonal communication between two individuals speaking different languages
- **Occupational English** : for international correspondence for commerce, science and technology
- **Creative English**: for non-technical writing such as fiction and political works³

The CLT Approach in the ESL Context

As the CLT approach suggests, surely, it is effective in the ESL context, because in a language teaching method where language is treated primarily as the medium of communication and where the target is to develop the learners' communicative competence, we cannot ignore the need of practicing the target language outside the classroom. And, this is possible in an ESL context, where English is given the status of official language. For example, we can take Australia, where, for the immigrants, English is the second language (SL) for communication. As there reside the native speakers of different languages (i.e., the immigrants) who are the learners, it is possible for them (the learners) to practice English outside the classroom what they learn in the class. Thus, the meaning negotiation practice is enhanced with the huge opportunity even after their routine class hour. So, the CLT is obviously a fruitful effort in an ESL context.

The CLT Approach in the EFL Context

On the other hand, we have to think it deeply, how far the CLT approach can help in an EFL context where the target language, English, is not an official language. In an EFL context it is not always possible for a learner to practice the classroom learning outside the classroom. It is possible if the students are from or regularly go to the upper societies where there reside the tourists and foreigners and also where many other people too often speak in English. But in a country or in a society (considering an EFL context), all do not belong to nor always go to an upper class area. Then, my question is, in such case, how much effective the CLT approach is in an EFL context. Yes, it is of course possible, but only among the four walls of the ELT classroom or maximum inside the boundary of an English medium institution where the media of communication is English. Otherwise, in an EFL context, the students who are basically the foreign language (FL) learners cannot practice what they learn in the classroom – their lesson

and learning targeting the meaning negotiation and information sharing have every possibility to be a failure.

Limitations of the Communicative English in Our ELT Classroom

Communicative English in Bangladesh has developed an idea suggesting the said mechanism of teaching and learning English to be confined to the four walls of classroom which may act as an input, but the environment far from the classroom appears to be the stage of enjoying the output of the same and that is deemed to be one kind of limitations by some of the language thinkers. There are so many factors responsible for the smooth practice of the elementary skills of English language. Lack of cultural harmony in the context of communication gap between teachers and students, as well as, the traditional one way teaching of the teachers is likely to be an obstacle on the way of the proper practice and participation of the learners.

The CLT Approach in the Context of Bangladesh

Now let us come to the context of Bangladesh, and the mentionable thing in this context is, there is no use of watering a plant when its root is not in a good condition. Let me relate the things – in Bangladesh, most of the English language teachers do not have a good command on the language. Then, our common sense experiences a bit puzzling situation when we think to adapt the CLT approach in our context. Somehow, it becomes an improper idea to practice such an advanced-level methodology, the CLT approach, in our context where our English language teachers do not have enough confidence and competence.

In Bangladesh, no doubt, ELT is more or less up to the mark only in some English medium schools and some other very few renowned schools and colleges, only in twelve Cadet Colleges, and in few public

and private Universities. And, it is really very hard to know, whether there exists any other academic institution where English language is practically practiced. If the CLT approach is introduced in these institutions (mentioned above), we can expect to get fruit out of it, because in these institutions English is compulsorily used as the means of communication for the learners to practice their classroom learning outside the class. But the problem is, this is not the total picture of the entire educational field of Bangladesh. We have to think for the majority and also for their betterment. Otherwise the actual problem will always persist – the students or the English language learners of the country will never be able to practice nor to use what they learn in the classroom in the real life situations.

Another problem is, we can learn different notions and functions in the CLT classroom, but we cannot practice it in the proper context. For example, going to a fish market of Bangladesh, if we start talking to the people and the shopkeepers in the way we are taught in the CLT classroom, we can surely assume what will happen – the result will be a ZERO COMMUNICATION, while the CLT approach suggests for developing communicative competence among the language learners.

Moreover, as the theory says, there is no set syllabus or course curriculum for the CLT approach. Then, if a teacher or language instructor wants to follow exactly what is suggested or proposed in the CLT approach, he/she has to be a trained scholar on this ground. But it is already mentioned earlier in this article that Bangladesh is such a country of the third world where the language instructors are unaware of their own language deficiencies. Then how can they teach English language properly to bring out communicative competence among their students when even in some cases they themselves (the teachers) do not have the exact and clear conception about 'communicative competence'?

In such cases, before adopting the CLT approach in the context of Bangladesh, we have to establish at least one training center where the

English language teachers will be trained. But then there arises another question: who will train these teachers? In that case, we may need to bring foreign/native experts. So, we see a chain of problems, but of course, the problems regarding the 'communicative competence' are solvable. The prior steps for solving this issue are our plan makers have to be more cautious and they have to rearrange the whole thing in a new order.

In fact, this is not the problem that exists in Bangladesh only—there are many countries in the world, especially in the EFL context, where exist the same problems regarding ELT.

What can be an Effective ELT Method?

Now, let us have some new points in the discussion. – How much importance should we give to the CLT approach and its contributory factors in ELT? Should we grant the CLT approach as a model in language teaching? Or, is there any other method that can help the ELT?

After having discussed up to this point, now there may arise an issue, i.e., though we see, more or less, some contributions of the CLT approach, at least better than some other methods like the Grammar-Translation one, there also persist some undeniable weak-points in the CLT approach.

Actually, all the language-teaching methods that are proposed and modified from time to time in the history of language teaching by different scholars and linguists have some contributory factors that can, no doubt, contribute something in language teaching. But it fully depends on time, place and situation. For example, where the CLT approach fails to bring a good output in an ESL/EFL context, some other methods like Situational Language Teaching (SLT) can be partially applied up to that mark to which it can help. So, we cannot go along with only one language teaching method. We cannot consider any of the language teaching methods as the 'best one', not even the CLT method.

Conclusion: "There is Some Truth in Every Method" ⁵

Before drawing the conclusion of this article, we can quote something from N. S. Prabhu's article, 'There Is No Best Method – Why?', published in the *TESOL Quarterly* (Vol. 24, No. 2, Summer 1990, p. 161 – 176). To comment on the different language teaching methods, N. S. Prabhu says, 'It all depends on the teaching context' (p. 162) and 'There is some truth in every method' (p. 166). Any creative and critical views are obvious to support the fact that we have to take into consideration the context before starting or adopting any of the methods of language teaching, and accordingly, we have to arrange, or if necessary rearrange the language teaching process adopting different relevant extracts from different language teaching methods.

Index

- ELT** : English Language Teaching
CLT : Communicative Language Teaching
SL : Second Language
ESL : English as a Second Language
FL : Foreign Language
EFL : English as a Foreign Language
TESOL : Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
<http://www.google.com> : A famous online search engine

Bibliography

1. Ahmed, Sadruddin. (April 2000). *Learning English the Easy Way*, sixth edition.
2. Hornby. A. S. (2000). *OXFORD Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, fifth edition
3. Longman. "The English Language Today", *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language*

4. Numan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
5. Prabhu, N. S. (Summer 1990). "There is No Best Method – Why?", TESOL Quarterly, vol.24, no.2
6. Quirk, Randolph. Baum, Sidney Green. Leech, Geoffrey. and Svartvik, Jan. (1985). "The English Language Today", edited by Longman, A Comprehensive *Grammar of the English Language*, London and New York
7. Rahman, Arifa. (June 1999). "Educational Innovation and Cultural Change", The Dhaka University Studies, vol. 56, no. 1
8. Richards, Jack C. and Rodgers, Theodore S. (1995). *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Cambridge University Press, low price edition.