

Making Communicative Language Teaching Work in Pakistan

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Abstract

This paper examines communicative language teaching (CLT) and its significance in terms of language teaching and learning. The actual purpose of the paper is to explore the causes of failure of CLT in Pakistan and other developing countries in order to suggest the ways to make it successfully effective in the context. It is found that contextual problems such as overuse of traditional methods of teaching such as lecturing and large classes always come into clash with the use of CLT in the developing countries such as Pakistan because CLT is in fact a method developed and used in the developed countries where the contextual issues found in the educational institutes are rare as compared to developing countries.

Keywords: CLT, methods, lecturing, issues, adaptation, situational analysis

1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a widely implemented teaching approach in the field of language teaching in developed countries. Conversely, Sakui (2004) argues that its application in developing countries is rare. CLT represents the western learning values and principles; therefore, it always comes into clash with local learning environment of developing countries. Furthermore, CLT is the field that lacks empirical research and is more or less based on the concepts and activities mentioned by its pioneers and founders. The research so far conducted on CLT is based on teachers' and learners' views and perception of CLT and observation (e.g., Nunan, 1987; Wyatt, 2009; Xue, 2013). Nevertheless, very few studies have made an attempt to empirically test CLT. However, there are some studies which have tested some CLT approaches anyway and found effective results (Bughio, 2013; Shamim et al., 2007). Despite the fact that these studies claim that group work enhanced student communication and language learning, these studies faced management issues. This paper is an attempt to explore if the socio-culturally adapted CLT strategies such as cooperative learning could improve student communicative competence and help teachers solve the management issues in large ESL classes.

2. Importance of CLT

The purpose of CLT is to develop students' language communicative proficiency. Communicative competence or proficiency includes the capability through which a student can use all the four skills i.e. speaking, writing, reading and listening. Therefore, Hymes (1972, p. 63) argues that communicative proficiency is "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses." Communicative competence requires from learners the understanding of the target language and the aptitude to use that understanding contextually. To support this argument, Littlewood (1984, p. 1) debates that CLT "pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into more fully communicative view". Communicative activities assist students become skilled in interaction and communication with others in their use of any foreign language. On the other hand, conventional activities authorises the teacher to teach, whereas, communicative activities place the students at the center and marginalises the role of teacher.

3. Background

3.1 English Language Teaching and Learning in Pakistan

The role of English as an international language, language of research, science and technology, trade, communication and offices is indispensably evident in Pakistan. English language has become indispensable and

ever-growing necessity for socio-economic development (Mansoor, 2004). As a result, it has been introduced as a compulsory subject from primary schools to higher education institutes like colleges and universities in Pakistan. However, English language has been used as a lingua franca since the independence of Pakistan; the conditions for English Language teaching-learning in Pakistan are not favourable. Warsi (2004) argues that although English is taught as a compulsory subject from class first, students, particularly from rural areas, cannot communicate in English easily. They feel deficient in all four language skills. The main reason behind this situation about teaching-learning in Pakistan is that the techniques used to teach English language are not communicatively up to the mark. English is taught in Pakistan as a second language or foreign language. Some people speak Urdu (National Language) as their mother tongue; English becomes as a second language for them, but the people with other languages such as Sindhi, Pashtu, Punjabi etc. as their mother tongues, English becomes as a foreign language for them because Urdu works as a second language for them (Warsi, 2004). Ahmad et al. (2011) debate that in spite of its being claimed second language of Pakistan, the syllabi of English language in Pakistan do not meet the specific curricular goals. The teachers are not trained and are not armed with modern teaching equipment; the majority of teachers use outdated teaching methods and contextually irrelevant textbooks to teach English as a foreign or second language. Examinations to assess English Language proficiency is entirely flawed and does not include the modern efficient evaluation and assessment methods (Warsi, 2004).

3.2 English in Higher Education

In all higher education institutes such as colleges and universities, medium of instruction is English for all subjects excluding subjects related to Languages (Rahman, 2004; Mashori, 2010). English is also taught as a major subject in the form of Language and literature and as a compulsory subject in Pakistani universities and colleges. However, teachers of English in these higher education institutes do not follow the required ELT based communicative methods of teaching and continue with the traditional lecture teaching style through which they themselves were taught (Raja, 2012). Universities in Pakistan have achieved greater scope in terms of English teaching. Both private and public universities offer multiple courses of English language such functional English, TESOL (Teaching of English to the Speakers of other Language), TEFL (Teaching of English as a Foreign Language), ESP (English for Specific Purposes) and EAP (English for Academic purposes). Some private universities also provide students pre-sessional English courses exclusively. In public universities ESL or Functional English courses are taught to remedy students' weak English, because the majority of students in public universities come from vernacular medium or non-elite English medium schools. Therefore, ESL/Functional English courses are considered to be important to enable students to meet the requirements of higher education (Rahman, 1999; Mansoor, 2003).

In Public universities, the courses of English language are offered largely at the undergraduate level including some courses at the postgraduate level in particular departments, i.e., Business and public management sciences. These courses are conducted by the institute of English in other departments and institutes in the general universities. These universities also hire visiting faculty to teach English compulsory and the permanent teachers are supposed to teach English Literature or Linguistics to the students of major subjects. A prescribed syllabus of English is taught to the undergraduate students. In the professional universities, the English language programme is controlled by the departments concerned or the faculty concerned. In the English language programmes of professional universities, teachers design the course for English themselves. The assessment and evaluation of the courses focuses content and information e.g., difficulties in communication or features a good paragraph writing practical skills of language (Shamim, 2011).

Moreover, one the most disturbing issues that keeps students of vernacular medium/government run institutes worried in developing countries is large classes. English language teaching in large classes of vernacular or government English medium schools, colleges and universities is negatively affected. Large classes create so many constraints which make the process of teaching and learning English language difficult for teachers and students. For students, the course content becomes useless and meaningless due to the large number of students in the class. The teachers become unable to use appropriate and interactive teaching methods in such large classes, therefore they normally pass time instead of teaching properly and meeting the needs of students' interest and knowledge. The greatest number of the teachers of large classes agrees that large classes are a serious problem (Shamim, 1993). In the context of Pakistani colleges usually classes are very large of around more than a hundred students in a class. The students in these classes are mostly of multi-level and heterogeneous in regard to their mental abilities and socio-economic backgrounds therefore and it becomes exceedingly problematic to gratify them with the help of outdated teaching techniques. The huge size of classes leaves no or tremendously little opportunity for teacher-student interaction. In such a large class the teacher performs as an authoritative

ruler rather than a facilitator (Raja, 2012). It is normally found by the researchers that the traditional lecture method of teaching curtails students' cognitive development (Raja, 2012). Therefore, there is a need of developing a more appropriate teaching methodology that may address large English language classes' problems more effectively. This paper has been aimed to address the problems of large university English classes at the UoSJP.

However, these compulsory classes cannot achieve goals as desired in spite of Pakistani universities offering English language support. The main reason is argued to be traditional teaching activities in these universities (Khan, 1997; Warsi, 2004; Bughio, 2013). Lecturing-method to teach English is used excessively which is not a very effective approach to teach and learn English. There is clear evidence that, for language teaching and learning, communicative language teaching methods should be used. Savignon (2002) and Richards (2006) argue that these methods engage learners in the process of language learning by keenly practising the target language for interactive purposes. The majority of language teachers in Pakistani universities do not adopt interactive teaching-learning methods. On the other hand, they reproduce outdated lecture-style instruction they experienced as students (Shamim, 2011; Raja, 2012; Bughio, 2013).

It is debated that teachers lecture to avoid management problems which are caused by the use of interactive methods in such large classes (Naidu et al., 1992; Jimakorn & Singhasiri, 2006). Despite the fact that lecture-style teaching does not create interactive environment in class, instructors opine that its use at least help control classroom management issues. However, Naidu et al. (1992) and Jimakorn & Singhasiri (2006) reason that collaborative methods like team work create disorganised circumstances where it becomes almost impossible for teachers to control learners from moving about and off-task chatting. Larger classes create greater disruption. A large number of learners produce more noise and it becomes extremely difficult to organise students into teams, which wastes much time and can cause substantial confusion. Teachers in large classes become unable to engage students through student-student and student-teacher interaction in the English learning process which is the basic objective of CLT.

4. Critical Review and Analysis

4.1 Student Engagement

The utmost significant feature of CLT is to improve communication and interaction among students in class (Allwright, 1984). This environment of interaction in the classroom offers a vital and resourceful podium for transferring classroom knowledge to the external world. Thus, learners practice their learning not only in the class, but also outside the class. Therefore, communicative language teaching activities should be designed not only to emphasise communication in the classroom, but these should also stimulate real life communication problems. Classroom interaction is not normally a sufficient aim of CLT. It should commonly be managed to enhance communication for outside the real world (Allwright, 1984). The teachers need to provide learners with real life like situation and communicative strategies that help them use language under a certain situation where learners can contextualize and negotiate meaning depending on the situation (Swan, 1985). Social interaction among students through group/pair work further expedites language learning process by providing learners open platform to practice language through discussion and reflection.

The real life communicative activities help bridge the gap between classroom and outside world communication. We learn by communicating, especially in language learning, where it is used as means of communication in solving communication problems. Communicative learning in the classroom aims at enhancing student involvement (Allwright, 1984). Student engagement and involvement is necessary for developing student achievement and oral fluency in language. According to Allwright (1984), Savignon (2002) and Sharan (2011) reason that Language learning always needs a communicative environment where student-student and student-teacher communication is regular. Communicative environment not only improves provides opportunities for the problem-solving process through one-to-one interaction, but it also command of the target language is strengthened (Allwright, 1984). Similarly, Savignon (2002, p. 6) argues "It is essential that learners be engaged in doing things with language—that is, that they use language for a variety of purposes in all phases of learning" (Savignon, 2002, p. 6).

4.2 Role of CLT in Pakistan and Developing Countries

Unfortunately, the phenomenon of large ESL classes in developing countries like Pakistan makes it almost impossible for learners to enhance their language skills through engagement in interaction. Due to the large size of classes and the frequent use of the traditional lecture method by teachers, students seldom get opportunities to engage in interactive activities with one another. Consequently, students fail to enhance friendly and constructive cooperation through which they not only can learn, cooperate and enhance one another's knowledge, but they

also can develop their communicative language and social-interpersonal skills.

Therefore, the present paper aims to find ways through which CLT can be used to enhance student engagement in large ESL classes because it is extremely important for language learning (e.g., Kuchah & Richard, 2011; Todd, 2006). Through the traditional lecture-style in classrooms, students are chiefly taught language rules, not how to use or practice language. Thus, they only learn the linguistic rules of the target language rather than the ways to adopt it communicatively to express thoughts both in written and orally. In traditional teaching styles, the student is primarily a passive recipient of knowledge (Nunan, 1999, p. 72). For better learning of language, students need to “learn language as communication, not just as a list of facts to be memorized or set of symbols to be manipulated”. Language learning should begin from active practice of the target language and involve interactive learning strategies.

Student engagement with one another and in learning processes and procedures through interactive activities is a prime requirement for language learning. Students are unable to achieve the desired level of Language proficiency and skills unless they practice it through interaction (Nunan, 1999; Ur, 2004; Harmer, 2007). Content learning also require interaction and student engagement, but in the case of language, it is the most important element. In content learning focus is on learning content only, whereas, in language learning, firstly, interaction should be focussed and then content (Todd, 2006, pp. 1-2).

4.3 Learner Autonomy

CLT method such as Group/pair work liberates learners from unnecessarily excessive dependence on the teacher (Sakui, 2004). They, thus, become responsible their own learning. This further enhances their motivation level. CLT offers learners’ autonomy in their learning. The teacher only can perform as facilitator and inform about and organise communicative activities. His role is to motivate not to control learners. “If we look at foreign language learning as it occurs in the natural environment, it also becomes clear that these processes can work without any teacher at all, so long as the environment provides the necessary stimuli and experience.” Communicative skills better develop when learners feel motivated and have opportunity to express their own individuality and associate themselves with the people around them (Littlewood, 1984, p. 92). CLT thus requires a learning environment which provides them with a feeling of security and value as individuals.

The language-learning process is not likely to be restricted to the classroom setting. Najeeb (2013) argues that language learning needs ever-lasting effort both in and outside the classroom. Therefore, CLT requires from the teacher train learners in order to take responsibility for their learning, thus establishing learner autonomy. For language teaching and learning, making students independent learners is important and is likely to be positive; he/she becomes independent learner and user of the target language, not only in the class but also in the real world. Thus, it can be argued that learner autonomy may be established in the classroom setting with an objective that it may extend beyond it (Najeeb, 2013). An autonomous learner as the one who should understand his/her learning practices and activities, actively involves himself/herself in the learning task at hand, is always prepared to take risks. He/she does his/her homework no matter if it is evaluated or not and values precision and appropriateness (Thanasoulas, 2000).

On the contrary, the case with large ESL classes seems to be the reverse in Pakistani universities. Large classes are more likely to reduce students’ engagement with the teacher and with one another. In the context of language learning, interaction and student engagement is extremely important. However, in developing countries, for language learning even in small classes, the focus is more likely on content/course learning which may have the least impact on students’ skill development such as speaking, writing, reading and listening (Kumar, 1992; Shamim, 1993; Bughio, 2013). Both small and large classes taught through student-centered approaches such as group work enhance student engagement, interaction and teacher feedback. On the contrary, as Kumar (1992) discusses that the classes in which teacher-centered methods are used, have the opposite effect. For the enhancement of student engagement, group work has not only been recommended, but it also has been empirically shown to be a useful method in large language classes (Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Harmer, 2007; Kuchah & Richard, 2011; Bughio, 2013). Group activities enhance student talking time and engagement. Interaction in small groups enhances students’ practice in communicating and negotiating meanings, building positive rapport, and upholding dialogue (Sakui, 2004; Coskun, 2011). Hence, group-learning develops social positive interdependence in students and keeps them prepared to control themselves (Johnson & Johnson, 2009).

4.4 Empirical Evidence

Empirical evidence shows that student involvement in language-learning processes has positive correlation with student academic achievement and skill development. Nystrand & Gamoran (1991), for example, found, through teacher-student questionnaires, tests and classroom observation of 58 classes of 16 USA middle schools, that

student engagement positively affected student achievement. He argues on the basis of the findings that when students engage with substance and topics of their learning more substantively, their cognition and achievement are more likely to be enhanced. Collaborative engagement in learning tasks may best facilitate students with substantive engagement where students and teachers may engage in open discussion. Carini, Kuh, & Klein (2006) examined tests (RAND, GRE and SAT) and conducted Survey (NSSE) from the sample consisted of 1058 students at 14 US colleges and universities. Generally, the findings suggest that engagement is positively associated with desirable learning outcomes such as critical thinking and grades. However, the relationships between engagement and academic performance were not as strong as expected. Colonel, Altunay, & Yurdabakan (2012) conducted different reading comprehension tests developed by University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate (UCLES) from 182 participants to judge the effects of CLT. The participants were enrolled at TuAF NCO College in 2005-2006. The researchers found that the group engaged in CLT-learning techniques showed significant improvement in reading comprehension achievement. Similarly, Donato's (1994) observational study showed collaborative learning seems to result in the improvement of language competence of students. In Swain & Lapkin (1998) the communicative undertakings which involved learners significantly improved student learning. In addition, Tsou (2005) conducted an experimental study through questionnaires, tests and participation turns in a Taiwanese university. Both qualitative and quantitative data showed that engagement and interaction through communicative activities improved the treatment group's language skills especially speaking skills.

4.5 Problems of Implementation in Other Contexts

Although CLT has been considered as an essential approach for establishing communicative situation of everyday life and developing communicative competence, its adoption in developing countries is not frequent. Coskun (2011) found that apart from the political, language policy, infrastructural, and other economic factors, perhaps, the most affecting factor is its clash with local culture of learning. Traditional teaching methods, which expect students to be submissive and passive in the classroom, are the main cultural factor that negatively influences CLT's application in developing countries. Sakui (2004) and Hiep (2007) conclude that pedagogical approaches grow from social and cultural situated contexts. Therefore, if any of these approaches is used in the context where it was not established, can be challenging in another totally different context.

Following problems are found to be faced by teachers in various countries by "Li (1998) in Korea, Carless (2004) in Hong Kong, Hu (2005) in China, Hiep (2007) in Vietnam, Nishino & Watanabe (2008) in Japan, Jeon (2009) and Orafi & Borg (2009) in Libya. See also surveys of a range of East Asian countries in Ho & Wong (2004) and Butler (2011) by teachers during the implementation of CLT" (Littlewood, 2013, p. 5):

- "Difficulties with classroom management, especially with large classes, and teachers" resulting fear that they may lose control;
- New organizational skills required by some activities such as pair or group work;
- Students' inadequate language proficiency, which may lead them to use the mother tongue (or only minimal English) rather than trying to "stretch" their English competence;
- Excessive demands on teachers' own language skills, if they themselves have had limited experience of communicating in English;
- Common conceptions that formal learning must involve item-by-item progression through a syllabus rather than the less observable holistic learning that occurs in communication;
- Common conceptions that the teacher's role is to transmit knowledge rather than act as a facilitator of learning and supporter of autonomy;
- The negative "washback" effect of public examinations based on pencil-and-paper tests which focus on discrete items and do not prioritize communication; Resistance from students and parents, who fear that important examination results may suffer as a result of the new approach.

4.6 Significance of Contextual Adaptation in CLT

CLT should not be considered as a ready-made prescribed set of package of classroom techniques. Teachers in developing countries like Pakistan "need to make further efforts to develop and generate, within the communicative approach, classroom techniques appropriate to their condition" (Hiep, 2007, p. 200). Kramsch & Sullivan (1996) debate that the way CLT is adopted in London might not be practicable in Hanoi. Littlewood (2013) argues that to address the issues of CLT in classrooms in different contexts is that more operative methods should be discovered that focus on group work in order to direct and support autonomous interaction, even in the absence

of direct involvement of the teacher. “Techniques in cooperative learning (e.g., Littlewood, 2009) are an avenue for exploration” Littlewood (2013) argues that “top-down approaches, in which policy-makers and other “experts” legislate on how language is best taught, have lost their validity”. Every teacher is an expert professional in his/her own specific context. However, s/he can also draw understanding from other people (theorists as well as teachers) and examine them in the context. In a nutshell, the investigation for effective pedagogical approaches and principles, it is imperative that “theory, research and practice work together on a basis of equality”.

Similarly, it is of utmost importance that teachers in Pakistani university need to look into the contextual issues and adapt and adopt CLT methods. Using CLT methods straight away without contextual adaptation is likely to create issues of management and discipline. For example, Hiep (2007) conducted study on the three teachers to explore how ESL they perceive and use CLT in the context of Vietnam. All these teachers underscored the potential effectiveness of CLT and stressed that CLT chiefly was a method of teaching learners the language meaningfully for their future life, and assisting them to enhance the classroom environment. These teachers expressed that the main objective of CLT was to create meaningful communication to support the learning process. They indicated that the activities based on such as role play and group or pair works the main components of CLT. However, these teachers faced difficulties in using these activities because they did not adapt the activities contextually and “appeared to lack confidence or skills to generate independent CLT practices” (Hiep, 2007, p. 198). For example, one teacher unconsciously retained her authority during group work and another teacher found it difficult to group students in the class because grouping them created chaotic situation due to a large number of students. Therefore, it is always necessary that before adopting CLT methods, teachers need to adapt them.

Ho & Wong (2004, p. xxxiv) argue: “*there has been much criticism of an unquestioning acceptance of CLT techniques in ELT in this [East Asian] region and of the varying practices of CLT*”. Hiep (2007, p. 196) similarly states that although “teachers in many parts of the world may reject the CLT techniques transferred from the West”, “it is doubtful that they reject the spirit of CLT”. He further argues that this spirit is that learning appears to take place when classroom processes are made factual and expressive for learners and that the goal is to teach learners “to be able to use the language effectively for their communicative needs”. Thus, CLT may continue to deliver a theoretical framework focusing firstly on orienting our instructions towards students’ communicative goals and secondly, planning evocative experiences which direct towards these goals. Following this *modus operandi*, teachers and teacher-trainers now emphasise “not adopting CLT but on adapting it to suit the context where English is taught” (Littlewood, 2013, pp. 6-7).

4.7 Situational Analysis

The implementation of CLT cannot be given up in other countries (other than it is originated) because it conflicts with cultures (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Rejecting new and active pedagogical methods of language is to disregard progress in language teaching (Hiep, 2007). The overall argument about the CLT approach reinforces the position of CLT as a very operative technique of language teaching and learning. It is, therefore, supported that CLT’s implementation should be extended rather than dismissed. CLT, if not used in an exactly similar way as it in western countries, perhaps as Littlewood (1984) reasons, with some adaptation and innovation, it can also produce anticipated effects in other cultures and countries. The teacher can always adapt the text into smaller communicative sections and teach them through various contextually adapted communicative strategies.

Literature suggests the analysis of situation and the adaptation of CLT methods according to the situation requirements (e.g., Richards, 1990; West, 1994; Khan, 2007; Savignon, 1991). The situational analysis can offer an insight into teacher-learner perceptions which can help familiarise programme of language learning to their contextual needs (Richards, 1990). Thus, it may also encourage teachers and learners to own improvements and innovations. In order to identify the incompatibility between the theory and practice, the teachers’ and learners’ views need to be explored (Savignon, 1991). For the proper implementation of CLT, the most important factor would be to change teachers’ behaviour towards and perception of CLT (Coskun, 2011).

Moreover, for effective and successful implementation of CLT, it is also necessary that its use is continued and practiced permanently in other contexts. Wyatt (2009) observed a teacher’s behaviour and teaching for three years and found she developed the skills for CLT implementation to a considerably great extent. In her very first classes, she used more closed-ended tasks inviting individual students to solve with least efforts on their reasoning and reflection which she considered CLT activities. However, later, with the passage of time, she started to use CLT activities like group/pair work and role plays with more open-ended tasks inviting students’ reasoning and reflections. Continuity in the use of CLT tasks not only develops teachers’ CLT skill, but this also develops students’ interest and attitudes towards CLT. For example, Xue (2013, p. 6) that, with the permanent/longer use of CLT, students’ attitudes towards CLT activities underwent gradually improved. Thus,

CLT activities always need time to get fused with other cultures, the new practitioners need to be consistent.

5. Conclusion

This article looks into the uses and importance of CLT in language pedagogy. It is an attempt to expose CLT into Pakistani higher education institutes. It describes and discusses the present status of English language teaching and learning in Pakistan and other developing countries. It aims to explore the causes of failure of CLT approaches such as group work or cooperative learning in Pakistan and establishes that CLT is not an approach that is universally designed to be adopted in all countries of the world. However, CLT is found to be an approach that CLT needs adaptations according to the constraints of contexts where it is implemented.

Pakistani teachers need to consider the cultural and contextual aspects and adapt CLT accordingly. Since there is trend of teaching English through traditional teaching methods such as lecturing due the contextual constraints such as large classes and lack of training, the language teachers in Pakistani universities are suggested to investigate their situations and circumstances and adapt CLT techniques instead of using them straight away. This attitude of teachers may improve the present scenario of English language teaching in universities and may help students engage in learning processes and take responsibility of their learning. Since learners in universities are adults and mature, they could easily get trained to become autonomous through the use of different CLT methods such as cooperative learning.

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