



FROM LINGUISTIC COMPETENCE TO PERFORMANCE: SOCIOLINGUISTIC CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING TO ELT TEACHER AT HIGHER EDUCATION LEVEL IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA, PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study attempted to investigate the challenges faced by college English teachers in applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study employed qualitative approach, essentially phenomenological in nature by drawing on fifteen teachers' lived experiences through semi-structured interviews. A thematic analysis was conducted to recognize the general trends in implementing CLT in English language classrooms. The results indicate that there are several intertwined problems which limit the effective implementation of CLT, namely the mismatch between problem the National Curriculum and English textbook, students' resistance to communicative activities, the persistence of Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in teaching and learning English, limited teacher training, large class size, limited teaching time, examination system based on memorization, high teaching workload, and insufficient teaching materials. Institutional demands, examination pressure and poor infrastructural facilities are reported to hinder effective communicative English teaching. These ask for traditional teaching practices. The study concludes that the implementation of CLT in the context of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa faces systemic, pedagogical and materials related barriers. The study suggests changes in textbook revision, teacher training, class size, reforms in the examination system, enhancement of resource support, and creation of monitoring mechanisms for effective CLT based teaching.

Keywords: *Challenges to English Teachers in CLT, Communicative Competence, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English as a Foreign Language (EFL).*

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1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was developed in response to the problems faced due to the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) that it did not enable students to develop communicative skills in the target language. In contrast to traditional methods of teaching language that focus on teaching language rules, CLT sees language mostly as a tool for communicating and strives to train the use of language in a communicative, meaningful, and appropriate manner in authentic contexts (Berns, 1990). Foreign language teaching is now aimed primarily at communicative competence and CLT has been widely recognized as a teaching method that is effective in promoting foreign language proficiency (Savignon, 1987). Larsen-Freeman (1986) said that the ultimate goal of language teaching is to help the learner communicate in the target language effectively, which will need the use of modern teaching methods and learner-centered teaching methods.

Although CLT has become widely accepted in many countries around the world, traditional and teacher-centred approaches to English language teaching in many developing environments remain prevalent. English is a compulsory subject in all Primary Schools up to college level in Pakistan and students are expected to communicate in English in their academic, professional and competitive environment. Written tests for Central Superior Services (CSS), Provincial Management Service (PMS), Provincial Civil Services (PCS), and admission tests in professional courses require competency in language skills, as well as in effective communication. But, after more than a decade of studying English, most of the students from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa show poor communicative skills and struggle to express themselves properly in both the spoken and written language.

A possible reason for this is the traditional pedagogical practice that offers few opportunities for real language use and interaction. Learners may lack access to meaningful communicative tasks and authentic language materials and teachers may make use of methods that focus on exam preparation and grammar learning rather than communicative competence. Thus, students suffer from the lack of communication skills in real life. As a result, students have difficulty in acquiring the language skills they need to communicate in reality. However, CLT has been identified as one of the most effective methods to the teaching of language due to its focus on language skills integration, meaningful communication and learner interaction (Ying, 2010).

The principles and characteristics of CLT have been discussed extensively in previous studies, and research has been undertaken on teachers' and learners' perceptions of the introduction of CLT (Brown, 2007; Brumfit, 1984; Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1991; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Likewise, various studies conducted in other contexts of EFL learning have reported a variety of problems encountered in implementing CLT in EFL classrooms such as teachers' lack of knowledge and training, low learner proficiency, inadequate teaching materials, examination-oriented systems and reluctance from teachers and learners (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Hiep, 2007; Islam & Bari, 2012; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2005; Li, 1998; Memari, 2013; Miller & Aldred, 2000). These challenges have been reported in a number of settings, but there is still limited research that has specifically addressed the experiences of college teachers of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. It is a fact that communicative competence is a critical component in today's English language teaching and learning, so it is important to have a better understanding of the problem that teachers encounter when implementing CLT.

Thus, the present study is designed to explore the problems of EFL teachers in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at college level in KP Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The study is conducted using qualitative phenomenological design with the method of semi-structured interviews to get a picture of the experiences and perceptions of teachers in implementing CLT. The study aims to identify the main barriers in the way of implementation of CLT in the Pakistani colleges, to contribute to the literature and to give some inputs to the teachers, curriculum developers, policy makers and educational administrators for promoting the effective communicative language teaching in colleges of Pakistan.

2. Methodology

The study uses qualitative research methodology with Interpretivism approach and inductive approach of reasoning which is based on the lived experience of college lecturers in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the context of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). To capture and interpret the subjective experiences of the participants, a phenomenological research design, in particular hermeneutical phenomenology, is implemented, and the researcher's professional perspective is included in the interpretation. The English lecturers are selected using criterion sampling approach whereby the selected English lecturers must possess the required criterion of teaching at college level in order to be relevant to the phenomenon of the study. Data is gathered using a semi-structured interview format, giving flexibility and depth of exploring participants experiences and perceptions. Thematic analysis is used to analyse the collected data, which helps to identify, interpret and report on patterns and themes within the data from the challenges and practices of CLT implementation.

3. Data Analysis and Discussion

The results of this research study suggest that the teachers in the college level in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are confronted with several interrelated issues in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) that are related to curriculum design, textbooks, students' background, institutional pressure, assessment system, inability of teachers to train and misunderstandings of the method. The discussion goes on to confirm the international nature of CLT, but also its challenge to implement in the local EFL context with structural and pedagogical constraints.

One of the big problems is that the goals of the National Curriculum are not in line with the English textbook. Although the curriculum tries to develop competent and vocal learners, the textbook fails to achieve these goals. The participants expressed their clear opinion that the textbook does not emphasize the communicative competence and is not balanced in the development of the communicative competence. The textbook was described as having “almost all language areas” but not having enough exercises to attend to all the four language skills; listening and speaking skills were not covered; the textbook also lacks lessons which could prepare students to use the English language in real situations, T8 said. Likewise, T6 said, “The book is not activity-based, rather, it requires teachers to apply GTM in a way. The book is written according to the examination system which emphasizes more on grammar and translation.” This indicates that the textbook organisation itself encourages Grammar Translation Method (GTM) instead of CLT. The analysis also shows that the learners are made to learn the rules of grammar but not communicative competence, which is defined as “what a speaker needs to know about how a language is used in particular situations for effective and appropriate communication” (McCarthy and Carter, 2001, p. 55). Furthermore, language used in authentic contexts (real-life situations) does not fully exist in the classroom and as a result, limits learners' ability to communicate outside the classroom (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). As a result, teachers are under pressure to implement GTM as this system and text are linked to the requirements for the examinations.

The other problem is that students' basic English knowledge is low and resistance to communicative learning. English studies are conducted at school level for about 10 years, and students are still not able to communicate effectively in English. Teachers expressed the challenges they had with implementing CLT. However, the attitude that T1 reported when he tried to involve them in an activity, made them not interested in participating, so that he gave up to apply CLT due to his frustration. In the same way, T2 said, “The level of English is very low when they reach college, they don't respond when I speak English to them, they are not confident enough to speak and understand English, just because of their background.” T13 also pointed out the long-term effects of traditional teaching, “How can one let them use English language fluently in only two years of time,

without using it for a decade? For ten long years, they've been used to translating English to their language of choice, and they do not understand if the teacher starts using CLT.” The responses indicate that students' prior experiences at school with GTM-based lessons contribute to resistance and dependency on the translation, which hinders the implementation in CLT.

The study also reveals that Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is still being applied in the English teaching process. Though teachers know that GTM is not a communicative competence program, they still need to use it because of systematic constraints. Based on the above, it can be seen that T9 stated that Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is an obsolete teaching approach that does not focus on communicative competence, and the objectives of this method is to develop students' grammar and translation competence rather than communicative competence. I am not prepared to change because I don't know anything about CLT, but I have heard about it. I'm too lazy to find time to learn about the new way of teaching, modern teaching methodologies.” Furthermore, “why should I bother trying to change to CLT, if everyone is comfortable with the traditional methods of teaching?” This suggests an awareness of CLT and a lack of readiness or ability to embrace CLT. Moreover, T11 emphasized the pressure from institutions, “It is really difficult for teachers at college level to adopt CLT, the teachers are strictly instructed to follow the plan that has been given by the departmental head, and they are all about how to use GTM. Therefore, textbooks, exams, administrative expectations and teacher habit are the reinforcement for GTM.

Another major problem is the absence of trained teachers with professional development. Teachers felt that they are not equipped to be trained in the new approaches to ELT. T9 said, “There are no trainings provided and if at all provided, it's not in relation to modern ELT teaching techniques and methodologies.” Likewise, T4 said, “Most of the teachers at college level cannot speak English fluently and they are not aware about how to apply CLT to solve the issues faced by them, which is due to the absence of special trainings.” T10 also recognised the responsibility of teachers, “We, the teachers, are also responsible for this. Majority of the teachers are reluctant towards getting familiar with these new concepts.” The results suggest that there is an institutional neglect and teacher resistance to the implementation of CLT. The teachers have a general knowledge of the name of CLT but lack knowledge of its application in practice. I know what CLT is, I don't know how to use it; I don't know what to do when it comes to using CLT,” said T3.

Conditions in the classroom further impede the implementation of CLT. The large class size (70-80 students in one class) and short class time (40 minutes) were reported by teachers as being impossible to handle for interactive teaching. T4 said, “Class duration is 40 minutes and I have to teach 70-80 students in my class, it is not possible to involve all the students in activities, CLT is an activity-oriented methodology.” T8 also said, “I have

to manage my classroom effectively in order to get the students engaged in different tasks, and CLT requires effective classroom management for me with 75 students in my classroom, which is convenient for me to teach them conventionally. Teachers are also under pressure to finish the syllabus content within a limited time period. T15 said: “Our departmental head monitors all teachers to ensure that the course has been fully completed or not. Each teacher is responsible to complete the course on schedule.” These factors render CLT extremely challenging.

Another major obstacle that needs to be overcome is that of grammar tests and grades. The assessment practices focus on memorization, grammar and translation rather than communication. T9 said, “All the tests/exams measure the students' knowledge of grammar, and we are very pressed to prepare our students for them or they get low grades.” T11 went on to say, “T11, motivated to secure good jobs, the students from primary level want to achieve high marks and the overall system supports this. The parents and teachers put constant pressure on the students to achieve good marks.” T7 then went on to say, “When students sit for these grammar tests they are doing fine, but when they are presented with a situation to communicate in, they fail.” Hence, the assessment practices are a barrier to communicative teaching and support GTM.

Overwork, inadequate teaching materials also have a significant impact on CLT implementation. Teachers reported a heavy workload in teaching more than one section and administrative work. “T10 said we are multi-tasking and don't have enough time to think about activities and to deal with a lot of students in the classroom.” In the same way, T13 said, “CLT is an activity that requires time to design, plan, organize, monitor groups and pair work, and give counseling and attention to the students, and it is hard to allocate time from our busy schedule to manage such activity.” Also, there is a dearth of resources, including audio-visual aids, projectors, electricity and language labs. T7 said that to practice CLT, A/V aids are required and other electronic devices with which all the colleges of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa are lacking.

Finally, methodological uncertainty regarding CLT also impacts its application. The respondents reveal that there is a lack of clarity on how to put CLT into practice. As stated by T14, “it was difficult to understand CLT since teachers are not aware of this methodology, there is a dire need to train teachers to use CLT effectively.” This indicates that although the concept of CLT may be taught in theory, teachers are not properly trained in practically using CLT in language classroom.

4. Conclusion

The study findings suggest that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at college level of KP is affected by the interrelated nature of institutional, pedagogical and contextual factors. One of the major problems is the incongruence between the National Curriculum and the English textbook, the latter of which is dominated by grammar and

exam-oriented aspects while the former puts emphasis on communicative competence. Consequently, teachers are forced to use the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and this is supported by the grades orientation and the examination system based on the grammar. In addition, students have low participation, resistance to English teaching, and weak English foundation because they have been taught English for a long time in traditional way in the primary and secondary schools. Additionally, relatively high teacher workload, low instructional time and large classes complicate the use of interactive, activity based teaching techniques that are essential to CLT.

In addition, the study finds that the absence of trained teachers and inadequate professional development opportunities are significant barriers to the effective implementation of CLT. Many teachers have heard of CLT but don't understand how to implement it in their classroom, as noted in the responses expressed as “I know what CLT is but I don't know how to implement it.” It is exacerbated by the limited institutional support, insufficient teaching aids (Audio-visual aids, language laboratory etc), and methodological uncertainty regarding the CLT. Overall, these are found to have created a strong dependence on traditional teaching methods and thus, the successful application of CLT in the context of EFL in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa is highly challenging.

5. Recommendations

It is recommended that the College English textbook should be revised based on the CLT. College English textbooks should combine grammar, vocabulary, and use of real life examples, and should include a variety of tasks that are based on activities and communicate meaning. Practical training sessions on CLT should be organized on regular basis with language centres and an annual workshop for teachers to improve their skills and professional development. Teaching aids like audio-visuals, projectors, language laboratories and regular electricity supply should be available in classrooms for communicative teaching. School classes should be cut to a maximum of 40 students and extra classrooms and teachers should be made available to cater for workload. Teachers also need to be trained and sensitized through training and awareness programs to change their teaching methods from Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to modern communicative methods. Moreover, the examination system has to be changed so that communicative competence, not only grammar and translation, is being tested, such as the ability to speak, listen and to use language in real situations. Finally, a monitoring body, that is strong and autonomous, should be set up in the college to oversee the implementation, training and overall teaching of CLT.

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