The Attitude of College Teacher Towards CLT in Rural Areas of Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the attitude of a college teacher towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL classroom. A male English teacher from a rural college participated in the study. The data were collected through classroom observation and follow-up interview. Results of the study indicate that the participant has positive attitude towards CLT but fails to implement it in classroom because of some obstacles such as teachers’ private tutoring, lack of resources, lack of relevant training, and objectives of the curriculum. The study offers some suggestions in the end.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, teacher’s attitude, rural Bangladesh

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) became popular among language teachers and researchers all over the world in last few decades because of its contribution in the increased number of English speakers (Islam, 2012). For example, the number of English speakers in China was more than 400 million (Bolton & Graddol, 2012). Similarly, the economy of Bangladesh has been developing in the last two decades and the government had to plan how the traders, educationists and common people could communicate with the international community (Islam & Begum 2017). Therefore, the government
announced the launch of Communicative English Language Teaching syllabus at secondary and higher secondary levels in 2000 to make the learners competent in English (İslam 2016).

**Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Bangladesh**

Although English was established as a foreign language in Bangladesh, CLT had been considered as an approach of foreign language teaching in the country. The educationists (such as Ahmed, 2014; Ansarey, 2012; Shurovi, 2014) claimed that there were many obstacles to implement CLT in classroom in Bangladesh which could be related to infrastructure, administration, teaching system and fluctuations of educational policy and modifications in the English curriculum. Moreover, Barman, Sultana and Basu (2006) explained that the obstacles might be related to lack of teachers’ competency in English, lack of teacher training, poor competence level of learners and sociocultural barriers to the implementation of CLT in the classroom. However, the country’s economy was expanding and the government had to take initiatives to implement communicative language teaching syllabus and to make the learners competent in English (İslam 2016).

Many research papers have been published to define the characteristics of CLT (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). Some linguists (such as Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1971) claimed that the main goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence. However, Canale and Swain (1980) argued that the teachers should focus on grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competences in the CLT classroom. Larsen-Freeman (2000) accepted this view as the aim of CLT activities.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) advised the teachers to engage the learners in communicative activities through proving interactive lessons in classroom. Teachers should use information gap activities and provide feedback to learners in order to achieve communicative competence in the target language (Johnson & Morrow, 1981). They might play different types of role in a CLT classroom such as they could work as guide, participant, facilitator and organizer. The learners could also play the role of negotiators in a communicative classroom (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Additionally, teachers would have to make the lessons learner-centered in the CLT classroom (Richard & Rodgers 2001).
Methodology

The present research is a qualitative work in nature. To collect data, class observation and in-depth interview are used. In this study the researchers follow interpretative research paradigm to analyze data. Moreover, they use ‘Thick Description’ in the analysis as it might help them to present the research beyond the surface level of the participant’s activities (Bryman, 2001). The thick description also allows the researchers to focus on the feelings and meanings of the participant’s activities in classroom.

Participant

An English language teacher from a rural degree college was selected as participant. The college was located around 350 kilometers away from the capital city Dhaka. The institution is renowned in the rural area as it was established 65 years ago. However, for ethical reason the participant is pseudo named as Hamid. He has twenty two years of experience of teaching English in rural areas of Bangladesh. He is a familiar teacher in the college as he has taught there for a long time. Hamid speaks to students inside and outside the classroom in Bangla.

The participant is selected for few reasons. Firstly, one of the researchers’ permanent residence is near the college. Besides, the local students informed that the participant is easy going and would provide the reliable information than any other teachers. Secondly, Hamid has the experience of teaching both the traditional and the current (communicative) English language teaching syllabus. Thirdly, the researchers had been informed by the learners that the participant used to teach according to students’ expectations. Finally, Hamid participated in an introductory training course of using CLT for one week in Dhaka. Fifth, he used Bangla in classroom to facilitate learning.

Observation

The researchers conducted an unstructured observation (Borg, 2006) in order to understand how the attitude of English language teachers toward CLT influences them to teach in classroom. Therefore, the researchers followed non-structured observation helps present rich and transparent data from the field (Cohen et al., 2007; Robson, 2002). Moreover, Bogdan and Bilden (1998) claim that it might be an opportunity for researchers during an observation to experience, see, and hear the activities of the participant in the
Attitude Towards CLT

research field. Therefore, the researcher collected some field notes from the observation like other qualitative researchers (see Islam, 2016; Islam & Begum, 2017; Khan, 1999). The field notes help the researchers understand the attitude of the teacher in CLT classroom and identify how it influences him to engage learners in his class activities. The researchers presented themselves as observers only and did not participate in any activity.

Interview

A semi-structured interview (McGrath, 2002; Punch, 2005; Seligar & Shohamy, 2003) with the participant was conducted. The researchers prepared some questions before the actual interview based on observation data. Additionally, other questions were raised on the basis of the interview. However, one of the researchers had a meeting with the participant. Ten days after he meeting the interview was conducted in the office of the participant for half an hour.

Results and discussion

It was evident from the classroom observation that Hamid did not focus on all the skills of CLT in his activities. He chose a topic from the prescribed syllabus and began to read the passage. Then he instructed a few students randomly to read the lines aloud to identify if the words of the passage were familiar to learners. He also asked them the meaning of some unknown words. Additionally, he explained the meaning of the words and sentences. Afterwards, he translated the whole passage to the students. He did not engage the learners in pair work and group work. There were no learner-centred activities in classroom and it was completely teacher-centred. Hamid used Bangla in classroom and did not encourage the learners to speak in the target language. However, the preface of the prescribed syllabus explains that the teachers and learners should focus on all skills of CLT. Additionally, it claims that learners would be able to communicate in English after the completion of the course. However, Hamid skipped all communicative activities and focused on translating the reading passage only.

The researchers conducted a follow-up semi-structured interview after the classroom observation. They had a formal conversation with Hamid and explained to him what was found in the observation. Then he was asked some basic questions regarding CLT. It was found that Hamid was aware about CLT. However, he did not apply it in classroom for many reasons.
First of all, he believed that class duration and size of the class was not convenient for him to apply the skills of CLT. He explained, “…there were 137 students in the classroom. More 33 students were absent because of cold weather on that day. There was 45 minutes for 170 students…”.

As he believed that time and class size were obstacles for him to implement CLT, he was asked why he did not split the class and make some small groups. He explained that he worked under another experienced teacher and that teacher was the decision maker in the college. Hamid also added that he had discussed with the decision maker regarding this issue but he did not accept it. Furthermore, Hamid explained that the decision maker lived near the college and provided private tuition. Therefore, the decision maker stopped him to facilitate students’ learning in classroom otherwise it might affect his private business. Hamid explained,

… I told many times to the decision makers to take steps. But he is not interested. His house is near the college and he invites the students at home for private tuition. Besides, he does not want to take more class. Even I told the principle to take to him but nothing worked…

The researchers also asked him about the use of Bangla in the classroom. He explained that he did not use the target language and did not encourage the learners for two reasons. Firstly, if he would speak in English the learners would not understand him. Secondly, level of the learners was very weak to use English in the classroom. Moreover, majority of the students came from poor class family. They would be happy to pass in the exam only. Hamid maintained, “…I had to think about the level of learners. Besides, the competence in English was not their aim. They wanted to pass in the exam only…”.

Exam system is also an obstacle to implement all the principles of CLT in classroom. Hamid explained that the exam system was different from the objective of the prescribed syllabus. The English exam focused on reading and writing only and skipped listening and speaking. Therefore, both teachers and students believed that they should focus on reading and writing to perform better in the exam and to ensure pass marks in the exam. English was considered as the most difficult subject among all the courses in the rural area of Bangladesh. Hamid said, “…everyone considers English as the most difficult subject. Therefore, the learners and teaches want to ensure pass in the exam. As the exam is based on reading and writing, everyone wants to focus on them…”.
Attitude Towards CLT

Lack of resources is another obstacle to implement CLT in classroom. Hamid explained that there were not enough resources in the college to implement all the tenets of CLT. For example, he explained that the college did not have any sound system for listening activities. Additionally, there were not enough books in the rural market. The teachers might have to go to cities to collect appropriate books to implement CLT. Hamid further added that the government is generous about technology and has provided one projector and one computer for the college. However, he felt that this equipment is not enough for a college and he needed further support such as internet connection: “…we need further resources to implement CLT. We have only one computer and projector but we do not have internet connection…”.

The lack of teacher training is also an obstacle to implement CLT in rural areas. Hamid explained that the teachers did not receive enough training from the government to implement CLT in the classroom. He also added, although he was trained for seven days it was not enough for a teacher. Furthermore, he added that he was self-conscious and curious for development to teach CLT. However, the government did not take necessary steps to train all the teachers. Hamid reports,

…yes, it’s true I was trained. But how about the rest? Look even the person in charge in this college is not trained to teach CLT. Still the situation of this college is better. If you consider the other rural college…

Therefore, it is evident to the researchers from the data analysis that Hamid was knowledgeable and had a positive attitude towards CLT. He believed that CLT could help the learners to improve their communication skills and it was also essential for their future. However, he failed to implement all the skills of the prescribed syllabus for many reasons. Firstly, the higher authority did not take necessary steps to implement all the skills of CLT. Secondly, the syllabus designers did not consider the sociocultural limitations of rural areas to implement CLT. Thirdly, there were mismatches between the exam system and the objective of CLT in classroom. Fourth, the level of learners influenced the teacher to stay away from CLT activities in the classroom. Fifth, majority of the teachers considered their private tuition business more lucrative than developing learners’ communication skills. Sixth, the teachers were not trained to implement CLT in classroom. Finally, there were lack of resources in rural areas.
Conclusion

Although the college teacher is interested in using CLT, they fail to implement the approach in the classroom. He faced institutional conflicts to implement it. Some teachers considered the classroom practice as an obstacle to their private tutoring business. While Hamid was interested, he did not receive enough support from higher authority of the college. Additionally, majority of the teachers were educated in English Literature; thus they have lack of knowledge in English Language Teaching. Therefore, they are reluctant to implement CLT in classroom. However, if the study were related to college teachers of urban areas, the result could be different. Hence, this study suggests providing adequate support for rural college teachers to implement CLT in the classroom.

References


Attitude Towards CLT


