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## Do We Need to Look for an Alternative to CLT in Bangladesh? A Study from Secondary Level English Teachers' Perspective

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### Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching is highly advocated by many applied linguists and English language teachers as an effective language teaching approach. But, the implementation of CLT in English as Foreign Language (EFL) context has encountered a huge number of difficulties. These difficulties vary widely from country to country. Bangladeshi English teachers also mention some problems that

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they face in applying CLT approach. They also uphold perceptions about the CLT principles. These perceptions and beliefs have direct impact on their teaching practice in the classroom. This study tries to find out a co-relation between their perceptions of CLT and impediments to implementation of CLT in secondary level English classes. This study also tries to find out whether the current approach-fetish ELT education system needs to be changed. The study was based on data collected from 20 secondary level English teachers of Bangladesh through questionnaires with fixed alternatives and unstructured interviews with the teachers. The answers were tabulated numerically and analyzed for interpretation.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching approach, Communicative competence, ESL Context, EFL Context, Traditional method.

## **Introduction**

Many a research work has been conducted to investigate if the Communicative Language Teaching approach, a Western innovation, can be applied to and followed as a language teaching method in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. (Burnaby and Sun, 1989, Ellis, 1996, Li, 1998, Xiaoju, 1984).

Most of the above- mentioned research focuses on the problems that teachers come across while applying Communicative Language Teaching approach in the ‘Outer Circle’ and ‘Expanding Circle’ (Jenkins, 2009) countries. Most of the problems identified are spotted in the education system, teachers’ misconceptions about CLT, infrastructure facilities of the institutions, socio-cultural factors, the traditional examination system, and large class size which relate to Bangladeshi English education scenario too. This study investigates the conceptions of 20 secondary English teachers about CLT and tries to identify the problems in its application in English teaching in Bangladesh. It also wants to know from the participating teachers their views about the appropriateness of CLT as an approach.

## Literature Review

A lot of research has been conducted worldwide regarding the appropriateness of CLT in EFL contexts by ESL and EFL researchers.

Some studies have emphasized the local necessity and the particular English teaching conditions in the EFL countries and the importance and success of traditional language teaching methods (Bhargava, 1986, Sampson, 1984, 1990) and some have strongly advocated the adoption of CLT in EFL countries (Prabhu, 1987). But, the majority of studies have recognized the difficulties EFL countries face in adopting CLT.

Ellis investigated the appropriateness of CLT in Vietnam. The problems that were discovered in Vietnam are related to the teachers' maintenance of deep-rooted tradition. The problem, according to Ellis, was due to two traditional practices, the cultural reluctance of the Vietnamese to challenge written words, and the focus on grammar and translation in the examination system. It was also revealed that the Vietnamese teachers believed that they did not have necessary knowledge of target language culture and CLT is culturally incompatible with the Vietnamese culture and education system. In that study Ellis concluded that "although there is a strong demand for communicative competence in Vietnam, it is not matched by adequate teacher training, communicative language materials and suitable learning environments". Ellis (1994) had doubt about the universal relevance of communicative approach in Far-Eastern countries. He argued that the Western idea that 'communicative competence shares the same priority in every society may not be true; and so he asserted that communicative approach needs to be culturally attuned and accepted to make it suitable for Asian situation. Hence, he suggests a kind of "mediating" between the Western and Eastern teachers and integration of the two teaching methods to make language teaching successful in EFL countries.

Gorsuch (2000) investigated Japanese teachers' approval of communicative activities. Eight hundred and eighty four Japanese senior high school EFL teachers participated in the study. Based on the data of the study, Gorsuch concluded that teachers were largely influenced by the requirements of the university entrance examination. As the university entrance examination was crucially important in students' lives, both the institution and the students put pressure on teachers to allow them to study materials needed for the examination. Gorsuch also found that majority of teachers preferred a more traditional way of teaching and were opposed to the new teaching method of CLT. Another factor was the use of target language. Teachers did not use the target language in the classroom which they believe was not wise to use in high school without the explicit direction from the teachers.

Studies were conducted in China about the suitability of CLT there. Burnaby and Sun (1989) report that teachers in China found it difficult to use CLT. The constraints cited include the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching method, class sizes and schedules, resources and equipment, the low status of teachers who teach communicative rather than analytical skills and strategic competence. Anderson's, (1993) study of CLT in China report the following problems as barriers to the implementation of CLT. They are lack of properly trained teachers, lack of appropriate texts, and materials, and students' not being accustomed to CLT.

Studies conducted in Bangladesh regarding the usability of CLT by a number of researchers are Chowdhury (2011), Chowdhury and Ha (2008,), Shahidullah (2007), (Farooqui, 2006), Karim,2004), Hasan,(2004). There are mixed opinions about the application and suitability of CLT in Bangladeshi EFL context. Karim (2004) conducted a survey among 36 post secondary ELT teachers in six private universities of Bangladesh to investigate into their beliefs, perception and expectations about CLT. Karim's studies manifest many positive opinions by the participating teachers. The findings as described by the researcher suggest the fact that the participating teachers did not support some of the common misconceptions about CLT. There is a misconception prevailing among the Bangladeshi teachers that CLT requires a good

proficiency of the teachers. But, Karim found that the majority of teachers opined that lack of teachers' proficiency is not a problem. The respondents identified students' lack of proficiency as a problem. The studies reported that 50% of teachers believed the misconception that CLT requires a lot of time from teachers for preparation of lesson. The other barriers identified by the respondents are large class size, inadequate resources in the classroom, immovable furniture in the classrooms, traditional teacher—centered grammar teaching method, traditional grammar-based examination, lack of support from the administration, lack of teachers' training, lack of oral fluency of the teachers, teachers' lack of time to prepare communicative materials, lack of authentic materials and audio visual materials .

Chowdhury and Ha (2008) conducted a study with six Bangladeshi university teachers. The study was done on the basis of qualitative research through unstructured interviews with the participants. The respondents identified some misconception about CLT as powerful barriers to the adoption of CLT in Bangladesh. A respondent suggested that mediating between CLT and traditional grammar translation method will be a wholesome choice for Bangladeshi ELT situation.

Chowdhury's (2011) study found that 80% of higher secondary teachers rated the following problems as great difficulties in implementing CLT in Bangladesh. They are 'students' unwillingness to participate in communicative activities' 'large class size,' 'lack of training in CLT' and 'lack of logistic support from administration'.

## **Materials and Methods**

This study follows the qualitative approach to research. Questionnaire with fixed alternative was distributed among 33 secondary school teachers of two Upazilas (administrative units having almost half a million of population each) of Chittagong district. The questionnaires were distributed to the teachers through the government Secondary Education Officers of these two Upzilas. Teachers submitted the filled in questionnaire to the same persons. However, teachers were asked to provide their

phone numbers for any interviews if required. Twenty two questionnaires could be collected. From among them, 20 questionnaires (10 from each Upazila) were analyzed for data collection. All the questions were with fixed alternatives because these types of questions are easy to analyze and do not lead to confusing interpretation. However, for clarification of some answers unstructured interviews were arranged with a number of teachers.

### **Communicative Language Teaching Approach in Bangladesh**

To improve the quality of ELT, CLT had been introduced and teachers have been being encouraged to follow this approach. To facilitate the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh, batches of senior English teachers were sent overseas-almost exclusively to the English-speaking West-for further training. But, the fact is that at all levels of education the Grammar Translation method is still being followed in Bangladesh. So, there is conflict between the policy –level expectation and actual practice (Chowdhury and Ha,2008).

In 2000, the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) which was funded by the Bangladesh Government and by the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DFID) introduced communicative textbook up to the Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) level. Chowdhury and Farooqui discuss how the ELTIP, jointly run by the British Council, Dhaka and the National Curriculum and Textbook Board attempted to improve the quality of ELT in secondary and higher secondary education across the country. This new curriculum was a complete departure from the previous teaching method. This method was student-centered and aimed at helping students acquire 'communicative competence' through interaction and practice of skills in the classroom. Textbooks for the first time were written by Bangladeshi teachers and those were culturally compatible and familiar (Chowdhury, 2011). To provide well-structured training program, ELTIP gave training to secondary teachers through 27 centers across the country. ELTIP trained teachers so that they could make the best use of the newly

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written communicative textbooks with a view to developing the four language skills of the learners. DFID funded two phases of the ELTIP (1997-2001), and after DFID left in 2002, ELTIP had been funded by the NCTB and seven Boards of Intermediate and Secondary Education. ELTIP had two objectives: (1) to produce CLT-based English textbooks for grades 9-10 at the secondary level and grades 11-12 at the higher secondary cycle, and (2) to train school teachers and empower them to teach communicative English (Paul, 2004, Hamid, 2005, NCTB, 2001, 2003, Rahman, 2007, cited in Hamid and Baldauf 2008). So, to continue the development of ELT training in Bangladesh, DFID started another project called 'English in Action' from May, 2008 which will continue up to May, 2017.

### **Definition of Communicative Language Teaching Approach**

A huge number of books and papers have been written to define the characteristics of CLT. Communicative Language Teaching encapsulates some prominent characteristics. They are: Meaning is very important. Interaction helps a lot in acquiring communicative competence. Function of language is vital. Fluency precedes accuracy, etc.

Littlewood (1981) highlights the importance of interaction in acquiring communicative competence. He says that CLT pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, and hence combines these to a more fully communicative view (p.1). CLT advocates to go beyond the teaching of grammatical rules of the target language and recommends that learners will develop communicative competence by using the target language in a meaningful way. Interaction is the means to use the language in a meaningful way.

Larsen Freeman (2001) considers interaction as the prerequisite to language learning. To her language is for communication and in a communicative class everything is done with a communicative intent (p.132). Students learn a language through communicative activities. Larsen Freeman also observes that language games, such as, card game, scrambled sentences, problem solving tasks, such as,

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picture strip story, and role play activities that match the principles of communicative approach are integrated in a CLT classroom.

Richards and Rodgers (2001) illustrate that ‘the emphasis in communicative language teaching on the process of communication rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different role for learners from those found in more traditional second language classrooms’. Learners are thought to be active participants in the language classroom.

## **Results and Discussion**

The analysis of the questionnaires reveals the following data.

### *Analysis of Question No. 1*

The teachers have varying level of experience ranging from 1 to 10 years. Please see Table-1.

**Table 1: Experience**

1-2 years	3-4 years	5-6 years	7-8 years	9-10 years
2	2	11	4	1

### *Analysis of Question No. 2*

All the teachers are found to have gone through training of various types. They are ELTIP, B.Ed. and workshops on English teaching. As the teachers have done the training during the last 10 years, they said that their training focused mainly on CLT. Many of them have done more than one training and workshop. Table 2 illustrates this.



**Table 2 : Training**

ELTIP	B.Ed.	Workshop
17	10	22

***Analysis of Question No. 3***

Question no.3 was intended to elicit teachers' conceptions about the general principles of CLT. This question lists 13 statements which are descriptive of CLT, and some of them are common misconceptions about CLT being prevalent in EFL countries. Responses to this questionnaire item indicate the Bangladeshi English teachers' conceptions about general principles of CLT. It is found from the responses that majority of teachers uphold most of the right perceptions about CLT whereas they uphold a few wrong conceptions too.

***Right Perceptions***

1. CLT is a student-centered approach 100%
4. CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy 100%
5. CLT emphasizes communication in L2 80%

Again it is seen that these teachers do not agree with the misconceptions about CLT being held in EFL countries as is seen from their negative responses. These teachers do not adhere to these misconceptions by opting for 'not true'. For example,

3. CLT means discourse competence only 80%
11. CLT means teaching speaking only 90%

However, 90% of the teachers subscribe to the misconception.

6. CLT relies heavily on speaking and listening skills 90%.
12. CLT puts too much pressure on teachers 85%. (Please see table 3.)

**Table3: Perception Table**

Serial no.	Features	True	Not true	Don't know	Total Responses
1	CLT is a student-centered approach	20	0	0	20
2	CLT means strategic and sociolinguistic competence	18	1	1	20
3	CLT means discourse competence only	2	16	2	20
4	CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy	20	0	0	20
5	CLT emphasizes communication in L2	18	2	0	20
6	CLT relies heavily on speaking and listening skills	18	2	0	20
7	CLT requires the teachers to have high proficiency in English	16	4	0	20
8	CLT means only pair work and group work	4	16	0	20
9	CLT requires higher knowledge of target culture	5	13	2	20
10	CLT means not teaching grammar	2	18	0	20

11	CLT means teaching speaking only				
2	18	0	20		
12	CLT puts too much pressure on teachers.	17	2	1	20
13	CLT is basically an English as Second Language, not English as Foreign Language methodology.	2	16	2	20

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***Analysis of Question No. 4***

Question No.4 was intended to find out which difficulties the teachers face in adopting CLT in secondary English classes. These difficulties are traced in studies done around the world focusing on the problems faced in EFL contexts. The table 4 shows the following results.

90% of teachers identify the following factors as great difficulties in implementing CLT in Bangladesh. They are:

‘Teacher does not have sufficient spoken skill, large class size, students do not want to engage in communicative activities, students ‘low level proficiency’ followed by ‘teacher does not have sufficient time to prepare communicative materials-80% and traditional grammar based examinations 75% and lack of enough logistic support from administration 65%’.

**Table 4: Barrier Table**

SL No.	The following are some of the difficulties that teachers in Bangladesh and other EFL/ ESL	Not a problem	Manageable problem	Great difficulty	Total Responses
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	countries have in adopting CLT . Do you come across these difficulties or do you think they might be difficulties for you in adopting CLT I n Bangladesh?				
a	Teacher does not have sufficient spoken skill	0	2	18	20
b	Teacher does not have enough target culture knowledge	9	9	2	20
c	Teacher does not have sufficient time to prepare communicative materials	2	2	16	20
d	Students do not want to engage in communicative activities	2	2	18	20
e	Examinations are traditionally grammar based	0	5	15	20
f	Large class size	0	2	18	20
g	The differences between EFL/ESL teaching contexts	0	10	10	20
h	Lack of training in CLT	0	10	10	20
i	Not enough logistic support from administration	0	7	13	20
j	Teachers do not know what CLT means	0	10	10	20
k	Unsuitability of Western educational system in EFL context	8	8	4	20
l	Lack of effective assessment system of speaking and listening	4	6	10	20

	skills				
m	Students' low level proficiency	0	2	18	20

***Analysis of Question No. 5***

This question is intended to know if the teachers consider CLT as the appropriate approach for Bangladeshi context. The following results are found.

Yes-3

No-16

Don't know-1

80% of teachers do not consider CLT as the suitable approach for Bangladesh.

***Analysis of Question No. 6***

This question was aimed at finding out the participant teachers' views about their preference for accuracy, fluency or both at the same time. The responses yield the following results:

Fluency 2

Accuracy 8

Both fluency and accuracy 10

It is seen from the responses that 90% of teachers are not ready to compromise on accuracy.

***Analysis of Question No. 7***

This question is meant to elicit from the teachers if they think that CLT is a must to make the Bangladeshi learners communicatively competent users of English. The responses yield the following results.

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Yes-2

No-16

Not sure-2.

### *Analysis of Question No. 8*

This question is intended to know from the learners whether they suggest: to follow the current method, CLT, or find an alternative approach that incorporates the best and applicable in Bangladeshi context or more training of teachers in CLT. The answers reveal the following results:

Alternative approach 16

More training in CLT 3

Not sure 1

### **Discussion**

We can trace a kind of relation between the teachers' perception about CLT and the identification of barriers in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. For example, the difficulty 'Teacher does not have sufficient time to prepare communicative materials identified by (80%) of teachers as a great difficulty matches well with the perception 'CLT puts too much pressure on teachers' held by 85% of teachers. We can also compare the findings in this study with previous research done on the same topic elsewhere. For example, here 75% of teachers regard grammar based examination as a great difficulty. Ellis' research about the appropriateness of CLT in Vietnam found that among other things, the focus on grammar and translation in the examination system was a great problem faced by the Vietnamese teachers. However, a difference can be identified between this study and Ellis' study. In Ellis' study, Vietnamese teachers believed that they did not have necessary knowledge of target language culture. On the other hand, in our study only 10% of teachers rank this

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as a great difficulty. This might be due to the fact that at present, all the text books (class 6 -12) have indigenous topics and subject matters and been written by local writers. In Ellis' study he had doubt about the universal relevance of CLT approach and suggests a kind of 'mediating' between the Western and Eastern teachers and integration of two teaching methods to make language teaching successful in EFL countries. This view is also expressed by 80% of teachers in our study.

A comparison of our study with Gorsuch's study done in Japan about the Japanese teachers' approval of communicative activities can be made. In that study Gorsuch found that majority of teachers did not want to use the target language. In our study, 90% of teachers identified the barrier 'Teacher does not have sufficient spoken skill' as a great difficulty.

A striking dissimilarity of the present study with the previous research done on the same topic can be discussed here. For example, the items, 'The differences between EFL/ESL teaching contexts, Lack of training in CLT, Teachers do not know what CLT means' pose great problems in the implementation of CLT in many countries, but in this study these factors are not identified in Bangladesh. A significant number of teachers' (50%) identification of these problems as a manageable problem is remarkable in this study. But quite unexpectedly, 80% of teachers say that CLT is not a necessity to make learners communicatively competent and alternative method can help learners and teachers.

In Karim's study lack of only students' proficiency in English, not that of teachers, is a problem. In our study both students' and teachers' lack of proficiency is a great difficulty as identified by 90% of teachers. The participating teachers' no compromise with accuracy is remarkable. It is conflicting with their perception that 'CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy. This choice demonstrates their antagonism towards CLT as is the case in many EFL countries.

The teachers' option for an alternative approach for ELT is in line with their negation of CLT as a necessary method for making the learners communicatively competent. In both cases the percentage of teachers is same, i.e. 80%. However, in reply to our questions in the interview, 'How will then the learners be communicatively competent in L2 if the CLT is not followed?', they say that CLT is not essential to make the learners competent in communication. They opine that if the learners become grammatically competent and they have a good stock of vocabulary, they will become confident and accordingly they will become fluent speaker. They also opine that because of CLT learners are not learning correct English.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The participants of this study were selected from the rural schools. It could have been more representative if 50 percent of these teachers were from the urban areas because it is true that there is difference between the quality of education in rural and urban areas of Bangladesh. However, the two areas we selected for our data collection are only 14 to 25 miles away from the Chittagong Metropolitan area. These two areas are economically and educationally more advanced than the majority of villages of Bangladesh.

The study was done only from the perspective of the teachers. Students' opinions were not taken into consideration. But we wanted to study the problem from the point of view of the teachers, i.e., the problems faced by the secondary school teachers in implementing CLT in Bangladesh.

### **Conclusion**

The majority of teachers' knowledge about CLT principles is right except a few misconceptions. The right perceptions do not contribute positively to classroom practice. The problems are in the implementation process. The problems in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh as identified by the participating teachers are



almost same as those encountered by teachers in EFL countries. However, there are some striking differences in the identified problems.

The majority of teachers are also not happy with the current method of ELT, that is CLT and they want an alternative approach where there will be a balance between fluency and accuracy because the objective for introducing CLT to develop communicative competence is not fulfilled. So, there is a call for alternative approach to language teaching for the development of communicative competence. However, communicative competence can be developed through other syllabuses as well. So, Howatt (1984) says, “Communicative performance can be promoted on the basis of a traditional language syllabus, provided that the linguistic material is suitably selected, presented and exercised.” So, there is a need for indigenous method.

To do that, EFL countries should strive to establish their own research contingents and encourage method specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that take into account the political, economic, social and cultural factors and, most important of all, the EFL situations in their countries. So, Richards (1992) & Ashworth (1984) comment that instead of ‘follow the methods techniques,’ it should try to ‘develop a methodology’ that is culture and context sensitive; in other words, bottom-up, not top-down. Hence, there is an attempt to strike a balance between communicative syllabus and traditional grammar-based syllabus in many countries, for example, in the secondary and higher secondary English curriculum of our country. So, a course with grammar-based syllabus had been introduced in all the classes in secondary level from 2011 to remove the loopholes of the English education scenario.

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### Questionnaire

1. What is your educational qualification? BA/MA/ BA in English/MA in English/Other( please elaborate)
  
2. Have you received any training in CLT? (Please elaborate)
  
3. What is Communicative Language Teaching approach in your view? Tick those which you think are the features of the CLT.

1. CLT is a student-centred approach.
2. CLT means strategic and sociolinguistic competence.
3. CLT means discourse competence only.
4. CLT emphasises fluency over accuracy.
5. CLT emphasises communication in L2.
6. CLT relies heavily on speaking and listening skills.
7. CLT requires the teachers to have high proficiency in English.
8. CLT means only pair work and group work.
9. CLT requires higher knowledge of target culture.
10. CLT means not teaching grammar.
11. CLT means teaching speaking only.
12. CLT put too much pressure on teachers.
13. CLT is basically an English as Second Language, not English as Foreign Language methodology.

4. The following are some of the difficulties that teachers in Bangladesh and other EFL/ ESL countries have in adopting CLT. Do you come across these difficulties or do you think they might be difficulties for you in adopting CLT in Bangladesh?

Try a scale (circle one) how much of an issue is : 1-.no problem.....2-.manageable problem.....3- .great difficulty

- |   |   |   |   |
|---|---|---|---|
| a) Teacher does not have sufficient spoken skill                            | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| b) Teacher does not have enough target culture knowledge                    | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| c) Teacher does not have sufficient time to prepare communicative materials | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| d) Students do not want to engage in communicative activities               | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| e) Examinations are traditionally grammar based                             | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| f) Large class size   | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| g) The differences between EFL/ESL teaching contexts                        | 1 | 2 | 3 |
| h) Lack of enough training in CLT   | 1 | 2 | 3 |

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- |   |       |
|---|-------|
| i) Not enough logistic support from administration                      | 1 2 3 |
| j) Teachers do not know what CLT means                                  | 1 2 3 |
| k) Unsuitability of Western educational system in EFL context.          | 1 2 3 |
| l) Lack of effective assessment system of speaking and listening skills | 1 2 3 |
| m) Students' low level of English proficiency                           | 1 2 3 |
| n) Other  |       |

5. Do you think that CLT is a suitable approach for Bangladeshi context?  
yes/no/don't know.

6. Tick the one you would prefer for your learners to acquire,  
a) fluency b) accuracy c) both at the same time.

7. Do you think that CLT is necessary to make the Bangladeshi learners  
communicatively competent users of English? Tick a) yes b) no c) don't know.

8. Which one is more important to you? a) following the current  
approach/methodology slavishly b) teacher training in CLT c) not sure.

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