

## Communicative Language Teaching: A Teachers' Perspective

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English Language has become the synonym of all progress in the recent years. On one hand, the Educational process throughout is fast moving towards appropriating, assimilating, predicting, evaluating the essential educational cores which characterize the modern pedagogy, but on the other, the knowledge of teaching it well is not accessible to all the teachers of our undeveloped regions. Many students and teachers are deprived of the resources that can set them on the path of development and provide them with the opportunities for progress and a better life. Making this new knowledge accessible to them is the need of the day. Teaching and learning of English in educational institutions in these regions is rather inadequate and unproductive. The main reason is its being carried on mechanically as a ritual without any involvement on the part of teachers or learners at most of the educational institutions. But surely, there are educational places in India, where innovations in ELT have been carried out.

Among these is the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) which is viewed as the most effective and widely used approach in EFL/ESL teaching. It is an approach that emphasizes [interaction](#) as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a [language](#). It can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. These principles are:

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities
- Fluency is an important dimension of communication
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error

Since there is neither a single text (nor authority on this approach) nor any single model that is universally accepted as authoritative, CLT becomes different from the other approaches of language teaching. But, since its inception, CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world. Obviously it is due to its goal of teaching communicative competence. For the said purpose, a variety of activities/tasks are carried out in a CLT classroom such as - Role Play, Interviews, Games, Language exchange, Surveys, Pair work etc.

With the inception of ‘Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)’ in late 1960s, English teaching has been affected positively showing some hopeful signs of modifications and modernization in India. Among these signs are the introduction of CLT curriculum by Central Board of School Education in all its affiliated schools, infusion of technology with the teaching of English in the form of Language Labs, and reframing of the curriculum by some universities following CLT approach. As a result, new ELT textbooks have been produced which are in contrast to the earlier traditional, structural, grammar-based materials. According to some teachers, the CLT approach for teaching English has certainly an edge over the earlier approaches.

But in spite of all the aforesaid good/positive factors, there still remain many problems in the effective implementation of these innovations at most of the places:

- inadequate continuous professional development of teachers,
- indifferent attitude of the administrators,
- lack of proper infrastructure at many institutions,

Though the syllabuses claim to be communicatively oriented, there seem to be a common understanding that the teachers’ orientation about the different theories and principles of communicative language teaching approach is limited. According to Karavas, the teachers feel a wide gap between theory and classroom practices:

Courses designed to train teachers in the new approach focus on transmitting information about the new approach and persuading teachers of its effectiveness. When the teachers return to their classrooms they misinterpret the new ideas and translate them to conform to their existing classroom routines – at the same time believing that they are doing exactly what the new approach calls for.<sup>1</sup>

It is true. As seen in many areas, the teachers face difficulties in promoting the CLT approach as intended. These difficulties are –

- Internal constraints
- External constraints

**Internal Constraints** refer to factors that come from within teachers themselves, such as poor subject knowledge and resistance in changing the comfortable existing methodology. In the small towns, where most of the teachers have been teaching the traditional syllabus, they are not interested in diverting from the lecture method of which they have become an expert and the students are their obedient/passive listeners. Also, many of them find themselves lacking in communicative competency themselves, so they become automatically averse to the whole idea. To make the class learner centred, it becomes a must for the teachers to motivate every student to

speak and also be very patient to listen to the poor speakers of English. This motivation and patience is very difficult to find in the large size classes comprising of 70-80 students each. In order to motivate the students to have good communication skills, the teacher has to create new activities for the classroom, supervise and get involved himself/herself with the students. Now, whereas some teachers like the idea, most of them find it a primary school exercise. Not only that, most of the teachers find it embarrassing at the college level to indulge in such activities when they should be teaching Shakespeare or Milton (considered higher level things). Another important problem comes when the teachers forget it completely that the lesser number of texts in the syllabus are for the sole purpose of devoting most of the time in the aforesaid tasks/activities. They get the syllabus finished in a very short time using of course the old methodology of teaching and start criticizing the new syllabus saying that this is meant for primary school children. Not only that, the old masters refuse to admit that they are wrong somewhere. Even if an ELT expert tries to make them understand the altogether different methodology and specifically designed curriculum, they refuse to adapt because 'who can teach them to teach English (their own subject)?' This way the purpose of introducing new ELT approaches like CLT fails totally if the teachers are not trained for that effectively. Or we can say that the cycle of curriculum innovation is incomplete because changes in methodologies and materials are not supported by an attempt to achieve a parallel change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs.

The expanding education endeavours demand teachers to play new roles in the classroom. The teachers are no longer transmitters of knowledge. As facilitators having commitment towards quality learning, they actively involve themselves in designing learning activities and fixing methods of transaction and assessment. In order to play these roles effectively, teachers need to participate actively in multilevel professional development. Now, in the big cities like Delhi, teachers might be taking care of their continuous professional development, but not in small towns/or Govt. Sectors. I'm not talking of the usual refresher courses of English here, which do nothing but get the teachers listen to the old masters passively in a classroom situation. The teachers must continuously get involved in empowering themselves through symposiums, national seminars, training programmes and various short-term courses which aim at the ultimate educational development and progress of the students.

**External Constraints** refer to the factors that come from structural and organizational elements such as lack of resources and administrative obstacles. Agreed that it is the duty of a teacher to adopt the best method or technique while teaching English, but the teacher will be helpless in a situation where the authorities/central bodies that control the institutions do not help him/her. It is seen that there are powerful impediments working against the acceptance of CLT. The syllabuses based on CLT pattern are generally Task Based and Learner Centered. The tasks or activities carried out in the classrooms require some infrastructure different from the usual old styled classrooms. For example, the usual desks/benches in colleges are heavy and become a

hindrance if groups or pairs are to be formed for discussions etc. For that purpose, light weight separate chairs are required. Also, since the students do not rely on the teacher for a model but be comfortable with listening to their peers in group or pair work tasks, the classrooms tend to become noisy which may disturb the adjacent classes. So, not only the infrastructure but an entire separate wing for the language classes is needed. In addition, shorter class sizes, treating English as an important subject like other subjects and supporting the innovative teachers can help to improve the scenario of bad communication skills. For these and other such things the support of the governing authorities becomes essential.

In the major decisions like changing the whole curriculum of English, the help and support of administrators is needed at every step. Right from approval to the effective implementation of CLT, their role becomes most important. What usually happens is that an updated administrator in the field approves and takes care of all the needs of English teachers along with the equipment/tools/teaching aids etc., the teachers get inspiration and encouragement to go further in the said direction and put in their best, but all of a sudden the administration changes, and the new one sometimes is least interested in all the earlier projects related to ELT which discourages the hardworking staff totally.

Apart from all the other supplementary material (like lots of papers used as handouts during the listening tests etc.), there is need of proper infrastructure like setting up of Language Labs, Tape Recorders, Computers, Xerox Machines for various other listening/speaking activities in the CLT classrooms, which is not to be found at many places. Even if once it is arranged somehow, there is no guarantee of its proper maintenance.

Therefore, it is important that policy makers, syllabus designers, and teacher educators take into account teachers' problems when there is change of teaching materials and methods. It is also important to consider the context in which it is operating. The concerned bodies should take measures to minimize the constraints teachers face while they implement CLT in the actual classrooms. The authorities should organize successive workshops, seminars and in-service trainings so that teachers can get the chance to share experiences on how to cope with the existing problems. English language teachers should make themselves ready for a change. And since change is inevitable they are expected to equip themselves with everything the innovative language teaching has brought and this in turn can help them to find remedies to the difficulties they encounter in the classrooms. Or in the existing scenario of regional languages taking over international languages, there is an urgent need to make our learners communicatively competent without going into the debate of first, second or third language. There has to be a holistic approach to language teaching and learning.

**References:**

1. Karavas-Doukas, “Using Attitude Scales to Investigate Teachers’ Attitudes to the Communicative Approach”. <http://www.slideshare.net/ehsanataei/elt-j-1996karavasdoukas18798>