

Construction of Knowledge in the Research on CLT in Bangladesh

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This article makes an attempt to show how the choices of researcher(s) affect the construction of knowledge based on two studies conducted on the problems in implementing communicative language teaching (CLT) in the perspective of Bangladesh. The first research article titled “Problems of CLT in Bangladesh: Ways to Improve” was published in the *International Journal of Education Learning and Development* by Rahman and Karim (2015). The researchers aimed to find out the problems of failure of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh and to provide some possible solutions for such problems. They used a “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” as the method for data collection (p. 78). They chose “10 teachers of English from secondary and higher secondary levels” from rural areas of Chittagong, Bangladesh as the participants for their study (p. 79). The second research article titled “Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Context: Teachers Attitude and Perception in Bangladesh,” was published in *ASA University Review* by Ansarey (2012) who tried to investigate the difficulties and challenges that EFL teachers face in implementing CLT in their English classrooms. She used “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” as the modes of data collection (p. 65). She selected “30 teachers of English teaching at primary and secondary levels” from Dhaka City of Bangladesh (p. 66). The construction of knowledge in a study, is affected by several factors such as the connectedness between the purpose and research questions, the selection of appropriate methods in relation to the questions, how successfully methods are carried out, selection of appropriate participants, proper design of research instruments, how data are analyzed, etc.

In a well-designed study, the correlation between the purpose and the research questions should be maintained. In the study of Rahman and Karim (2015), the correlation between the purpose and the research questions is coherent. The first research question in their study matches the purpose of the study which was “to find out the problems of failure of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh” (p. 77). Their first research question asks, “What are the problems of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh?” (p. 77). The question is explicitly directed towards finding out the problems of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh and that is the purpose of the study. Therefore, there is coherence between the purpose and the first research question. Similarly, the second research question of Rahman and

Karim (2015) aligns with the purpose of their study. The authors attempted to provide “some possible solutions” for the problems of failure of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh (p. 77). Their second research question directly asks, “What are the ways to overcome the problems of CLT in Bangladesh?” (p. 77). The question seeks to find out some possible solutions by asking the ways to overcome the problems of CLT in Bangladesh. So, the second research question of Rahman and Karim (2015) corresponds to the purpose of the study. Therefore, both the questions of Rahman and Karim (2015) align with the purpose of their study. In the second research article, though Ansarey (2012) did not mention her research questions explicitly; the four objectives of her study can be interpreted as four of her research questions since they serve the purpose of her research questions. She also did not mention the purpose statement clearly in the introduction.

However, the title of Ansarey’s (2012) article “Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Context: Teachers Attitude and Perception in Bangladesh” shows a clear consistency with her objectives which are to “find out the contribution of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh” and “to know the difficulties and challenges that EFL teachers face in implementing CLT in their English classrooms” (p. 62). The connectedness between the purpose and the research questions of a study is an important factor since the consistency between these two sections helps to determine appropriate methods on which the construction of the desired knowledge is dependent in a study.

Methods are the means to construct knowledge relative to the research questions. Therefore, in order to construct specific knowledge, methods should be chosen carefully so that they are appropriate to answer the research questions.

In the study undertaken by Rahman and Karim (2015), the methods do not suit the first research question which asks, “What are the problems of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh?” (p. 77). The question asks about the problems that teachers face in implementing CLT in Bangladesh and so this is a question about teachers’ practices. It is important to notice that the question does not ask about the teachers’ “perception” or what the teachers “think” about the problems of CLT in Bangladesh.

In order to seek the answer of this question, Rahman and Karim (2015) used a “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” which are “perception methods” (p. 79). Both the “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” could be used effectively if the questions were about the teachers’ “perception” about the prevailing problems of CLT in Bangladesh. The use of “perception methods” in order to collect data for a question about teachers’ practices is defective because of the fundamental differences between the two by nature.

Similarly, in Rahman and Karim (2015) the methods do not fit the second research question which asks, “What are the ways to overcome the problems of CLT in Bangladesh?” (p. 77). The question seeks to investigate the means to succeed in dealing with the problems that the teachers face practically in implementing CLT in Bangladesh. So, this is a question about teachers’ practice as the possible solutions for the implementation of CLT are directly related to teachers’ practices. Rahman and Karim (2015) used a “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” which are “perception methods.” Logically, “perception methods” are not at all suitable to collect authentic data for a question about teachers’ practices. Since the methods do not support any of the questions, the knowledge Rahman and Karim (2015) constructed in relation to their research questions is questionable. The researchers asked questions about teachers’ practices, but they constructed knowledge about teachers’ perception.

A similar mismatch between the methods and the objectives is found in the study conducted by Ansarey (2012). In her study, methods do not align with the first objective which aims “to identify the problems that are inherent in English teaching in Bangladesh” (p. 62). This objective refers to teachers’ practices as it wants to find out the problems which are existing permanently in English teaching in the context of Bangladesh. In order to achieve this objective, Ansarey (2012) used “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” which are “perception methods” (p. 65). So, methods do not correspond with the first objective. Again, Ansarey’s (2012) methods do not fit the second objective where she wants “to find out the contribution of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh” (p. 62). This objective also refers to teachers’ practices because in order to find out the contribution of CLT in Bangladesh, it is important either to observe language teaching in the classroom or to undertake any other effective means. Ansarey (2012) employed “perception methods” to achieve this objective and so methods do not correlate to the second objective. Similarly, methods do not match the third and fourth objective which respectively aim “to know the feasibility of communicative language teaching” and “to know the difficulties and challenges that EFL teachers face in implementing CLT in their English classrooms” (p. 62). Both the objectives of Ansarey (2012) are related to teachers’ practices and so “survey questionnaire” and “follow-up interviews” cannot collect authentic data to achieve those objectives effectively (p. 65). Survey questionnaire and follow-up interviews can collect data about teachers’ perception and not about teachers’ practices. Since methods are not appropriate for any the objectives, Ansarey (2012) fails to construct the appropriate knowledge relative to her objectives. Her objectives reflected teachers’ practices but the knowledge she constructed reflected teachers’ perceptions. In both the studies, either the research questions or the methods should be changed to construct focused knowledge relative to questions. Therefore, while conducting a study, utmost care should be taken to choose the appropriate methods depending on the nature of the research questions. The construction of specific knowledge can be attributed to the selection of appropriate methods in relation to the research questions.

The construction of knowledge in a study is greatly affected by the choice of participants by the researcher(s). The selection of appropriate participants is a crucial factor for the construction of trustworthy knowledge relative to research questions. Different groups of participants can construct different knowledge in response to the similar questions. For example, Rahman and Karim (2015) chose “10 teachers of English” from rural institutions (p. 79). Among the participants “5 of them were male, and the rest 5 were female” (p. 79). Most of the participants “were 30 to 55 years old” (p. 79). In case of their “teaching experience, it varies from 10 to 25 years at different schools and colleges” (p. 79). As far as their working place is concerned all “10 participants were working at private/ Non-government schools and colleges” (p. 79). The study of Rahman and Karim (2015) reveals that “60% of the teachers do not prefer CLT and 40% of them accept it” (p. 82). However, the study of Ansarey (2012) reveals that 67% of the questionnaire participants tried using CLT in their classes “while remaining 33% of them said that they never used CLT in their classrooms” (p. 69). That means in Ansarey’s (2012) study, more teachers prefer CLT than in the study of Rahman and Karim (2015). Ansarey (2012) chose “30 teachers of English teaching at primary and secondary levels” (p. 66). Among her participants, “18 (60%) of them were males and the rest 12 (40%) were females” (p. 66). In case of age range, “the majority of the respondents (60%) were 30 to 35 years old whereas seven of them (23.3%) were 35-40 years old and rest five (16.67%) were 40 years old” (p. 66). In case of teaching experience, “it varies from 7 to 17 years at different schools” (p. 66). Among her participants, “twenty participants were working at private/Non-government schools and 10 others were from government schools” (p. 66). As it shows that the choice of participants has affected the construction of knowledge in both the studies. The participants of Rahman and Karim (2015) are from rural institutions and they are not always welcoming of the new ideas and teaching techniques. On the other hand, the participants of Ansarey (2012) belong to urban institutions and so they have more positive attitude towards CLT.

Based on the two studies, it is clear that participants from urban institutions are more interested in using CLT in their classrooms in Bangladesh than the participants from rural areas. In this connection, it might be relevant to quote what Dr. Deckert said in the class on August 24, 2015, “the construction of knowledge is not neutral.” In fact, participants contribute to constructing knowledge based on their own their background and thus affect the construction of knowledge of a study. Therefore, the researcher (s) should select appropriate participants to answer the research question with a view to constructing trustworthy knowledge in relation to the questions.

The selection of appropriate place/location in relation to the research questions is also important to construct coherent knowledge relative to the research questions. If the location of a study is not selected properly as regard to the research questions, the study will not construct the knowledge that it was supposed to construct. Both the studies have problems of selecting the

appropriate location in relation to the research questions. For example, in Rahman and Karim (2015) the location was not selected to successfully address the research questions. Their first research question addresses the problems of CLT in Bangladesh and the second question addresses the ways to overcome those problems of CLT in Bangladesh. So, both the research questions address the problems and possible solutions of CLT in the perspective of entire Bangladesh. However, Rahman and Karim (2015) conducted the study in “some of the less famous but long established and thickly crowded educational institutions of some rural areas in Chittagong” which is a small southern part of Bangladesh (p. 85). The researchers did not bring any of the urban institutions under their investigation. Therefore, the sample area of the study is not adequate enough to answer the questions which are based on the context of entire Bangladesh. Their questions are about problems of implementing CLT based on the whole Bangladesh; however, their study constructs knowledge only about the problems of implementing CLT only in Chittagong. Logically, Rahman and Karim (2015) should either change their questions to make it rural based or include urban institutions in their research.

A similar inconsistency is noticed in the study conducted by Ansarey (2012). Her first objective aimed “To identify the problems that are inherent in English teaching in Bangladesh” and the second objective aimed “To find out the contribution of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh” (p. 62). So, these questions are based on the perspective of whole Bangladesh. However, her study was conducted on the institutions which are “located at different areas of the Dhaka city corporation” (p. 66). Dhaka is the capital of Bangladesh where the differences between urban areas and rural areas in the context of educational environment are immense.

Ansarey (2012) did not bring any rural institutions in her research. So, her study constructs knowledge which is relative to Dhaka city and not necessarily about the entire Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, institutions which are located in urban areas have better academic environment than rural institutions due to socio-economic factor. In the cities, teachers have more facilities in all respects than in the villages of Bangladesh. Ansarey’s (2012) objectives reflected the entire Bangladesh but her selection of location failed to construct knowledge about the entire Bangladesh. Therefore, in order to construct knowledge relative to research questions, researcher(s) should select location appropriately in relation to the research questions.

How research instruments are designed affect the construction of knowledge of a study. Research instruments should be designed in accordance with the research questions so that they are effective to collect adequate data for the questions. For example, in Rahman and Karim (2015) the construction of the questionnaire is problematic to successfully address the research questions. Their first research question asks, “What are the problems of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh?” (p. 77). However, none of the questions in the questionnaire asks the

participants directly about the problems that they are facing in implementing CLT in their classroom. Rather, there are some irrelevant questions that have nothing or little to do in finding the answers of the question. For instance, the survey question “Is CLT EFL or ESL?” has nothing to do in finding out the problems in implementing CLT in Bangladesh, because whether CLT is EFL or ESL does not matter on the perspective of finding the problems in its implementation in Bangladesh (p. 83). The second research question of Rahman and Karim (2015) asks “What are the ways to overcome the problems of CLT in Bangladesh?” (p. 77). However, in the “survey questionnaire,” there is no such question that asks the participants about the ways to overcome the problems of CLT in Bangladesh. Even, the interview conducted by Rahman and Karim (2015) focused only on the problems of CLT in Bangladesh but not a single direct indication about the possible solutions to the problems of CLT in Bangladesh is focused in the interview. So, the construction of knowledge is affected by the construction of their research instruments.

However, in the study conducted by Ansarey (2012), the construction of the questionnaire and the conduct of the interview well suit her objectives. Her first objective aimed “To identify the problems that are inherent in English teaching in Bangladesh” (p. 62). The second objective aimed “To find out the contribution of communicative language teaching in Bangladesh” (p. 62). The third objective aimed “To know the feasibility of communicative language teaching” (p. 62). The fourth objective aimed “to know the difficulties and challenges that EFL teachers face in implementing CLT in their classrooms” (p. 62).

Ansarey (2012) designed the questionnaire in such way that reflects her questions. For example, she states “the fourth and final part of the survey explored the participants’ opinions with regard to the perceived difficulties and challenges in adopting CLT in their classes” (p. 66). Her interviews also reflected her objectives. She stated, “Each interview lasted about thirty minutes and they involved a list of open-ended questions addressing various issues related to CLT, and the use of it in EFL context, particularly in Bangladesh” (p. 66).

So, the knowledge constructed by Ansarey (2012) is more appropriate in relation to her questions than the knowledge constructed by Rahman and Karim (2015) based on the design of the research instruments. If research instruments are not designed in accordance with the research questions, they do not collect authentic data for the questions and thus fail to construct specific knowledge relative to the questions. Therefore, the research instruments should be designed in such way that they become conducive to collect data to answer the research questions.

How data are analyzed affect the construction of knowledge of a study. If data are not analyzed appropriately, there runs the risk of overgeneralization. For example, in the study

conducted by Rahman and Karim (2015) data are not analyzed appropriately rather some data are overgeneralized. The researchers stated that “Teachers of Bangladesh generally do not like to adopt CLT because it demands more hard work than GTM” (p. 85). This is an overgeneralized statement because the study selected only “10 teachers of English from secondary and higher secondary levels” to fill out the survey questionnaire and only one of the participants were interviewed (p. 79). Logically, only 10 teachers do not represent all the teachers of Bangladesh. The numbers of participants are not adequate enough to make such generalized statement in the perspective of all the teachers of Bangladesh. Again, Rahman and Karim (2015) stated that “Bangladeshi students are inherently shaky in nature to use target language in day to day communication” (p. 85). This is also overgeneralized because; the research was conducted in the “rural areas in Chittagong” which is a very small part of Bangladesh (p. 85). So, the study cannot represent the nature of the urban students as it was not conducted in the urban areas of Bangladesh. Students in urban institutions of Bangladesh, in most cases, are competent in using English in day to day communication. As regard to data analysis, the study conducted by Ansarey (2012) also presents some generalized statements. For example, in the conclusion, she states “It may be concluded that a number of constraints have made it difficult for CLT to be integrated into English classrooms in Bangladesh” (p. 77). However, her research was conducted only in Dhaka. So, to draw conclusion in the perspective of whole Bangladesh based on the data collected mainly from the institutions of the urban areas is overgeneralization. Therefore, in order to construct appropriate knowledge relative to the research questions, conclusion should conclude the data appropriately without overgeneralizing.

To sum up, a well-designed research should select appropriate methods to collect data to answer the research questions. If methods are appropriate to answer the research questions, it constructs proper knowledge relative to the research questions. Besides, methods should be carried out successfully to address the research questions. Moreover, appropriate participants should be selected to answer the research questions. In addition, research instrument should be designed appropriately to collect adequate data to answer the research questions. Furthermore, data should be analyzed properly without overgeneralizing in order to construct trustworthy knowledge relative to the research questions. Finally, this article is not meant to make personal attack, rather it is to create some awareness among the researchers of Bangladesh to conduct research using appropriate methods based on the nature of the research questions of a particular study.

References

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