

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) of English in Eastern Context

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Abstract

This paper focuses on how CLT methods are used in English Language Teaching (ELT) in eastern contexts. The term “communicative language teaching” (CLT) conveys different meaning to different teachers. Some believe that CLT emphasis on the orality (lingual) of the target language in the classroom. To others, communication implies the exchange of unknown information between conversationalists. In the same way, teachers of eastern countries like Japan, China and Turkey has their own way of using CLT to make their students acquire English language.

Keywords: CTL, ELT, communicative competence, implementation, issues, improvement.

Introduction

CLT is an approach that teaches second and foreign languages, which gives importance to interaction. The utmost goal of CLT is learning a language. The educators and linguists are dissatisfied with other teaching methods like, audio-lingual and grammar-translation method. Therefore, communication approach came as their product. CLT is often used in ELT; its roots are found in the changes that took place in the British language tradition during the late 1960s. There was an interest in communicative-style teaching, and it developed in 1970s. In CLT students engage in real communication with one another inside the classroom, the authentic language usage in such classrooms became popular.

CLT is learner-centered, here; the teacher presents more as a facilitator, in which the teacher allows the students to be in charge of their own learning. CLT uses communication to teach foreign languages. It focuses on real life situations and communication in different contexts. Even though, grammar is important in CLT classroom, it gives more importance in communicating a message. Here, students learn how to use a language in social context. For example, there is a difference between the way we speak with an adult and a child.

Eastern Contexts

CHINA

I IMPLEMENTATION OF CLT

China has adapted communicative approach from western countries during late 1970s and got involved in CLT since 1992. The State Commission of Education has set the teaching of Chinese English learners' communicative competency as the ultimate teaching goal in the new English teaching syllabus. The practice of CLT in China did not provide the expected results; the students showed a deficiency in effective communication. This was due to the lack of knowledge on the communicative rules of the target language; which is caused by the improper language teaching method.

II ISSUES

- Chinese students did not take CLT as a serious study. They enjoyed the communicative activities but did not carry it as an ultimate goal to acquire linguistic competency, specifically lexical and grammar, which is required to pass an exam.

Zhang et al. mentions that Chinese learners “tend to regard communicative activities as games for entertainment rather than a learning tool”

- The students were not willing to engage in conversation fluency activities with fellow students inside their classroom. For instance in practicing English language speaking tasks, the students are unable to “balance the relationship between linguistic and communicative competence”.
- Most of the students preferred their traditional classroom exercises more than ELT, this was due to the sense of inferiority regarding their spoken English; another issue was shyness.

In Chinese educational culture, a teacher is seen as an authoritative model, as the students are traditionally passive learners and they are expected to obey instructions and therefore, the learners are accustomed to teacher led classes, emphasizing “accuracy, repetition, memorization”.

Another major issue was the accuracy which was given importance over fluency.

III IMPROVEMENTS

Chinese English teachers must adapt CLT and adjust it with Chinese traditional approach. They should also compromise their teaching methods to meet the needs of their students. The goal of developing students' competence demands change in the teachers' training.

JAPAN

I IMPLEMENTATION OF CLT

In 1989 and 1990, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Sports, Culture, Science and Technology (MEXT) implemented CLT method into junior and senior high schools with the thought that the poor listening and speaking ability of Japanese students of English could be improved. It was promoted in 1998. The stress was placed on grammar and vocabulary. Later new oral-aural

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communication courses were introduced. These new CLT classes are task based and students are expected to give importance to listening and speaking activities.

II ISSUES

- There is difficulty of putting CLT into practice, it is due to the nature of syllabus design, the examination system, the communicative incompetence of Japanese English teachers and the large classroom sizes.
- With the growing importance of an oral communication in curricula, many Japanese teachers of English carry it as a tough job in preparing their students for entrance examination. This is because the English score have been given great importance in passing the university entrance examinations.
- A number of studies have examined the difficulties experienced by Japanese students due to the conflict between their language learning culture and CLT method. For example, CLT views teachers as a resource person and facilitator, but Japanese students expect the teacher to be in an authoritative model.
- Japanese English teachers in elementary, junior and high schools are struggling to cope with the ‘Action Plan’, which holds a great emphasis on the CLT approach in actual English classrooms in Japan.

III IMPROVEMENTS

At least, few Japanese English teachers can practice CLT in their classes and it can also be implemented through team-teaching. To improve Japanese “communicative competence” in English effectively, it is necessary to learn each and every communicative skill according to different levels.

TURKEY

I IMPLEMENTATION OF CLT

During the late 20th C.E., Turkey was affected by the idea of “globalization” and due to which teaching English has become important for Turkey. The yearning stemmed from country’s strategic position and changes took place in their educational system in 1997. The changes promoted the development of learners’ communicative skills via integrating LSRW skills. This was a breakthrough in the CLT approach. These changes in the educational system were not enough to meet the English language teaching criteria.

II ISSUES:

- Even though, Turkey is seen as a bridge between Europe and Asia, it attempted to be westernized from the beginning of its foundation. But, English was taught as a foreign language rather than a second language. CLT depends on student oriented teaching approach, which neither Turkish teachers nor students were familiar with. This communicative approach was put into practice without analyzing whether the Turkish people were prepared to accept this approach.

- The teachers were not trained to teach the young learners. The teachers were using teacher oriented approach but CLT requires student oriented methods and it also promotes teaching through group and pair work activities.
- Another issue was that the primary public schools did not have the facility to implement communicative activities in their classrooms.
- Large size classrooms were a drawback for implementing CLT in Turkish classrooms. The classes were crowded which made it difficult for the teachers to apply effective pair and group activities.
- Teaching hours was another problem; minimum of 200 hours per year the learners should be exposed to English language but the hours of teaching was far below than the suggested level.

III IMPROVEMENTS

The ELT teachers must be trained and English teaching needs to be better planned; the strength of English language learners was more but they did not have enough number of English teachers. The students were placed in public schools in large English classrooms. This could be improved by training more English teachers efficiently. Turkey needed a reform in the current examination system. English teaching practices can be changed according to skills that are tested in exams; the skills focus mainly on grammar, translation, reading skills and vocabulary knowledge. The attention should also be shifted towards other language skills such as listening, writing and speaking.

Conclusion

The CLT method has influenced many eastern countries in ELT; with the introduction of CLT in eastern classrooms the teachers can attempt to create a better environment in classroom, in which students feel confident and comfortable in interacting in English. Even though, few issues raised due to the new implementation of CLT in traditional classrooms of China, Japan and Turkey, many steps were taken to overcome these issues as the ultimate goal is helping students to attain communicative competence.

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