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Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in Iran

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Abstract

Methodology is one of the important and critical factors that plays an essential role in achieving the acceptable result in educational fields, especially in the process of language teaching and learning in applied linguistics.CLT as a modern approach has been accepted in language teaching domain in many developed countries, but in some developing countries such as Iran, it does not have the same popularity. The aim of this paper is to review the main problems of applying CLT in Iran.

Keywords: teaching methodology, teaching approach, CLT, EFL, CLT in Iran

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INTRODUCTION

Today, teaching and learning are two essential factors in education and they are not independentof each other, that is why their parallel occurrence in all schooling processes is not deniable (Forrest, 2004).These two factors need a correct selection of teaching method and teaching style (Knowles,1970). Moreover, a large number of scholars confirmed the impact of an effective teaching methodology on learning (Miglietti& Strange,1998). Besides teaching methodology, appropriate selection of materials(Nunan, 1990) and learners' needs analysis (Savignon, 2007) should be considered as well.

With regard to the importance of CLT and failure to adopting this method in Iran, the present study review the related problems for applying this method by going through current literature.

CLT Background

"A communicative approach to language teaching involves the negotiation of meaning between speaker and listener or between author and reader. Meaning must be at the center of all communicative exchanges; indeed, it is impossible tocommunicate without meaning
(Hendrickson, 1991, p. 197)."

The above quote by James Hendrickson (1991) simply describes the basic pedagogical idea behind what EFL teachers call Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach has its theoretical foundation in the late 1960s .

According to (Savignon ,2007) Chomsky's theories which characterized the linguistic competence of the ideal learner underpinned the conceptualmeanings forcommunicative language teaching

Chomsky's theories led to the notion of the communicative competencewhich was simultaneously developed in the United States and England in the early 1970s.

In 1971 experts began to investigate the possibility of developing language courses on a unit-credit system, a system in which learning tasks are broken down into portions or units and is systematically related to all the other portions.

Wilkins (1972) a British linguist prepared a document, which proposed a functional or communicative definition of language that could serve as a basis for developing communicative syllabuses for language teaching.

His contribution was an analysis of the communicative meanings that a language learner needs to understand and express. Rather than describe the core of language through traditional concepts of grammar and vocabulary, Wilkins tried to show the systems of meanings that lay behind the communicative uses of language.

According to Howatt (1984),there are two different types of CLT that is 'strong' and 'weak' version. Based on this classification 'weak' version refers to the significance of "providing learners with opportunities to use their English for communicative purposes and, characteristically, attempts to integrate such activities into a wider program of language teaching" (p.279). On the other hand, the 'strong' version of communicative teaching deals with the fact that "language is acquired through communication, so that it is not merely a question of activating an existing but inert knowledge of the language, but of stimulating the development of the language system itself"(p.279). Howatt (1984) stated that strong version can be described as 'using English to learn it' while weak version that has become more or less standard practice in the last ten years, entails 'learning to use' English.

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Features and Principals of CLT

CLT is a set of principles about teaching such as recommendations about method and syllabus where the focus is on use not usage, meaningful communication not structure .In this approach, students are given tasks to use language instead of studying the language. according to Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) the syllabus primarily is based on;

- Functional development,
- Not structural development.
- less emphasis on error correction as fluency
- Authentic and meaningful language input becomes more important as well.
- The class becomes more student-centered, while the teacher plays more of an observer role.

Some of the important features of CLT method are introduced by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) as follows:

Summary of essential features in CLT

Principle	**CLT**
Characteristic of Teaching and Learning Process.	1. Everything is done with communicative intent. 2. Students use the language through communicative activities like games and role plays. 3. Communication is purposeful. 4. Using authentic materials. 5. Activities are carried out by students in group. 6. Grammar is taught inductively.
Nature of Interaction	1. Teacher is a facilitator. 2. Sometimesteacher becomes co-communicator. 3. Students interact with each other.
Students' feeling and emotion.	1. Motivate the students. 2. Students are given the opportunity to express their individuality by teacher.
The role of native language	1. Native language is permitted. 2. Most of the activities are explained by target language.
Teachers' response to students' error.	1. Errors are tolerated during the fluency-based activities.

Advantages and Disadvantages of CLT:

- **The interaction between students and teachers:**

Teacher-student relationship is an interactive, harmonious relationship, rather than the traditional education, the kind of master-servant relationship.

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- **Improvement of the student's interest:** the students become the main character, naturally they were interested in the English language, to learn English as a pleasure.
- There is not enough emphasis on the correction of pronunciation and grammar error.
- CLT focuses on fluency but not accuracy in grammar and pronunciation.
- The CLT is great for intermediate student and advanced students, but for beginners some controlled practice is needed.

The Roles of Teachers and Learners in the Classroom

Various types of classroom activities proposed in CLTclasses also implied new roles in the classroom for teachers and learners. The learners have to take part in classroom activities. They also feel comfortable when listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model. They were expected to take on a greater degree of responsibility for their own learning. Teachers' role is assumedas the facilitator and monitor.The teacher had to develop a different view of learners' errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language learning. (Richards, 2006).

Using CLT in IRAN

English language is witnessed an increasing demand for learning and teaching in Iran in recent years. This ever-growing requirement has its roots in the fact that English has become a link- language and it is the dominant language in international trades, Internet and mass media.

The Main Problems in Implementing CLT in Iran

Social Problems

Akbari (2015) mentioned that the mainobstacle for learning English in Iran is that "there is no environment that makes learners familiar with the originallanguage" (Akbari, 2015, p.395). The author continued that very a small number of EFL learners have contact with English speakers or travel to English speaking countries. Likewise, very few native English speakers are teaching English in Iran. Akbari (2015) added that there are not many native English speakers in Iran except for the tourists that you can see them only in businesscompanies, tourist sites or hotels.Anothersocial problem is related to the fact that some of the authorities in Iran believe that English language is a school subject that represents and introducesthe culture of western countries to the Iranian students (Akbari, 2015).

Furthermore, if satellite TV can be considered as a source of authentic materials,there is limited access to it in Iran regarding some regulations made by the government (Ashari and Zarrin, 2014). However,taking advantage of VCD, satellite programs and video tapes is usually limited to the students who go to private language schools, since the only source of most of the students in Iran is their textbooks(Akbari, 2015).

In this regard, Dahmardeh(2009) put emphasis on cultural issues and asserted that, English language is a foreign language in Iran and there is a lack of consistency between foreign language culture and Iran culture.

Problems Regarding Educational System of IRAN

Concerning Iran educational system,Akbari (2015) focused on university entrance exam in Iran and believed that because special subjects are considered more important than the general ones (including English language), the students spend less time for studying general subjects than the general ones. The

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author also emphasized that since, the scores for special subjects outweigh the scores for general ones,in this kind of examination only most applicable vocabularies and basic grammatical points as well as reading comprehension are under consideration and less attention is taken to other language skills such as listening, writing and speaking. According to Riazi(2005), this problem can be attributed to the lack of effective educational plan in Iran, since English language teachers in Iran have to design their teaching syllabus according to the demands of nationwide exams.

Riazi and Razmjoo (2006) suggested a solution to overcome this problem, that is, students are better to attend English language institutions to improve their skills in reading, grammar, writing, and vocabulary.

However, others (e.g. Carver & Dickinson, 1982; Dickinson & Carver, 1980) justified the problem of educational systems by concentrating on the complexity of the task which learning presents. They claimed that because there is not enough time within a formal scheme of instruction, we cannot guaranteecontrol over the students. They added that learning will take place only if the learnersare prepared within the classroom to take responsibility to learn autonomously outside the classroom.

In other words Akbari (2015) explained that due to the fact that most of the classes are crowded, the students do not have enough time to practice English properly. That is why their problems remain unsolved and consequently, they don't have effective communication with the English speakers. Moreover, a large number of Iranian English language learners extensively use translation activities that is anotherweakness of educational system in Iran (Akbari, 2015).

Problems in Materials and Textbooks in IRAN

With regard to the textbooks and materials developed in the field of English language teaching, it seems that they are not included enough variety of communication tasks (Akbari, 2015). A group of Iranian researchers classified the shortcomings of the textbooks from the view point of CLT approach as follows:

- Lack of attention to cultural point of view in textbooks,
- Lack of attention to semantic features in textbooks, and Focus mainly onstructure or form,
- Lack of authentic materials in textbooks,
- Lack of attention to students' actual needs in teaching materials or topics,
- Lack of communicative oriented resources,
- Ignorance of identity in reading comprehensions.
- Reading comprehension and writing are more emphasized than other skills,
- The students in English classes do not have common background knowledge of English language.

(Aliakbari, 2004; Dahmardeh, 2009; Khajavi and Abbasian, 2011).

Lack of Applying Proper Teaching Methods

Most of the English language teachers in Iran only pay attention to grammatical drills and exercises as a part of writing skill in their classrooms (Farhady et al, 1994; Hosseini, 2007) and other skills are less emphasized in teaching plans. Accordingly, Grammar Translation Method (GTM) is still pervasivelyused in Iranian English language teaching and learning context (Eslami, 2010, Moradkhan&Sohrabiyan, 2009; Saadat, 1995; Rahimi, 1996; Khodamoradi, 1997; Razmjoo&Riazi, 2006; Rahimiand &Sahragard, 2008).

By applying this method for decades, English language learners beliefs about the nature of English language is a subject consisting of a set of grammatical rulesand a list of words that must be memorized

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and other skills can be learned separately.A series of researchers (e.g. Jahangard, 2007; Akbari, 2015)believed that this viewpoint is rooted in the fact that most of the English language teachers in Iran try to prepare their students for the final examination as well as university entrance examination not being skillful in English language per se.

Akbari(2015) claimed that "teachers still focus on summative assessment and do not have enough knowledge and skill to implement the new assessment system" (p.398). It seems that because these exams are designed mostly based on GTM, teaching procedure is also planned based on this method rather than other methods such as CLT. Moreover, in order to preserve their reputation as good teachers, a group of language teachers try to assist language learners to cope with examinations.

From another point of view, Birjandi et al.(2006), stated that reading is priority skill among the four skills for the Iranian EFLlearners becauseIranian syllabus designers and English teachers have concentrated more on reading skill. They continued that, EFL teachers mostly use reading text books in their classrooms.That is why the Iranian learners learn English language through reading skill and other skills are neglected specially speaking and listening that are highly significant from the view point of CLT.

"In Iran, most of the students demand that their English teachers focus on textbooks prescribed by the Ministry of Education. They may not like the textbook but they know that final exams are based on them" (Akbari, 2015, p.397).

CONCLUSION

The important objective of this paper was to review the problems in implementing of CLT method in Iran. The present paper reviewed the papers of some scholars regarding theirevaluation of some critical issues in applying CLT method in Iran. The main problems are social problems, educational problems, problems in designing text books andmaterials, as well as problems in applying teaching methodology. More importantly, sticking to GTM in EFL contexts in Iran is the salient reason for overlooking CLT. The above-mentioned problems can easily lead to the failure of CLT application in EFL contexts.

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