

Communicative English in Bangladesh: Where are the Communicative Elements?¹

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Abstract

This study investigates the conflict between the demand for communicative English language skills in employment and education and the lack of effective resources to develop such skills in Bangladesh. It offers a discursive analysis of vital issues in implementing effective communicative language teaching (CLT) by surveying 216 teachers about their views on the current English curriculum, their classroom practices, and the barriers they encountered in teaching. A significant gap was revealed between participants' understanding of curriculum expectations and their actual practice. An extended qualitative investigation followed and it was found that there is a demand for acquiring English language competency both within the country and for the purposes of trade, work, and study overseas. Unfortunately, teachers face a shortage in training courses in CLT. Furthermore, implementation of the curriculum in classrooms is affected by the availability of resources for creating communicative and real-life English language contexts, qualifications, knowledge, and experience of teachers, and especially, by the way learning is examined. The study concludes that a full range of inhibiting factors needs to be addressed to improve English language teaching (ELT). It further recommends the development of local and thorough theorisations of ELT rather than undue reliance on overseas trends and experts.

Resumen

Este estudio investiga el conflicto entre la demanda de habilidades comunicativas del idioma inglés en el empleo y la educación y la falta de recursos efectivos para desarrollar tales habilidades en Bangladesh. Ofrece un análisis discursivo de cuestiones vitales en la implementación de la enseñanza comunicativa de idiomas (CLT) efectiva al encuestar a 216 maestros sobre sus puntos de vista sobre el plan de estudios de inglés actual, sus prácticas en el aula y las barreras que encontraron en la enseñanza. Se reveló una brecha significativa entre la comprensión de los participantes de las expectativas del plan de estudios y su práctica real. Siguió una extensa investigación cualitativa y se encontró que existe una demanda para adquirir competencia en el idioma inglés tanto dentro del país como con fines comerciales, laborales y de estudio en el extranjero. Lamentablemente, los docentes se enfrentan a una escasez de cursos de formación en CLT. Además, la implementación del currículo en las aulas se ve afectada por la disponibilidad de recursos para crear contextos comunicativos y de la vida real en inglés, las calificaciones, el conocimiento y la experiencia de los docentes y, especialmente, por la forma en que se examina el aprendizaje. El estudio concluye que es necesario abordar una amplia gama de factores inhibidores para mejorar la enseñanza del idioma inglés (ELT). Recomienda además el desarrollo de teorizaciones locales y exhaustivas de ELT en lugar de confiar indebidamente en tendencias y expertos extranjeros.

Introduction

With the advent of globalisation, people are now required to communicate with other nations and different language speakers more frequently for various purposes. Therefore, the focus of learning a foreign language has changed, and communication has become one of the primary purposes of learning another language. Communicative language teaching (CLT) emphasises the development of learners' language skills in listening and speaking as well as reading and writing (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) and has become a widely used language teaching methodology throughout the world (Canale & Swain, 1980). It aims to teach not only the language but how to use it in real life contexts.

English in Bangladesh is considered a vehicle of change and development both by individuals and the government. It plays a vital role in education, administration, judiciary, trade, and foreign communication. English is also seen as a passport to access the wider world, and such access is in turn expected to contribute to the nation's economic growth by increasing trade and bringing in remittances. Bangladesh's educational policy and curriculum have mandated a communicative approach to learning English in order to achieve these goals. However, it is widely asserted that this approach fails (Ali & Walker, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008).

This article examines the global and local imperatives for acquiring communicative competencies, reviews significant research studies, reports a research project that investigated the implementation and varying practice (or lack of practice) of CLT strategies, and offers a discursive analysis of vital issues and their implications.

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The drive for communicative competency in English

In recognition of the need to interact and compete globally, teaching English has become a compulsory element throughout schooling in Bangladesh. The Ministry of Education (2010) views education as the means for developing learners intellectually and ethically, value its culture and history and gain a strong position in the global job market. Because English is seen as a dominant global language, its effective utilisation is seen as a significant contribution to human capital (Hamid, 2018) and thus to economic development. The need to enable learners to communicate effectively in English has given rise to the current policy mandating CLT and to the national textbooks that provide the contexts for practicing the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing, usually in an interactive mode and in real life situations (National Curriculum, 2012). In addition, competency in English is seen as a gateway to study and work abroad as this language is required as a qualification for tertiary education and overseas employment.

Despite language policy and the apparent overt need, there are repeated accusations in both media reports and research studies that graduating students are not confident in the use of English, that they lack rudimentary awareness of its structures, and especially, the ability to speak in English (Alam, 2018; Ali & Walker, 2014; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). The section that follows briefly reviews relevant literature.

Review of Relevant Literature

This brief literature review aims to demonstrate the main trends in past research about CLT in Bangladesh and identify gaps in the research. Many of the research studies about English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh (e.g., Ali & Walker, 2014; Chowdhury & Phan, 2008; Choudhury, 2010; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; McKay, 2011; Rahman & Pandian, 2018) report failures in the implementation of the communicative approach mandated by policy and in the acquisition of communicative competency.

Several researchers have identified students' fear of English as well as the prevalent student silence in classrooms and the frequent exclusion from virtual learning (Ahmed et al., 2007; Alam, 2016; Rasheed, 2017; Salahuddin et al., 2013). Other studies have critiqued the examination system that rewards rote learning and bypasses spoken language (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018a; Ali et al., 2018; Podder, 2013). The proliferation and instructional dominance of guidebooks and outside-school coaching (Alam, 2013; Al Amin, 2017; Mahmud & Kenayathullah, 2018; Rashid, 2016) have been identified as a buttress to the examination system and as a barrier to any communicative learning.

There are repeated accusations that nationwide students are not developing competency in English (Alam, 2018; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Islam, 2018) and that even English medium schools are not providing opportunities for developing proficient English speakers (Roshid, 2018). However, the literature reviews reveal a significant divide between rich urban and subsistence rural communities, thus increasing social stratification. Moreover, schools in elite areas have experienced teachers, and material and technological resources to teach English effectively, which is not the case in rural areas (Ilon, 2000; Islam, 2018).

In addition, the overall quality and competency of teachers have been repeatedly criticised by policymakers and cited in the media and by several research studies (Alam, 2018; Farooqui, 2014; Hasan, 2013). Much of this research is quantitative or based on small case studies. The implementation of CLT in Bangladesh has been criticised so far by the previous research (Ali & Walker, 2014; Chowdhury & Phan, 2008; Hamid & Baldauf, 2008). However, there is a shortage of research that comprehensively investigates the implementation of CLT. Therefore, there is an ongoing need for a broad-based and comprehensive investigation of the complex factors that impact the teaching of English in Bangladesh.

Methodology

This article discusses the findings of a predominantly qualitative research project (Al Amin, 2017), which implemented an emergent design (Robson, 2011). The study started with a survey of 216 secondary school English teachers. Many of the participating teachers attended CLT training at various teachers' training colleges when they took part in the survey. They were asked about their views on the current English curriculum, their classroom practices, and the barriers they encountered in their teaching. The survey results revealed significant discrepancies between their beliefs and their classroom practices. When interviewed, the participants reported some of the barriers that prevented effective teaching, which included exam-driven teaching, shortage of experienced and qualified teachers, very little understanding of CLT, prioritising guidebooks and notebooks that provide high-stake test questions like model questions and practices, neglecting the NCTB prescribed textbooks, compelling students to come for private tuition at teachers' home,

large and overcrowded classrooms, lack of financial and other benefits and minimal opportunity to use English in their everyday activities outside the classroom.

The survey was the springboard for a more extensive study, and because of the discrepancies between the belief and practices, the phenomena were further explored qualitatively. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with the participants selected through a snowball approach (Bryman, 2015). The researcher observed interviewed teachers' classroom practices, analysed various official and policy documents, artifacts, databases, and media reports. Participants of the qualitative study were forty-two students, thirty-five teachers, twelve teacher trainers, four principals, twelve parents, and fifteen other professionals including bankers, technical workers, migrant workers and government employees who need to use English in their workplace.

The qualitative investigation aimed to provide a thick description of the data (Geertz, 1988) and to provide rich and detailed narratives (Stake, 2013) of the participants' backgrounds, views on teaching, motivation to teach, their day-to-day practices, opportunities for professional development, practical barriers in teaching, what they do to overcome those barriers, and various other pedagogical and contextual factors that influence their teaching.

The qualitative phase of this study purposefully selected a wide range of English teachers for interview and observation, including those in both urban and rural contexts and in richer and poorer socio-economic contexts, those who considered that they were well trained in CLT and those who did not, those who taught with some communicative strategies and those who relied on rote learning only. The intention was to illustrate the range of intentions, practices, and understandings that exist.

During the data analysis, we looked for both evolving themes and individual stories of participants (Connelly & Clandinin, 1990; Riessman, 2008), and interpreted and documented participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2009). Finally, various forms of data were triangulated to provide a rich narrative.

The collection of individual participants' stories was an essential aspect of the research as they emphasised the human, situated, and experiential aspects of the data. Snippets of those narratives are used here. All names are pseudonyms.

A previous publication from this research has examined the influence of the examination system on teaching (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018a), and another has questioned whether the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) can be met with the current provisions for teacher training (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018b). Here, the focus is on the discussion of those findings which identify existing practices (and lack of practices) in teaching the English language communicatively and the factors that shape those practices.

Findings

Attitudes to the communicative language curriculum

In responding to the survey, participating teachers showed awareness of curriculum intentions and recommended processes for implementation, as shown in Table 1. The majority also reported that their practices accorded with curriculum intentions.

An effective teacher in Bangladesh is someone who.....	Strongly Agree	Agree	No Opinion	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
has a thorough understanding of the English Curriculum goals and objectives	43.1%	50.5%	2.8%	3.2%	0.5%
lets students talk most of the time in the class	24.2%	40.5%	8.8%	22.8%	3.7%
arranges group work frequently	36.3%	50.0%	3.8%	8.0%	1.9%
puts equal importance on all four skills (reading, writing, speaking, listening) of a language in a single lesson while he/she teaches.	32.4%	33.8%	3.8%	20.7%	9.4%
Teaching practices and beliefs					
I let my students talk most of the time in my class.	13.6%	39.4%	11.7%	32.9%	2.3%
I encourage students to work 'in groups' and 'in pairs' in my class.	30.4%	46.7%	13.6%	7.9%	1.4%
Students learn more when I teach them using lectures	4.6%	23.6%	8.3%	47.2%	16.2%
I use different teaching aids like flash cards, audio, video, etc., while I teach in the class.	28.7%	50.9%	6.9%	10.6%	2.8%

Table:1 Teachers' understanding of curriculum intentions and their practices

Over 90% of the respondents affirmed (strongly agree or agree) that an effective English teacher should have a good understanding of the curriculum's goals and objectives. A smaller percentage, but still a majority, believed that an effective teacher should emphasise oral as well as written skills in each lesson. Nearly 90% considered that an effective teacher should use group work and a clear majority considered he/she should encourage students talk throughout the class. When questioned about their practices, just over half of the respondents said they allowed their students to talk most of the time, and nearly 80% reported they used pair and group work and utilised a wide range of teaching aids. Less than 30% stated that their students learned more through teachers' lectures.

Survey responses are not always a reliable indicator of actual practice. The follow-up extended the qualitative investigation in this project, as well as research by others, shows that lecturing and rote learning are still all too common throughout Bangladesh. Moreover, these teachers were located through their participation in training programs. However, the responses indicate that the teachers surveyed were aware of what was expected in a communicative language teaching approach and tended to view such an approach as desirable. Impediments to achieving such an approach are discussed later in this article. The following section discusses some of the practices of communicative strategies used by the participants in teaching.

The practice of communicative strategies

During the qualitative phase of this project, the first author interviewed both rural and urban teachers who explained and often demonstrated aspects of ways to implement a communicative approach to language learning. Snippets from interviews are presented below:

Hasan: In my class, I have seen that students are very interested in speaking. It's a village school, and not many meritorious students come here. At least once a week, I arrange speaking activities with my students and sometimes a debate.

Abdur: One of my activities is to arrange an English debate in class. Then I also contact other English teachers in the district and arrange an inter-school debate competition.

Imran: When I take students to the language lab, they think they are in the ocean. They love to practice in speaking in English, and they really enjoy it when they watch movies and other programs in English.

Shopan: I create a speaking hour where students talk to each other in English outside their classroom while having light snacks.

Shafiq: In every unit [of the textbook], there are relevant pictures and sample questions to arouse interest and different communicative classroom activities.

Parvez: Even new teachers can teach in a communicative way if they follow the suggested steps in the books. There are options for practising all four skills in every lesson.

Apurbo: I use audio and video materials in my class. I downloaded many on my laptop.

The teachers discussed a range of communicative strategies and endorsed the communicative prompts offered in the textbook. These indicate that irrespective of their proportional number or the quality of their individual work, some teachers feel confident in practicing CLT. The fact that many Bangladeshi speak and write effectively in English also suggests that in some places, a good communicative process of English language teaching does occur. We would argue that it would be useful to investigate further examples of *good practice* to evolve models of the communicative language teaching best practices as models in Bangladesh.

Perceived need for communicative skills

As will be illustrated below, the study found widespread and multi-faceted perceptions of why active, communicative skills are needed for individual career progression as well as national development. Numerous urban billboards, newspapers, and media sites in the country reinforced the prestige of English as a marker of social position and affluence. Besides, in job advertising, the English language was found to be dominant.

Parents talked about the importance of their children's ability to use English and the sacrifices made to enable them to learn the language.

Shakila: We need to pay extra tuition fees in the school and need to keep good house tutors for him. I travel almost every week to the capital as there is no English version in any of the schools where I live. Still, we are happy to do this for the good future of our child. Now English is the medium of study in almost all the universities in Bangladesh. And maybe he will have a chance to study abroad in the future.

Many teachers also stressed the importance of interactive English:

Shopan: You may need to go abroad for study or a job: how will you interact with people if you cannot speak English?

Graduates also acknowledged the importance of being able to use English actively:

Luna: Throughout my university life, English was always a big factor. All the assignments and examinations were in English.

Mitul: Whatever the job, they test a candidate's English skills... The big barrier for me is to get a good score in the IELTS examination.

Graduates who wanted to work abroad or in commerce within Bangladesh also spoke about the need for real competency in English and, in many cases, the difficulties they had experienced through lack of it:

Shanto: In terms of English language, I faced various problems at different stages of my life. I attended private tuitions, and English was a challenging subject for me. In the UK, in the first month, it was difficult for me to understand native British speakers. In my present job in Bangladesh, I need to communicate with different parties. The working language in my bank is English.

Sajib: I knew I have to work abroad to earn good money. My English was not good at all. I faced the first difficulty in the flight. The air hostess came, and I knew she was asking me what I wanted to eat, but I did not say anything as I did not know how to request something or even the name of the food. Life abroad was very challenging for me at the beginning. I required help in everything. I feel that in my career, English is a big barrier to get to a higher position. If I would have better English skills, I may have a higher position than where I am now.

Komol: In fact, the working language in my bank is English.

English is also necessary for work in many overseas countries, which means funding remittances. Moreover, the contribution of remittances from overseas employment plays a significant role in Bangladesh's economy. In 2012, for example, it reached a peak of 11% of the Gross Domestic Product (The Global Economy, 2018). Yet Buchenau (2008) noted that poor English causes problems for many migrant workers in accessing medical care and legal help. However, Rubdy and McKay (2013) found that Bangladeshis were rated low in terms of knowing English in comparison to workers from Malaysia or the Philippines and thus were less favourably employed.

Various researchers (Banu & Sussex, 2001; Imam, 2005; Rasheed, 2012) commented on the dominance of English in business, tourism, administration, science, technology, media, the internet, satellite television, emails, and travel. Further education and entry into the Bangladesh civil service require the English language. The Bangladesh High Court and Supreme Court use English. Diplomatic relations, dealing with the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund, participation in UN peace keeping forces, negotiating with donors and lenders all require communicative competence in English. The nationally important garment industry and the increasing number of giant multinational companies who operate regional offices in Bangladesh also make indispensable communicative competence in English. International academic publishing relies on English. Moreover, a good number of journals in Bangladesh, including journals in science and agriculture, medicine, technology, and engineering are in English because they offer an opportunity to present results to a broader community.

Rote teaching practices

Despite the widely reiterated need for effective communication skills in English and the efforts of some teachers to practice a communicative approach to teaching the language, there are pervasive claims that the majority of teachers rely on rote learning of materials supplied by coaching centres and sometimes of material from the textbooks. Observations and interviews in this study also found repeated examples for rote learning as well as an absence of any development of communicative skills. Examples are given below.

Many teachers would not even attempt to use the textbooks; instead, they would drill grammar items from various guidebooks and previous test papers.

Islam (teacher): I do not need any textbook; everything is in my memory. I only look at the textbooks or any other books if there are any changes in the curriculum. Otherwise, everything is in my mind.

Hasan (student): We take sheets from the teacher. If we fail to understand anything, the teacher explains, and he gives us all the correct answer. All the sheets are important for the examination. For example, for right forms of verb, we have all the exercises in one sheet, and they are from various guidebooks, and we

learn as much as we can. For other important examination questions there are also various sheets like this, and we practise and solve them.

Islam's statement indicates a lack of concern with the materials issued by the government through its textbooks for teaching communicative English. He teaches as he has always done and according to what is assessed in the examinations, which still focus primarily on grammatical patterns and allow memorised passages to be written. Students like Hasan also feel no need to learn anything beyond what will be examined.

Rather than communication exercises, abstracted grammar rules were often observed to be taught for an entire lesson. For example, Sarkar spent a lesson demonstrating a verb tense, which his students did not seem to understand. He explained what he would teach in the class to the observer, but he did not tell students. Instead, he started writing on the board: PRESENT PERFECT CONTINUOUS TENSE and underlined the words.

Then he wrote some sentences showing the structure of the tense. After that, he gave some Bangla⁴ sentences and asked students to translate them into English following the structure. Students then started to raise their hands and ask questions. Mostly they would say: Sorry, sir, I couldn't understand this. Not a word of English was spoken except for the sentences he had written in English on the blackboard. Most of the time, he was facing the blackboard. Arguably, his lesson had very little relevance to the intentions or process of CLT.

In some observed cases, the textbook English for Today (National Curriculum and Textbook Board, 2013) would be used, but not in the intended communicative ways. For example, the following observed classroom interaction illustrates how the exercises were used for rote repetition rather than as prompts for communicative engagement.

Nijam: (reading from the textbook) Look at the picture. What are the people doing here? When do people do these kind of work [sic]?

Students: (together, repeating after him) Look at the picture. What are the people doing here? When do people do these kinds of work?

The teacher then asked the students if anyone could give a Bangla meaning. When no one raised their hand, he translated himself. He then proceeded through the text asking individual students to read, correcting their pronunciation, and translating into Bangla after each sentence. Therefore, the textbook's prompts for interactive communication were turned into an oral reading exercise.

The study also found that teachers expressed regret about their inability to teach from the textbook because of the pressures imposed by the national examination.

Monsur: The problem starts when I teach in class IX and X. When no passage is taken from the textbook for the examination, the students are not eager to study anything from the textbook. They know that whatever I am teaching from the textbook is not important and will not be in the examination.

Impact of the examination

This study traced evidence revealing the power of examination on determining and limiting what occurs in English classrooms. The English examination, largely unrelated to the aims of the national curriculum, has become a transformer of the intended curriculum into the de facto curriculum that is taught in the majority of Bangladeshi classrooms and a reinforcer of existing social stratifications (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018b). Some illustrative examples of how teachers understood the impact of examinations follow.

Teachers criticised the way high stakes examinations are based on memorising predictable topics.

Kabir: Students with better memorisation skills are getting good marks, and students who try to write from their own writing skills find it difficult to get good marks.

Hasan: Now, there is belief among students that they can answer from memorisation, which is a great barrier to improving students' writing.

Their statements highlight how students' awareness that rote learning would enable them to succeed was a barrier to teaching that would develop communicative skills in writing or speaking.

⁴ It is the language of Bangladesh

Even teachers who confidently conduct speaking activities reported the difficulty of sustaining their practice at the time before examinations.

Hasan: Continuing these practices becomes difficult when the exam is approaching. Nearer to that time students only like to study what will be important for the examination.

Schools are currently encouraged to assess speaking and listening skills through school-based assessment (Rahman, 2015), and the mark is to be added to students' end of year grades. However, many teachers and schools struggle with carrying out such assessments despite the policy mandate. Therefore, although schools are now asked to assess oral skills internally, they do not always do so. Moreover, in the high-stakes public examinations in Bangladesh, students' oral skills are not assessed. One participant reported:

Shopan: I have seen that in many cases, teachers do not assess students' speaking and listening skills. They just give an average mark based on the written English marks.

Urban-rural divide

The impact of the examination on learning is evidently traced in rural areas, which comprise over seventy percent of the population. English is a compulsory subject in all schools, but while the use of English is publicly visible in densely-populated urban areas, it is seldom heard or seen in rural regions. Thus, there is no environmental support or prompt for the communicative use of English in the rural areas. To most rural families, English is a completely foreign language. Teachers in this study talked about the impossibility of teaching communicatively through English.

Kabir: If I used English as a language of instruction in the English lesson, most of the students were not able to understand what I was saying. So, I had to use Bangla.

Nevertheless, students and their parents recognise the need to pass at least the first level of national examinations. Hasnat (2017) reported how rural students who often miss school in order to work with their parents return to school to prepare for the Class VIII examination. They intend to learn model answers by rote in order to pass the examination; understanding English is not a priority, and using English in later life is perceived as extremely unlikely.

The reliance on rote learning was highlighted in the current study when rural students, who were interviewed, showed their well-thumbed commercial guidebooks and who scarcely remembered where they had placed their textbooks. They stated that their teachers did not use the textbook, whereas teachers and head teachers reported the need to accommodate the pressures caused by rural poverty. For example:

Jamal: Most of the students in our school are from very poor families, and many of them are not regular in the class. The attendance of students only increases a few days before the examination. When they come, they are mainly concerned with the examination questions and what they need to learn so that they can at least pass in the examination. Anything that is not important for the examination they have no interest to study. In many cases, we have to shorten the duration of our classes. If we continue classes for the full day after the lunch, there is hardly any student in the class. Many of them go home and help their family in the afternoon. In this way, we try to finish by 1.30 pm instead of the mandated 4.30 pm finish.

The practicality of getting students through the examination is one factor. Another one is the relative scarcity of teachers with sound knowledge of English in the rural context. On the other hand, skilled teachers are attracted to city schools because of the advantages for them and their children. An illustrative example is given:

Kabir: When I was promoted to assistant professor, I was posted at a rural college. But I did not move to that place; rather, I continued teaching from my home. It took me one and half hours to go and one and half hours to come back, but it would not be possible to live there as there were no facilities. After six months, I was able to transfer again to the city where I live. If I live in that rural area, I will not get any of the opportunities I can get in the city.

In the absence of skilled teachers, rural schools are obliged to utilise graduates with weaker English and who have received no pedagogical training before their appointment. Such untrained teachers find the prevalent example of rote teaching towards an examination easy to follow.

An editorial in a popular Bangla newspaper, *The Daily Ittefaq* (2016, Jun 22), stated that education in Bangladesh became a commodity depending on people's buying capacity. The rich people of the city have the capacity to pay for good schools and afterschool tuition, and the poor rural people do not have this capacity and so have fewer educational opportunities. Reduced opportunities are significantly manifested in

the top-down instructional teaching and insistence on rote learning. In any subject and especially in English, communicative activities are rare in rural schools (Al Amin 2017; Alam, 2016; Rasheed, 2017).

Teacher selection and training

Teaching English for communicative purposes requires teachers who are trained to teach communicative strategies. Media and policymakers recurrently blame educational problems. The findings of the current study suggest that the accusation is too simplistic. The provision of 'good' teachers requires a targeted recruitment process, relevant pre-service training, a living wage, collegial support, and ongoing professional development (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018b). These processes and conditions still need to be developed in Bangladesh.

Many teachers join the profession in government schools because they failed to score highly in the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) examination. Many rural teachers are recruited by the school authority on the basis of an initial general degree and without any teacher training. The degree may have included only a few courses in English. In most cases, training is offered only after teachers have begun teaching. While the one-year Bachelor in Education (B.Ed) courses offered by Teacher Training Colleges are often taken by graduates, many of the graduates do not intend to become teachers. In addition, teacher trainers mentioned how their students were often motivated by goals other than teaching.

Voumik: Some students enrol for B.Ed course at TTC when they could not get any job. So, rather than spending idle time they consider that it is better to do a course as it may be of some benefit in the future. In many cases, these students leave the course if they get any kind job while they are in the course.

Khan: It is an opportunity to stay in the college hostel, and in the city, which is convenient for them to search for jobs.

Students also acknowledged their other career goals.

Halima: I enrolled in the B. Ed course at the TTC as it gives me the opportunity to stay in the college hostel in the city, which is safe and secure. I can then attend the job recruitment coaching centre easily.

Lack of initial teacher training is just one of the problems evidenced in the teaching sector. However, many teachers in the current study reported their lack of preparation for teaching English in ways that the curriculum currently requires. Many also acknowledged that they have to give private lessons in order to make a living wage. Similarly, Hasnat (2017) reported teachers who admitted that they were often too tired to focus on their classroom teaching after two hours of early morning private classes.

Currently, the most common process for inducting teachers into the use of communicative language teaching processes is a provision of short course in-service training. This study found varied reports about the effectiveness of such courses. Some of the participating teacher trainers talked about their thoughtful commitment to their work. For example, Nikhil explained how he tries to establish long term relationships with his short course graduates.

Nikhil: I keep contact through social media, and there are some benefits for everyone. Sometimes I need them as research participants. Some of them personally contact me and tell me how they have benefitted from the training. Many of them inform me that since the training, they have a feeling that they need to learn more to improve their teaching. They tell me what they do with their students, how much their students love different interactive activities like language games, puzzles, group work, and pair work, how they use the prescribed textbook in their teaching.

However, other participants criticised the ways courses were conducted. For example, one experienced teacher trainer criticised trainers for neglecting their main teaching jobs in order to earn money by teaching short courses.

Khair: There are very few teachers who are dedicated to teaching. Some teacher trainers do not care what is happening in their institutions; rather, they are more interested to teach in short training courses. They work as guest lecturers in various training projects, and one teacher is often involved in several training projects at a time.

Some teachers commented positively on the short course training they had, as in the example below:

Moshiuzzaman: There is no alternative to training in order to develop our skills. I am an old teacher, and I was not familiar with CLT. In the training, I learned about CLT- what to do in the classroom and how we should teach using CLT... To improve our education, our first priority should be providing necessary training to our teachers.

Nazrul: The training gives me a chance to spend almost a month with other English teachers from different schools and from different districts. Even in our free time, we exchange ideas and discuss about teaching. And more importantly, it is an opportunity to speak English with other teachers that helps everyone to develop our English-speaking skill.

Other teachers interviewed criticised the gap between course content and the needs of rural teachers. For example:

Hannan: I teach in a school which is in a char⁵. There is no electricity in this area. I have received training in using ICT and communicative language teaching, and I have made some digital content while I was taking training. We have a laptop in our school, but there is no multimedia projector. But the problem is we cannot use our laptop for a long time. Every time to charge the laptop, we have to go to the nearby bazaar where there is a solar electricity plan. Whenever the charge finishes, we go to the bazaar again to recharge it.

Jitendraanat: In the village, students are not interested into speaking and listening; all concentration is on passing the examination. The class time is very short, 40-45 minutes, and within this short time, it is not possible to conduct the activities suggested in the training.

In addition, twenty-six of the thirty-five teachers interviewed stated that they had not received any opportunity to attend even a short training course. Those who did attend a course stated that there were no provisions for continuing professional development after the course or processes for school-based support in developing their ability to understand and apply the processes of communicative language teaching.

International funding

There were many comments from participants about how initiatives for introducing CLT and much of the in-service training came through British and other foreign sources and criticism of the foreign-funded projects for developing CLT. It is explicitly stated in the education policy of the country that the ability to participate and compete in global markets is a key driver in adopting a CLT based curriculum. In addition, organisations like the British Council and the American Center actively promote the importance of English. Moreover, British institutions have active involvement in most of the English language development projects in Bangladesh, including financing, implementing, providing training, and working as advisors.

One of the earliest ELT projects in Bangladesh, English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP), was partly funded by the British government, and the British Council, along with other British institutions, was a key partner. Similarly, English In Action (EIA) was partly funded by the Department of Foreign Investment and Development (DFID) of the British Government, and several British organisations are involved in the implementation of this project. One of the major initiatives of ELTIP was the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching in Bangladesh, and English textbooks for the secondary and higher secondary level were written under the supervision of British experts while a group of writers was taking training in the United Kingdom. These tasks all involve British consultants.

Several participants who worked closely with educational development projects questioned the need for foreign training and the expertise of training facilitators.

Voumik: We need to think how much money we are wasting while implementing projects; how much we are sending abroad legally for foreign training. Can we reduce the waste of money in implementing these projects? We cannot be lavish in spending. We need these projects, but we have to reduce the waste of money. We need to think further whether there are alternatives to these projects.

Wahid: Often, the hosting institution hires training facilitators who are not the regular faculty members of that institution, and they agree to work as they were not in any regular job at that time. It is questionable how beneficial to attend training facilitated by such instructors.

Arguably their questioning is validated by accounts such as that by Shamim (2011), Kerr (2009), Biygautane (2016), Hunter (2009) and who variously discussed examples of how development projects are not sustainable. Moreover, Greenwood (2019) notes that "incomplete negotiation and agreement about goals and processes," (p. 111) is one identified cause. Another is the absence of funding for continuance after the initial funded period (often a start-up phase) has expired.

It is also arguable that CLT approaches in English need to become based on local conditions, needs, and emerging resources rather than remaining dependent on foreign visions and initiatives.

⁵ An island in the middle of a river

Discussion

Data from the survey and the qualitative investigation suggests that teachers who had received training in communicative language approaches understood the curriculum should include interactive processes to be used in classrooms, involving speaking and listening, as well as reading, writing, and encouraging students to talk in natural settings about topics that are meaningful to them. However, these teachers referred to impediments to implementing what they understood in practice. The most vivid of these was the way examinations, which reward rote learning, create a *de facto* classroom curriculum. Besides, they identified the lack of resources, insufficient training, and rural conditions in which poverty reduces school attendance and that English is a completely foreign language. Apart from the commitment of some teachers, the study also found a continuing practice of rote-based teacher instruction, a dominant reliance on guidebooks and question-and-answer sheets, and in many cases there was a significant lack of resources, teacher knowledge and materials, to support an interactive communicative approach to teaching language. This was especially the case in rural areas. It was found that training was predominantly in the form of short courses, especially in case of novice teachers, and that there were mixed reactions, by trainers and trainees, to the value and effectiveness of the courses. It appears that there is a lack of transition from international initiatives for CLT to models suited to Bangladesh. Furthermore, most importantly, it was found that the current examination model undermined motivation for teaching or learning by CLT approaches.

The findings are summarised in Figure 1, which identifies the rationale for teaching English as a communicative tool and the broad factors that inhibit the practice of CLT in classrooms. It is noteworthy that, while there is a range of pressures caused by the global market and opportunities that lead to the formulation of a curriculum policy that highlights the need to develop effective communication skills in English, the policy is only one of many other factors that impact on what actually happens in classrooms. This indicates that classroom practice cannot be improved by refining policy alone. Instead, the improvement should include attention to the broader range of factors that have been reported and discussed in this article.

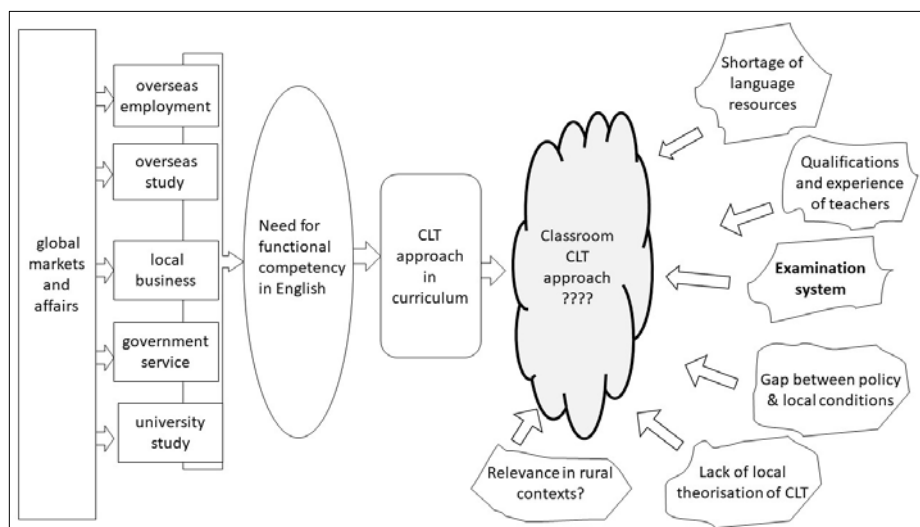


Figure 1: Factors that impact on classroom practice of CLT

The debate that is repeatedly featured in media and academic publications (Alam, 2018) is whether CLT or grammar-based methods are more effective tools for teaching English. We would argue that this debate ignores the complex nature of language learning. Grammar is indeed important in helping learners understand the structure of language, but it is often incomprehensible unless taught within meaningful contexts and evolving skills. Among others, Cummins and Davidson (2007) reminded us that "language learning cannot be reduced to a one-dimensional set of prescriptions," and Spada (2007) emphasised on the inclusion of form-based instruction within primarily meaning-making approaches. CLT has the potential to embrace a wide range of techniques and strategies: what is crucial is that the emphasis is on effective communication. We argue that pedagogical models of how this can best be achieved require research that focuses on examples of effective practice, resulting in theorisations of communicative teaching that are based on the conditions of Bangladesh classrooms and continuing development of teachers and improvement of teaching resources. It is also necessary to dismantle the examination system that defies

the expectations of policy and curriculum and imposes a reductive memorisation-based curriculum in the place of effective and communicatively functional language learning.

Conclusion

The results of the study showed that communication frequently appears to be a missing element in ELT in Bangladesh. It was found that students are silent in many classrooms and that rote learning dominates. However, there is also a relative absence of communication among policy-makers, the teachers, and teacher educators who are called on to implement policy. Such communication is needed to mediate the gaps between policy aspirations and local classroom conditions. In addition, there is also an absence of effective procedures for disseminating research into the effective teaching of CLT that is taking place and for supporting teacher inquiry and development.

We argue that there are no easy solutions for improving teaching in all areas as well as in the English language. Development is a long process requiring constant critical reflection and adaptive planning. Blaming the adoption of a CLT approach may offer an attractive scapegoat, but it does not remove the powerful impact of an inappropriate examination system or the need to train and professionally develop teachers and to provide teaching resources. Nor does it remove the need to offer Bangladeshi learners adequate communicative strategies in English to meet the demands of the current global context.

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