Challenges in the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Azad Kashmir

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Abstract: *This study investigated challenges faced by EFL teachers in the execution of communicative language teaching (henceforth CLT) at the elementary level in Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AJK), Pakistan. The sample for this study consists of 30 EFL teachers from ten elementary schools in Muzaffarabad. The data was collected in two phases, starting with quantitative data collection through questionnaires, followed by qualitative data collection through interviews. The collected data was analyzed statistically through frequencies and percentages. It was found that the EFL teachers in AJK are aware of the basic principles of CLT. Although the teachers have a positive approach toward CLT, they have failed to practice it in their classes because of some challenges. The findings indicated that the factors affecting the implementation of CLT in the AJK are traditional grammar-based teaching, lack of CLT training, large class size, the diverse backgrounds of students, and a lack of support from the administration.*

Key Words: Communicative Language, Teaching, Form, Function, Structure

Introduction

In the history of English language teaching, several language teaching methods have emerged and been adopted. Some have achieved wide recognition, while others have been superseded. Each language teaching method has its strengths and weaknesses and a diverse focus. These methods have been widely discussed, evaluated, and recommended for adaptation in a range of contexts and functions. CLT is no exception in this regard. It has been widely adopted for teaching English as a foreign language around the world. According to Barnelly and Sin (1989) and Ellis (1961), CLT has been recognized as a powerful theoretical model for teaching English. However, sometimes it poses problems in its implementation. The present paper focuses on the implementation of CLT in the AJK context by specifically focusing on the attitude of teachers towards its adoption in that context. The results of the study highlight the challenges faced by teachers in the implementation of CLT at the elementary level in Muzaffarabad AJK.

What is CLT?

According to [Richards (1992)](#) and [Richards and Schmidt (2002),](#) CLT emphasizes communicative competence as the sole goal of learning. [Littlewood (1981:1)](#) and [Savignon (1991),](#) however, give a holistic definition of CLT by saying that CLT pays systematic attention to both the functional and structural aspects of language. Generally, CLT goes beyond the mere teaching of grammar rules in a prescriptive way by using language in a meaningful way by practice.

The Salient Features of CLT

According to [Brown (1994),](#) "Communicative Language Teaching is a unified but broadly based theoretical position about the nature of language and language learning and teaching." There are several elements within CLT that distinguish CLT from other language teaching methods. These are discussed below:

1. Learners need knowledge of things like form, structure, and meaning. In CLT, however, the function is given primary importance. CLT does not neglect structure and grammar altogether. Rather, it considers that systematic knowledge of both form and function is very important.

2. Fluency and accuracy are the two principles subsumed under communicative language teaching ([Brown, 1994](#)). However, fluency takes on more value compared to accuracy. Fluency is emphasized over accuracy to enable learners to use language in context.

3. With CLT, classroom activities are based on real-life situations because such communication practice may help learners prepare for real communication in a real-world context. Roleplay, group work, pair work, games, drama, etc. are the activities mainly adopted in the CLT classroom to help learners gain spontaneity in their language use. [Thompson (1996)](#) recommends that with group work and pair work, learners can enhance their communicative competence. Their motivational level is also enhanced.

4. Grammar is taught but somewhat different to other methods of language teaching. In CLT, grammar is taught inductively, while in other methods, language is taught deductively. In the past two decades, some scholars have revisited and focused their attention on form-focused instructions in CLT (e.g., [Celce-Murcia, 1991](#); [Doughty and Williams, 1998;](#) [Ellis, 1993](#); [Long and Crookes, 1992](#)). There are some misperceptions about the teaching of grammar in CLT. One of the persistent misperceptions is that CLT means no teaching of grammar, although the exclusion of grammar was never part of CLT.

5. The Communicative Approach is not so limited in its scope. Besides oral skills, reading and writing skills are also developed to promote learners' confidence in the language ([Celce-Murcia, 1991](#)).

([Brown, 1994](#)) maintains that CLT prepares learners for real, meaningful communication. It helps learners produce unprepared language performance out of the classroom environment.

([Brown, 1994](#)) and [Yang and Cheung (2003)](#) find that CLT emphasizes meaningful and purposeful activities in the classroom. Apart from this, [Richards (2005)](#) highlighted the main aim of learning a language with the effective use of communicative competence. According to him, the basic aim of language learning is to understand the use of the language in a real situation. [Tomljenović (2020)](#) endorses the same by claiming that the interactive model of learning and

teaching positively influenced students' understanding of visual arts content.

Error Correction

Since the advent of CLT, errors have been viewed as normal phenomena while learning the English language. Too great a focus on correcting errors is, however, considered a way to discourage learners from communicating in English. Larsen-Freeman (1986) believes that learners might have specific linguistic knowledge and information and can still be effective communicators when errors of form are tolerated. According to Vigil and Oller (1976), error free language can be developed through self-correction because it can lead learners to the effective use of language in terms of their inter-language development. This is so because language is produced by the cognitive connections in the brain.

The Role of the Teacher

Along with the development of different teaching methods and approaches, the role of a teacher has changed significantly in CLT; Breen (1980) clarified the teacher's role in connection with CLT by claiming that within CLT, a teacher can have different roles, such as facilitator, guide, researcher, learner etc.

The CLT Approach and English Learning in AJK

English is needed for interaction and communication in an active way in today's world. Pakistan and the state of Azad Jammu and Kashmir are no exception because people living here also require English to communicate and to interact in an active way. English has become the medium of instruction and teaching in AJK tertiary educational institutions for both English majors and non-English majors in books and courses. Thus, proficiency in English is a basic requirement for teaching and learning. The teaching of English in Muzaffarabad

offers benefits to the educational policy of the state of AJK. In most institutions, interactive sessions are arranged by the teachers to enhance the oral competency and communication skills of the students. These sessions and activities are intended to develop students' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills so that they communicate efficiently and effectively with speakers of English. In some areas of Muzaffarabad, institutions offer basic courses related to the English language other than as a part of their regular classes. However, these programs are not satisfactory for the development of learners' English knowledge and oral skills. In addition to this, the overall level of Muzaffarabad students in English proficiency is not yet satisfactory (Muhammad and Rizwana 2020). The traditional way of teaching upholds a teacher-centered ideology. These procedures make students inactive and rely on memorization as the sole learning strategy. This style of instruction is the opposite of learner-centered instruction and is less conducive to the learner-centred learning atmosphere. That is the case in Muzaffarabad. Teachers are concerned about the use of traditional methods with an approach based on the ideology of teacher-centered strategies. In this system, teachers are considered the experts in the classroom, authorities who convey information to learners. In response to this, learners lack strong roles to perform; students are just data receptors that follow the teachers' directions (Muhammad and Rizwana 2020).

Recently, teachers (of EFL) have been motivated to implement CLT to help mature learners to use English properly in all situations and settings. CLT supports teaching practices that develop communicative competence. The present research can be considered an attempt to find out how CLT, as introduced in the elementary school English curriculum, is perceived by teachers and what they think

are the impediments to the practice of CLT.

Research Objective

1. To investigate the obstacles and challenges in the implementation of CLT at the elementary level in Muzaffarabad AJK.

Research Question

1. What are the hurdles in the implementation of Communicative language teaching in elementary schools of Muzaffarabad?

Significance of the Study

The findings will help to identify the levels of impediments and ways and means of developing and implementing CLT at the elementary level in AJK. Furthermore, this study will be significant for other institutions to measure their levels of CLT practices and will help in implementing and practicing CLT successfully. Lastly, it may support policymakers to understand the complexity of introducing communicative English teaching into the syllabus in AJK.

Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a prominent theoretical model in English language teaching (ELT), and CLT is accepted by many applied linguists and teachers as one of the effective approaches. As Li (1 998) stated, since its first appearance in Europe in the early 1970s and subsequent development in English as a second language (ESL) countries over the past 20 years, CLT has extended in scope and has been used by different educators in different ways. A number of research studies have been conducted, and much effort has been put into discussing on the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English as foreign language (EFL) countries (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998;

Xiaoju, 1984).

CLT approach has been so successful compared to other countries (Savignon, 2000). Ansarey (2012) asserts that despite the growing popularity of CLT in most ESL and EFL countries, there have been many challenges pertaining to the implementation of the CLT approach. Nakata (1990), as cited in McClintock (2012), reports that, in Japan, CLT has been shown to be difficult to implement in many facets of the education system. The study reports that difficulties exist in syllabus design, communicative competence of Japanese teachers, and the standardized testing system.

Lungu (2006) compared the effectiveness of reading and writing achievement in English between Communicative Approach (CA) and traditional methods in grade 8 Zambian basic schools and noted that communicative approaches were better than the traditional methods in many categories of pupils'" mean marks achievement. He noted that communicative approaches were better than the traditional methods. Thus, this study provides us with proof that the Communicative Approach is an effective approach to language teaching and learning over traditional methods in the African context when it is utilized and implemented effectively. Likewise, Borti (2015) explored the challenges in African classrooms using the Ghanaian context, focussing on the use of the appropriate language teaching methodology in African classrooms. In this study, experimental and control groups with a total of 86 students from an elementary school in Ghana-Tema Municipal Assembly Junior High School in Nmai Djor- Accra were used. The experimental group was taught using CLT, while the control group used the structural approach. The findings revealed that the experimental group performed better than the control group implying that CLT improved the communicative skills and the general proficiency. However, some studies show that CLT Approach has had

little or no success.

A study by Moyo (2009) indicates that English as a Home Language (EHL) classroom do not use a diverse range of activity types despite the language curriculum being based on the CLT approach. Classrooms are characterized by the dominance of lecture or telling style of teaching and listening to the teacher is a predominant activity in EHL settings. English is used extensively, but no prohibition or discouragement on the use of the mother tongue. These teaching and learning behaviors, according to Moyo (ibid), indicate the limited application of the CLT approach, hence posing questions and skepticisms about the complicated nature of the CLT approach for ESL and FL contexts. A recommendation from Moyo (ibid) is that the CLT approach should be revisited for its suitability in multi-level language classrooms.

Al-Magid (2006), on the other hand, assessed the effect of teachers" attitudes on the effective implementation of the Communicative Approach in ESL classrooms in Harare, Zimbabwe. Using a descriptive case study, 38 o-level secondary school English teachers from six schools were assessed in terms of their attitudes toward their classroom practices. The findings indicated that the effective implementation of the Communicative Approach was critically dependent on teachers" positive attitudes towards the approach in the five categories covered by the study. Positive attitudes towards the approach reflected the proper and effective implementation of CLT on the ground, but the opposite reflected the improper and ineffective implementation of the approach. Therefore, the author recommends that if the Communicative Approach is to be effectively implemented in Zimbabwe, then teachers" attitudes towards it have to be improved.

In Kenya, Onchera (2013) explored the factors perceived by teachers of English that affect the teaching of oral communication in the secondary school English language classroom. The study employed a descriptive survey design focusing on the secondary school teachers of English and their learners. The results revealed that most teachers used to lecture and Question/Answer methods more than any other techniques. According to the author, the teacher played an active role while the learners remained passive. The author also maintained that teachers did not make efforts to provide opportunities for learners to practice oral skills in the class; as a result, learners were unable to demonstrate oral skills. Also, in Kenya, Maryslessor et al. (2012) explored the challenges teachers faced in using the CLT approach in the listening and speaking lessons in Lugari District. A total of fourteen teachers were involved, selected from twelve secondary schools through stratified and simple random sampling techniques. The study revealed that the major challenge was time and a wide syllabus. According to the authors, this challenge, together with the large classes, limited the teachers" ability to involve learners in meaningful participatory activities. It was further noted that the pressure for formal examinations made teachers concentrate on training and drilling learners on how to pass the exams at the expense of communicative competence. Teachers chose to teach the learners how to pass exams and not how to use English in different situations.

Existing literature shown above reveals the challenges of the teaching of English using the CLT approach in most countries. The current study, therefore, sought to fill that gap by examining the influence of English teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the implementation of the CLT approach in Secondary schools of Muzaffarabad.

Research Methodology

The sample for this study comprised 90 English language teachers teaching at various levels in Muzaffarabad, from which there were 30 respondents. One specific district in the province of AJK was purposefully selected. The sample population included male and female participants from both public and private schools.

Data Collection

In order to establish the obstacles and challenges faced by teachers in implementing the CLT approach in AJK, data was collected from 30 EFL teachers through questionnaires and interviews. A structured questionnaire with two parts was developed for the survey study. The first part of the questionnaire was related to the demographic information of the participants. The second part of the questionnaire comprised five Likert scales, where each item had four options, i.e., Agree (A), Strongly Agree (SA), Disagree (D), Strongly Disagree (SD), and Uncertain (US). The statements are given in the Likert scale dealt with the obstacles and challenges for these EFL teachers in adopting.

Data Analysis

The researcher personally distributed the questionnaires, and the participants were given two weeks to complete and return

them to the researcher. To gain a deeper understanding, the interviewees were given options to respond to interview questions either in English or in Urdu. However, interviewees mostly responded in English. Each interview took approximately 10 to 15 minutes. For the purpose of observing research ethics, the names of participants were kept anonymous. Hence, the ten participant identifiers were pseudonyms such as P1, P2, P3, and so on. The data obtained through the questionnaire was analyzed using a percentage for every item. There the data collected through interviews were recorded and transcribed before being identified and transformed into categories. At the very first step, the recorded data were transcribed and then categorized into groups, which were constructed according to the research questions. Since the interview was a continuation of the survey, the data collected through interviews were thematically aligned with the survey results.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the analysis of the data that was collected to study the challenges faced by English language teachers in the implementation of CLT principles and practices in Azad Kashmir. The following table highlight the challenges faced by English language teachers in implementing CLT in Muzaffarabad.

Table 1. Challenge and Obstacles in Adopting CLT

Challenges & Obstacles	S A	%	A	%	SD	UC	%	D	%
Teachers' lack of target culture (English) knowledge	19	63.3 %	11	36.6 %	0	0	0 %	0	0%
Not enough authentic teaching materials to use	20	66.6 %	10	33.3 %	0	0	0 %	0	0%
Traditional grammar-based examinations	25	83.3 %	04	13.3 %	01	0	3.3 %	0	0%
Large class size	23	76.6 %	06	20 %	01	0	3.3 %	0	0 %
The diverse background of students	26	86.3 %	04	13.3 %	0		0 %	0	0 %
Lack of training in CLT	26	86.3 %	04	13.3 %	0		0 %	0	0%
Lack of an effective and efficient assessment instrument	24	79.6 %	06	20 %	0		0 %	0	0%

Challenges & Obstacles	S A	%	A	%	SD	UC	%	D	%
communicative competence	18	60 %	07	23.3 %	05		16.6 %	0	0%
Lack of support from the administration	26	89.3 %	03	10 %	0		0 %	0	0%
Teachers' misinterpretation of CLT	24	79.9%	06	20 %	0		0 %	0	0%
The unsuitability of Western educational assumptions in Asia	24	79.6 %	06	20%	0		0%	0	0%

English is considered a vital and compulsory subject in the school education of Azad Jammu and Kashmir, and English teachers must teach it in accordance with the syllabus provided by the board of AJ&K. English teachers in schools face many challenges and problems in teaching English. The first challenge that English teachers face, as mentioned in the above table that 63.3% of English language teachers strongly agree, and 36.6% of English teachers agree with the statement that Teachers' lack of target culture (English) knowledge is one of the challenges in developing communication skills of students and for teaching English effectively in a language class. This is because Teachers lack real-life exposure of living and interacting with native speakers of English, which could give them knowledge of English culture. Moreover, it emerges in the interview that coursebooks have too little information about culture.

Participant no 03: *"This challenge also happens because in the course books, the syllabus does not offer anything about the target language culture, which students and teachers should learn before teaching English."*

The data in above shows that English teachers face many obstacles while implementing CLT with L2 learners in a language class. The data shows that 66.6% of English teachers responded strongly agree, and 33.3% of English teachers just agreed with the statement that 'Not enough authentic teaching materials to use is an obstacle for them in teaching through CLT. The statistical data also show that only 1% of

the teachers disagreed with the statement that they lacked sufficient authentic teaching materials for teaching English because in some schools, teachers use authentic or prescribed materials for developing communication skills among students. This means that almost all English language teachers agreed that they lacked sufficient authentic teaching material to use in a language class for developing communication skills among students, and this is because English language teachers in schools must complete the given syllabus within the deadline and in accordance with the requirements of the exams, which are based only on written tests, and there is nothing to test listening or speaking skills. Apart from this, some teachers feel obliged to use GT because students in this area feel good when teachers use the GTM method in their teaching. One of the participants summarized it in this way:

Participant 02: *"As in the Asian context where English is taught as Second language and it is a subject taught in school education, so teaching Grammar is considered necessary for students to build their proficiency skills".*

The table shows that 83% of English teachers strongly agreed, and 13% agreed with the statement that Traditional grammar-based examinations constitute an obstacle for them in developing students' communication skills. For teaching L2 in a language class, school teachers continue to use the grammar teaching method because they feel comfortable with it.

Participant 06: *"Generally, teachers feel relaxed and comfortable using GTM, since*

there is not as much effort exerted in using this method as with using CLT in the class. Moreover, students are also tested in accordance with the grammar-based examinations, and students prefer to cram things rather than developing their conceptual skills. This is really a challenge for teachers, and it creates a hurdle in changing the methodology or switching from GTM to CLT".

The data shows that only 1% of English language teachers disagreed with the statement that traditional grammar-based examinations offer a challenge for them, and it is because these teachers may be sufficiently creative to switch from GTM to CLT. Classroom size is also very important for English language teachers as there is a range of standard classrooms sizes used for teaching English and developing communication skills among students. For example, the ideal classroom used in some European and American universities should contain 25 students; the seating arrangement of the students is also important for effective teaching. However, the situation in AJK is much different: a class normally consists of 50 to 60 students. The data given in the table shows that, in response to the statement, 76% of English teachers strongly agreed and 20% English teachers agreed that large classrooms are a major challenge for them, and that these create hurdles in developing communication skills among students.

Large classes with masses of students are not as effective for developing communication skills, since teachers must perform certain activities for different proficiency skills, but because of large class sizes, they are unable to execute their plans.

Participant 09: *"The large classes can be a problem for them in developing the communication skills of the students. It is impossible to deal with every student in huge, crowded classes."*

In response to the challenge of diverse backgrounds among students, 86.6% of English teachers strongly agreed and 13% agreed that this was an obstacle for them in developing students' communication skills. A class where students belong to different social, cultural, ethnic and economic backgrounds can be a challenge for English teachers, owing to student's diverse levels of ability to understand, but overall data show that only 1% English teachers consider it a hurdle for developing communication skills in L2 learners.

The data show that 1% of English language teachers disagreed with the statement that diversity of background was an obstacle for them, since in some classes; diversity can be a positive impetus for developing communication skills among the students. A class where students belong to different ethnic groups and economic backgrounds can be helpful in teaching communication and for CLT activities, since such conditions will create diversity in class and students will be able to share their background information in a diverse way. In reply to the statement that lack of CLT training is a barrier for English language teachers, 86.6% of these teachers strongly agreed and 13% agreed with the statement that lack of training in CLT is a challenge for them, since English teachers in schools need to know how to use CLT effectively in classrooms and how to design certain CLT activities and execute them in a language class.

Previous research practices show that English teachers without training in CLT may not be able to use CLT for developing communication skills among students. The data show that 1% of these teachers disagreed that lack of training in CLT constitutes a challenge for them in developing communication skills with the help of CLT activities.

Participant 05: *"It may be due to the fact that teachers give more importance to other challenges than CLT training."*

In response to the item Lack of an effective and efficient assessment instrument, 79.66% of English language teachers strongly agreed that this was a challenge for them in developing English proficiency and using CLT in their classrooms; additionally, 20% of the teachers agreed with the statement that this was an obstacle for them, while none of the teachers agreed that it is not a challenge for them. Since our education system is based on writing and lacks sufficient and effective assessment tools to test the listening and speaking skills of students. Teachers do consider this a major challenge for them in using CLT in their classrooms.

The data shows that none of these teachers considers lack of effective assessment tool a as a negative factor discouraging the use of CLT in the classroom. This is because teachers use traditional methods in classrooms and rely on traditional assessment tools; it is thus difficult for them to switch from old assessment methods to modern CLT tools in a language class. For a language teacher, having communicative competence is necessary, since students take teachers as role models to follow. If a teacher is sufficiently competent to use language effectively in class, then it may be beneficial for students and teachers to use CLT in class. The above data shows that 76.6% of English teachers strongly agreed with the statement that communicative incompetency was a challenge for English teachers, since they lack sufficient exposure to English in real contexts. Owing to the influence of the L1 in their daily routines, they mostly use L1 in social and classroom contexts, which affect their proficiency skills and the competency they model for their students. The data shows that 23% of English language teachers agreed with the statement and said that they faced this challenge during classroom teaching. The statistical data also show that 0% of EFL teachers disagreed on this point and said it

was not a challenge for them. One participant supported the idea in the interview:

Participant 04: *"For developing communication skills of the students, CLT communicative competence is not a challenge, since English teachers nowadays use other mediums to develop the communication skills of the students and for CLT teaching, like recorded lectures by native speakers and voice interactions with other language users who are competent enough to speak English in a language class."*

The data shows that lack of support from the administration is not a major challenge facing English language teachers in the CLT classroom, since 79% of these teachers disagreed with the statement. The data shows that only 20.6% of English teachers agreed with the statement, and this may be because in some traditional schools, older teaching practices continue, and the administration might focus more on form teaching, covering the syllabus and meeting examination deadlines.

Participant 07: *"Administration does not greatly affect CLT teaching, as they don't have any concern over CLT teaching, and it is the language teacher who can affect the CLT teaching."*

The above given table reveals that English teachers strongly agreed that they face some misinterpretation of CLT, since 79 % of English language teachers strongly agreed and 20% agreed with the statement. This shows that overall, 99 % of English teachers agreed that misinterpretation of CLT was a challenge for them. This is due to several factors like lack of training and knowledge about CLT, its misinterpretation during language teaching and incorrect implementation of CLT in the language class context.

The data also shows that 0% of English language teachers disagreed with the statement that misinterpretation of CLT could be an obstacle in teaching and

developing fluency with L2 learners. The last-mentioned challenge concerned the unsuitability of Western educational assumptions in Asia, where only 79. 6% strongly agreed and 20% agreed that this was a challenge for them in using CLT in the L2 classroom for developing students' communication skills. Whereas, none of the teachers disagreed with the statement that the unsuitability of Western educational assumption in Asia is a challenge for them. Today's education sector is shifting from traditional methods to modern methods that have already been successfully used in western systems with positive results. In Asia, these methods have also exerted a significant impact on L2 learners and in developing their competency skills in English. It is therefore imperative to use CLT methodology in developing the L2 skills of students, and this is not a concern for these English teachers.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Lack of knowledge about CLT is a hindrance in the implementation of CLT in AJK, so English language teachers should be trained in CLT. They need to be made aware of the techniques and principles of CLT and of how these techniques and principles are practiced in language classes. Class size is an important issue in CLT. In the rural areas of AJK, class size is exceptionally large. However, this should be regulated, and English classes should not consist of more than 30 students. In the rural context, many teachers still consider the Grammar Translation Method better than CLT for teaching English. Teachers' belief plays an important role in the teaching-learning process. So, the teachers need to be trained to change their beliefs and teaching methodology at the elementary level. The present examination system also needs to be improved by including all four skills in the examination. EFL teachers should be trained to teach all four skills to the students.

Implications for Future Research

Taking into consideration these challenges and recommendations for implementing CLT, further research, particularly an action research, is required for better recommendation for implementing CLT in AJK. The research should involve a variety of data collection methods such as interviews, physical artefacts, questionnaires, and classroom observation in order to examine the actual problems faced by EFL teachers in the classroom.

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