Enhancing Communicative Competence of Undergraduate Students Using Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT)

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ABSTRACT

English language teaching has been undergoing consistent modifications in terms of applying methods and approaches. With the rapid advancement of technology and its use in English classrooms, classroom activities, students' participation and teachers' involvement have also undergone many changes there by paving way for a cooperative approach to English language learning. Traditional methodologies focus on proficiency in different aspects of grammar and through controlled activities like memorisation of dialogues and drills, pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work. CLT emerged in the 1970s and 1980s when the attention from grammatical competence shifted to the knowledge and skills needed to use grammar and other features of language suitable for different communicative purposes such as making requests, giving advice, making suggestions, and describing ideas and emotions and so on. The present paper attempts to outline the main principles of CLT and its application in a language classroom. In addition to this, the research shows the role digital education plays in enhancing learners' academic performance, enthusiasm and process of learning. The paper concludes with notable results that might motivate teachers, researchers and professional educators to employ the approach in their regular teaching.

Keywords: Communicative competence, Communicative Language Teaching, language skills, digital language education

Introduction

The effectiveness of language teaching can be determined by the innovativeness of teachers' pedagogical practices and the inclination of students towards learning and overcoming language barriers along with the appropriate aid of technology. The present-day language teaching focuses on the need for effective communication skills to prepare students for formal instruction, travelling, studying abroad, and the opportunities available through media and the internet. In this context, the analysis of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) becomes relevant. Since the 1970s when this methodology evolved as a reaction to traditional language teaching using Audio-lingual Method, cognitive-based approaches, and Situational Language Teaching, it has always been a continuous influence on language teaching (Kumaravadivelu, 2001 & 2006; Celce-Murcia et al. 1995; Canale & Swain, 1980; Widdowson, 2011; Richards and Rodgers, 1986). CLT aims to enhance communicative competence by teaching language use, variation

in language use according to the setting and participants that is by switching between formal and informal speech or written and spoken communication, writing and understanding different types of texts like narratives, reports, interviews and conversations and overcoming communication barriers (Richards, 1986). The growing influence of CLT is a vital component in the academic world, varied ways of learning and opportunities for undergraduate students of higher educational organisations. Moreover, CLT connects the skills gap by transforming the graduate students into qualified, competent, and skilful human resources with notable language expression for the continuous professional and personal growth that the present-day job market requires.

Now, graduates aspiring for good jobs are required to put the theoretical learning into practical usage effectively while performing their jobs. This process will be further reinforced through CLT as it facilitates a cooperative rather than an individualistic approach to learning and it helps students know what to say and how to say it appropriately based on the situation, the participants and their role and intentions. The idea of "communicative competence" came from sociolinguistics which ascribed it as a goal of language teaching (Power, 2003). The ideas and concepts in CLT were adopted from applied linguistics, sociolinguistics, psycholinguistics and philosophy. CLT thus promotes using English for business purposes, in the hotel industry or for travelling, in an office, on an aeroplane, or in a shop. It helps students know the use of languages in everyday situations like making telephone calls, vocational or professional situations like taking part in a meeting, describing plans, and academic situations like giving explanations or making an introduction. CLT prioritizes

discourse and rhetorical skills like storytelling or giving an effective business presentation.

CLT assists language learning through the process of communication rather than a grammar-based approach. It makes real communication the objective of language learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). It provides opportunities for learners to test and try out what they know. The attitude towards error is altogether changed in CLT because it is believed that errors suggest that the learner is building up his/her communicative competence. It offers chances for the learners to develop both accuracy and fluency. It bridges the gaps among different skills like speaking, reading, listening and writing. It focuses on developing fluency in language use (Brown, 2001). Fluency is a language use occurring naturally when a speaker involves in meaningful communication and keeps up comprehensible and continuous interaction despite restraints in his/her communicative competence. CLT develops classroom activities enabling students to negotiate to mean, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings and work to overcome communication barriers. When CLT evolved during the 1970s and 1980s, a series of alternative approaches and methods also emerged simultaneously like the Total Physical Response (TPR) developed by James Asher (1969), the Natural Approach, the Silent Way, or Suggestopedia (Richards and Rodgers, 1986). Kumaravadivelu (2006) observed that the CLT became popular because of its focus on learners and communication.

Concerns of CLT

Contrary to use grammar topics or texts (dialogues, short stories and so on) as a basis for organizing syllabus, CLT prioritizes

communicative skills and grammar is just introduced as a support to develop these skills. Some advocate the usage of tasks as chief units to form the basis of daily and long-term lesson plans (Breen 1987; Long 1985; Nunan 1999; Prabhu 1987). This approach to the syllabus is known as task-based instruction (TBI). In CLT a learner does not read the texts or study the grammar but he/she undergoes task-based performances that give him/her a purpose to use the grammar in a meaningful context. CLT emphasizes the significance of focusing on meaning. It supports the principle that conveying an intended meaning is the essence of language use. Long (1985) and Skehan (1998) stress the use of real-world tasks or activities that are comparable to authentic task behaviour. It is a challenge for the teacher to engage students in a variety of tasks to promote acquisition. Nunan (1999) explicates two kinds of tasks: Real-world tasks and pedagogical tasks. The former kind emphasizes the skills that students need to have to perform in the real world. Such tasks usually reproduce authentic task behaviour and their basic focus is the achievement of an end product. The latter kind is intended to act as a link between the classroom and the real world in that they prepare students for real-life language use (Long, 1985). It involves those tasks that promote the language acquisition process by considering a teacher's pedagogical objective, the learner's development stage and skill level and the social contexts of the second language learning environment. CLT promotes learning by doing for example the goal of a lesson may be to give a task to students to arrange a talk with a group of international students interacting with them on topics like hobbies and interests, languages that they speak, or their age, their viewpoints and so on. They can be given the task to collect information to set up an address book.

In view of the practical experience of implementing the CLT, the researcher would like to mention that the sample group of students of the study were all enrolled in English Communication Course and had varying levels of English language competence. Gradually, several approaches and tasks were needed for students to master the course content of this course and to have real-life communication skills. Further, all the students were given an exclusive support system through CLT wherein they would be learning communication skills, enhancing their English language competency and learning among peer groups through group discussions, task-based learning, participating in the in-class quizzes and oral presentations. Initially, the teacher participant felt that the students were hesitant in performing and practising task-based learning but with regular motivation and varied tasks given at regular time intervals, students came up with renewed enthusiasm to learn different ways of communication skills. It implies that every phase of English language teaching and learning needs to be logically integrated through CLT to bring desired results.

Review of Literature

The objective of a section on the review of literature is to emphasize research and examination already done related to CLT, the discussion related to post CLT or post-method and the application of CLT in the context of English language teaching and learning. CLT shows a certain model or research paradigm, or a theory (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995). Its main objective is for learners to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1972) or communicative ability. Communicative

competence is the ability to interpret and enact suitable social behaviours, and it needs the active involvement of the learners in the production of the target language (Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia et al., 1995; Hymes, 1972). Such an idea includes a wide range of abilities e.g. the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary known as linguistic competence; the ability to say the appropriate thing in a certain social situation called sociolinguistic competence; the ability to initiate, go through, add to, and end a conversation, and the ability to do this in a continuous and coherent manner known as discourse competence; the ability to communicate effectively and repair problems caused by communication breakdowns referred to as strategic competence. Littlewood (1981: 1) states that "one of the most characteristics features of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combine these into a more fully communicative view." With the CLT implication in the classroom, the target language is used which is a vehicle for classroom communication, not merely the object of study. (Larsen-Freeman, 2000: 25). Richards & Rodgers (1986: 67) state that the target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate and not with rote learning but through social interaction. CLT is not a method in the sense by which content, a syllabus, and teaching routines are clearly chalked out (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). CLT uses materials and methods that are suitable to a given context of learning. Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) assert that many teachers agree that communicative language teaching should be taught in a fun way and the preparation to make it fun is really time-consuming. Nunan (1987: 136-145) observes

that teachers following CLT devotedly do not manage to recreate real-life communication in their classes along with creating opportunities for developing communication skills. The review of recent literature on CLT reflects its analysis and criticism needed to have a thorough understanding to explore its implementation in the process of teaching and learning the English language at the undergraduate level.

Rationale of Study

The outcome of a course in a programme depends on the smooth functioning of the teaching-learning process. The course entitled English Communication of B.A. English Honours 1st semester and B.Sc. Home Science 1st semester at Institute of Integrated & Honours Studies IIHS, Kurukshetra University, Haryana India plays a crucial role in enhancing the language skills of undergraduate students. So the present study was conducted to investigate the language acquisition of the students through interviews, feedback through emails (for the e-content designed to improve the language skills of the students) and face to face interaction between teacher and students. The present study intends to investigate the effectiveness of CLT in the context of the teaching and learning process at the Institute of Integrated & Honours Studies IIHS, Kurukshetra University, Haryana India. The study utilizes suitable methods of research that are particularly designed to achieve the set goals. Initially, a systematic analysis of the literature review was done. Then the researcher made an assessment of the concerns of CLT in the field of education. The researcher's personal pedagogical experience and analysis of the data collected added inputs to the review.

Objectives of Study

The research objectives of the study are:

- To assess the efficacy of the CLT in ensuring the communicative competence of the undergraduates.

- To discuss the concerns of CLT in the education field

- To emphasize the kind of positive impact CLT has on the process of teaching and learning of English Language

Research Methodology

The present study applied Wallace's action research Model (1993) by systematically collecting data, inventing interactive tasks as a daily practice, and analysing the data to reflect upon the teaching strategy used and to arrive at some decisions and bring in pedagogical changes to cope up with the language issues faced by the students. The teacher action research used in this study was contextualized, localized, and aimed at discovering, developing or monitoring changes to practise the pedagogy (Wallace, 2000). The present study investigates the impact of CLT through the direct interaction between the teacher and the students who were asked questions based on language acquisition and its challenges. The students of B.A. English Honours were more receptive to short interactions towards the end of the class on a daily basis. These students used to share their problems and express their inability to use language skills through emails too. The students of B.Sc. Home Science used to interact through the tasks given by the teacher during the classroom and also through emails and WhatsApp messages. Regular tasks were given and the students were monitored through their responses and participation. The teacher focused on developing the fluency of the students through tasks like role play and word games. The classroom activities provided students with an opportunity to 'negotiate meaning', 'use communication strategies', 'correct misunderstandings', and focus to avoid communication failures (Richards, 2006:14). The teacher made groups of the students and offered them an opportunity with language tasks like speaking on a topic to ensure information exchange across the groups. The situation-based tasks provided ample opportunities for the students to rethink the ways in which they could convey the desired and required information. The teacher action research was an integral tool to modify the students' attitude toward language acquisition and also made the teacher reflect upon the traditional method of lecture method teaching and replace it with CLT. The teacher gave the tasks of role-playing frequently to the students to maximise their engagement. This experiential method was very significant for CLT classroom when it was performed in groups and pairs, the encouraged participants stimulated other reluctant participants with their extempore and other forms of public speaking in the given situations. The teacher organized the regular activities for the students and objectively monitored their performance by making a record of their performance in an MS Excel file containing information on the activities, language issues and improvements of the students. The teacher gave the tasks of word games to the students like spelling bees, crossword puzzles, scrabble, riddles, and anagrams to make them concentrate on the language activities and develop their confidence in language items.

Data Analysis & Findings

It is pertinent to emphasize the model of the CLT implementation at IIHS to show how the present study was able to meet its specific research

objectives. The sample group of students belonged to the first year B.A. English Honours and B.Sc. Home Science branches. The sample size was 69, of these 59 students performed satisfactorily through various task-based instructions through CLT. English communication is generally considered to be the only challenge where many students face rejection at the time of interviews. But with the appropriate CLT techniques, the students were able to communicate effectively during every task-based exercise. The implementation of CLT into the regular classroom sessions was found to be productive and successful as reported by students and teachers in their feedback. Many students felt they experienced a clear shift between their earlier poor English communication and CLT based effective English communication. When prompted, they mentioned that plenty of opportunities and tasks were provided in the CLT to practise and enhance language skills in several ways. Additionally, they shared their participation levels have increased gradually in answering the quizzes, assignments in teams and pairs, and oral presentations. Getting access to CLT pushed them further to prepare themselves for real-life interaction more confidently participating in group discussions, opening up with their classmates and developing their language skills and overcoming language barriers.

Responding to how CLT improved students' communicative competence in English, the students said that they were able to read, share, write and speak effectively through regular task-based exercises done in daily classroom on topics such as oral presentation skills, and enhanced accent and intonation, debates, elocution and extempore. Also, they felt they were positively influenced to be more

responsible for their own learning and growth. The teacher remained a facilitator who monitored the students and let them learn through their mistakes and consistent practice of language skills based on different tasks given at frequent intervals. They were given the study material through blogs and audio and video lectures on youtube channels. In the classrooms, they were paired up with others, decided the topic for presentations on their own, gathered essential information and then gave oral presentations individually. Then, clarifications were sought through discussion classes and then final presentations were given by the students with utmost confidence, eagerness, authority and fluency. During the initial classes, most of the time was spent on expressing and seeking clarification from students on certain challenges related to the use of appropriate vocabulary in different situations, sentence structures and fluency along with fine-tuning their way of reporting, presenting arguments and counterarguments in a paragraph and presenting the information.

The study aimed at the investigation of the effectiveness of CLT in improving the English language skills of the students using a survey to bring out their feedback. The results of the survey found that the CLT has made the process of language learning a better and more cheerful experience as reported by 88% of participants. It was opined by 85% that the key driving force of the course was getting task-based opportunities to explore language skills and get confidence and fluency with consistent practice. A majority (77%) of the students expressed that collaborative learning and group discussions among peer groups were ensured and facilitated by the CLT. Development of self-confidence in learning and expressing language for academic

and general contexts was reported by 90% of the students. CLT made 85% of them well prepared, informed and focused on language learning skills. Besides, they mentioned their way of structuring questions and improved sentence structures with the regular writing tasks given in the classroom. From the perspective of teachers, it was observed that their chief motivating factor to adopt CLT was the scope for learner-centred teaching, the opportunity to learn and deliver new ways of teaching and motivating students through varied tasks. There was negative feedback reported by 14% of the respondents. When enquired, they reasoned out certain pertinent issues related to accessing the learning content online, some cognitive aspects, poor time management to perform tasks timely, lack of interest, inability to balance personal work and studies, lack of uninterrupted internet connectivity and self-motivation.

The study discovered that the word games and language activities like extempore writing and group discussions made the language learning interesting and stimulating and gave the teacher an opportunity to engage the students easily in more complex language tasks like oral presentations, opinion sharing and resume writing. The students were assigned presentations individually and were made to reflect on situation based communication through mutual discussion of various groups. The study noticed that the CLT classroom thus becomes a social event in which the students cooperate, communicate, explore and contribute through mutual interaction resulting in various academic outcomes. NEP recommends encouragement to be given to slow and fast learners and this study discerned that the grouping of mixed proficiency can benefit both fast and slow learners because more negotiations in the second language occur.

Conclusion

Having gone through the findings of the study, it can be argued that the CLT is not only a promising teaching-learning strategy but also generated interest in the students to learn and develop their communicative competence in English. In a language acquisition process, a teacher has to be a facilitator who is constantly reflecting, investigating and self-motivating to help students attain fluency and show maximum participation in the context of Communicative and learner-centred Language Teaching. The present study attempted to address the language acquisition issues and find solutions to particular students' language and behavioural problems in the English Communication classroom at IIHS. The study underpinned the enhancement and development of the students' fluency and communication skills after being monitored and facilitated by the teacher in a CLT classroom. The findings of the present study formed a major contribution to the overall evaluation of the English Communication Course designed to enhance the language competence of the undergraduate students of Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, Haryana. The implications of the study suggest the relevance of task-oriented teaching, understanding students' language behavioural needs, impartially monitoring students' performance, and the nature of teacher's pedagogical methods like CLT to facilitate and ensure effective language teaching. The findings emphasized the systematic implementation of the research and student-oriented outcome which is a crucial step to evaluate the language acquisition process. The tasks undertaken by the teacher systematically to enhance the students' communicative competence were monitored and evaluated objectively through an action research plan. The research methodology

suggests that the tasks like memorisation of dialogues and drills, pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and oral presentations engage the students and enhance their communicative potential and competence much needed in the modern competitive and technology savvy world. The findings also implied that the CLT classroom provides an opportunity for both the teacher and the students to be significant participants in the language learning and teaching process. The findings proposed that the students in a language classroom can be motivated to participate through interactive tasks with no burden of grammar rules and can learn the ways to speak better with regular practice of various speaking tasks. The findings strengthened the relevance of students' cooperation and mutual learning method with group discussions, asking questions, making requests and providing feedback thereby boosting their communicative ability.

Besides, CLT being a task-oriented, learner-centred, language learning opportunities for the students are manifold, it has become a successful means of bringing positive change in students' language skills. With the changing time and needs of the students, CLT provided many benefits like good fluency, enriched vocabulary, syntax, discourse and speech setting thereby improving their comprehension process. With the teacher being the facilitator in CLT, students, in particular, found confirmation checks, use of body language, visual representations, repetitions, and effective use of English all helped them in the language comprehension. CLT furthermore has brought a pragmatic or performance-based approach to learning. It has promoted the goal of developing real-life language skills by engaging the students in contextualized, meaningful and communicative oriented learning tasks. Given these findings, it is essential to point out that CLT is receptive to reconsidering and adopting new teaching practices, as research findings evolve in the future.

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