RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN ENHANCING THE COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

English Language Teaching has in recent decades shifted toward communicative focused instruction. However, researchers have reported the hiatus that often exists between the knowledge of the language the teachers have and the use of the language in communicative situations, in oral and written forms. As a way of narrowing the gap between learners' theoretical knowledge and its utilization to serve the daily communicative needs of the learners. This study tried to implement a one-month training programme to enhance the communicative abilities of teachers with accuracy and fluency,. The findings indicated that when language was taught for functional purposes involving the learner-centric principles of the need, ambition, and the motivation of the teachers, their communicative abilities have been enhanced. The intrinsic motivation to learn and self-confidence to teach have been enhanced. The teachers were able to use the forms of language they have learned already. They were able to connect form and function appropriately using the language in interpersonal communicative contexts.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, formulaic expressions, accuracy, fluency

1 INTRODUCTION

In the present context of globalization, privatization and development, it is imperative that in any field one should have communicative abilities with the factors of accuracy and fluency in their use of language. In the same vein, in the field of English Language Teaching, (ELT), it is necessary that the teachers of English need to have communicative abilities in English in order that they become efficient teachers, specially, teachers of English language. In India, even the parents from lower strata of society want to provide English education to their children even if it is dearer in terms of resources. English medium schools have proliferated and more teachers are required to teach not only the English language but also the subjects in English. The communicative abilities of teachers should have both the components of accuracy and fluency. Even though there are institutes trying to develop the communicative abilities of learners within a short period, yet the

abilities during performance need some kind of refinement. In the case of teachers during the teacher training course, the trainees are given orientation in developing their communicative abilities. In spite of the regular component in their syllabus, teachers of English need a special form of training for their empowerment and splendid performance.

It is often believed that the knowledge of the English language could endow with a higher standard of communicative abilities in the language. But it is essential that the functional aspects of the forms of the language should be known so as to enhance the language abilities in communication. Language is connected with the society and communication. Further, it is also embedded with the socio economic development.

In recent decades, teachers of English have been encouraged to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to help in developing the communicative abilities of the learners appropriately in personal and in interpersonal social contexts. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach has been introduced to enhance students' abilities for communication to use English in real contexts (Littlewood, 2007). Communicative   Language Teaching (CLT) also advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence in authentic situations (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

2.   Literature Review

2.1   Communicative Competence

The concept of "communicative competence" had been introduced by Hymes (1972). He claimed that the study of human language should place humans in a social world. He opined that "communicative competence" is what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate in a speech community. For instance, in the real world, not only a speaker is expected to produce a grammatical sentence, but he/she should also consider the situational context in which the sentences are used. Hymes (1972) is of the opinion that competence should be viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses" (p. 13). Communicative competence entails not only the knowledge of the language but also the ability to use the knowledge in context. Further Hymes proposed four areas of communicative competence. (i) Grammatical correctness, which refers to the notion of grammatical competence and the correctness of the utterances (ii) acceptability, deals with whether something is feasible (iii) appropriateness, means that a sentence should be appropriate to the context in which it is used and (iv) probability of occurrence, which is that a sentence may be formally possible, acceptable, and appropriate in contexts, but have no probability of actually occurring. Hence, 'communicative competence' consists of knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and language strategies.

2.2   Definition of CLT

Linguists agree that CLT started from a theory of communicative language use, and was extended into a design for instruction, materials, classroom techniques, teachers, and learners.

 According to Richards & Rodgers (1986), the goal is to develop learners' communicative competence.

In the present study, as Brown (2007) proposed the four interconnected characteristics as a definition of CLT are applied: (i). Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence; (ii). Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather, aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes;   (iii). Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times, fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use; and (iv) In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

2.3   Characteristics and Principles of CLT

CLT has been popular and widespread in English language teaching. In the traditionally followed teacher-centered approach, teachers are regarded as knowledge providers and learners as receivers; CLT reflects a learner-centered approach. This learner-centered approach as Brown (2007) points out, gives students a sense of "ownership" of their learning and enhances their motivation. CLT emphasizes the process

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of communication and leads learners to roles different from the traditional approach. The learners make negotiations between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning. They are actively engaged in negotiating meaning by trying to make them understood and in understanding others within the classroom procedures and activities (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The roles of teachers in CLT approach is that of facilitators. The teacher facilitates the communication process among participants themselves and the teacher also engages in communicative activities with the students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Apart from the teacher being a participant, he becomes an analyst, a counsellor and the group process manager as Richards and Rogers (1986) claim.

2.4 The Adoption of CLT in ESL Context

In the teaching of English as the Second Language the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has become widespread since its emergence in the 1970s. In the recent decades, communication is essential in various fields such as technology and travel, business and commerce and in social contexts. Shih (1999) investigated English programs in Taiwanese universities and found the English courses had changed from traditional form-based to communication-based, with emphases on language functions and learners' needs. The research by Chern (2002) indicated that in addition to the general English courses, elective English courses are offered to develop students' English proficiency.

3. The Study

3.1 Statement of the Problem

In the school, the teachers are required to perform varied types of teaching work. They need to deliver their lessons well, and monitor the learning of their students and contribute to the enhancement of communicative abilities of the students. Situations also demand that they need to communicate in English with their colleagues and prepare the students for efficient communication in life situations.

The teaching environment is such that the Principal and the correspondent of the school are the only individuals with whom they could communicate in English. The situation is not able to throw a any challenge to their communicative abilities. Nor do they have any exigency to communicate in English. But the assignment they have now needs to have good communicating ability in order to enhance the communicative abilities of the students. The context in the present study is in conformity with the view that "the students in developing countries who have received several years of formal English teaching frequently remain deficient in the ability to use the language and to understand its use, in normal communication, whether in spoken or written form" (Widdowson 1972). Even though the teaching learning approaches have been changed and the school curricula shifted toward CLT in ESL classrooms, researchers have pointed out a gap between policy and practice (Nunan, 2003).

3.2 Participants

The present study has made its focus on a group of twenty teachers, non-native speakers of English working in an English medium High school situated in the outskirts of Chennai city. The participants of the study are qualified teachers to teach in the High School. Some teachers have no experience and recently graduated in teaching. Other teachers have experience ranging from 5 months to 5 years of teaching. Regarding the ability of understanding English, the teachers could follow lectures in the classroom and are able to understand the textbooks. They have knowledge of the basic grammar of word order of a simple sentence, yet the strength of their vocabulary is not very stable.

3.3 Methodology

A training programme has been designed to improve the abilities of the teachers in their communicative abilities with accuracy and fluency in their use of the English language. The teachers are trained-graduate teachers. They had their education till graduation in their language L1, namely, Tamil. They had studied English as a subject of study in their graduate course and used the English language to acquire knowledge of their main subjects of study in their graduation. Obviously, the need of using English for communication in the classroom, in the tertiary institution and with others is minimal. Now as teachers, they need to have communicative abilities to teach classes up to 10 and at the same time they have to possess accuracy and fluency.

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The training programme has been designed for one month. The learners are expected to work in dyads and groups. Tasks are characterized with a goal to achieve and an activity to perform is used as strategy for working to acquire the communicative proficiency. Tasks are used to elicit some form of linguistic behavior from the learners. The other strategies of instructions exploited in this learner-centric approach are the imitation and creative construction and then practiced often times till the communicative grammar is internalized.

The learners formed themselves into groups of dyads or triads in each and they had to work with the materials of nursery rhymes, pictures and some newspaper clippings. The language of the rhyme presented short patterns of speech with functional value. The rhymes become models for emulation of speech between two people involved in asking and responding, describing, instructing, accepting and clarifying, etc. With the help of the language available in select rhymes, they were to recognize the conversational style embedded in the nursery rhymes, identify the description and narrative style etc. and transform the rhymes into conversational dialogues.   The study began with the analyzing the rhyme, such as,   Johnny Johnny, Yes, Papa!

Baba, Black Sheep! Pussy Cat, Pussy Cat, where have you been! I hear thunder! Then they began to use the language for daily communication, later applying the patterns of utterances in different situations.
The trainees were able to interact with one another in the group to clarify and appeal for affirmation. It has been observed that they also understood and formulated utterances to express their views, ideas, thoughts etc. They related the type of prepositions they could make with the organization of the utterances.
From the nursery rhyme of Jack and Jill went up the Hill, they learnt to describe the events, narrate incidents and stories using the past tense. Rhymes with question forms of language are identified and used for making enquiries and responding. From the recreational song, There is whole in the bucket, the learners noticed the framing of questions using the auxiliaries and prepositions. On the basis of their analytical observations of the forms of language used in the texts, or the grammar of functions explored, the learners related the 'linguistic forms' to the ' communicative functions' performed in the rhymes and they explored the contexts where they could apply this knowledge in their classroom situations. All these activities were performed through group interactions and sharing.

The instructional strategies set for language output by the learners to enhance their fluency of speech. The learners were expected to converse among themselves in English while they were engaged in the task. The task had twofold objectives: the principal objective was for the learners to use the language while working out the task given to them, and the other was to complete the language tasks. The target of the training was to increase the fluency of the language performance. The training lasted for thirty working days of the school, with an hour per day devoted to practicing communication skills. The learners had to work on the task of converting the song into a dialogue. The songs chosen were of two types: one is of narrative rhyme and the other questioning type. The trainer followed the principle of moving from the simple to complex and from familiar to the unknown, from knowledge to application. The hierarchy of functions given by Halliday (1970) was used as the base to start with. In the first week of training, the trainees were asked to recall and write down all the instructional language they used in the class or they heard their teachers use in their school days. Somewhere a person used to begin saying --- sit down, stand up, sit down, stand up and the physical response that were elicited from the learners. Stop talking. Don't make noise. Look at the board, Your attention please! Who is talking there! etc. were some of the expression they recalled. The teacher was asked to write down some more of similar expressions they could use in the classroom. Over four days in the week, the teachers were able to write down formulaic expressions they knew and heard their teachers using: Instructional language, Directional language, Locational language, Narrative use of the language to describe their daily activities, spending their week end, getting ready for school in the morning etc.

Another way to make use of pictures in a speaking activity is to give students just one picture and having them describe what it is in the picture. Tasks given in the classes were to comment on the figures given in the picture, express their opinion about some issues, relate any incident triggered out of the pictures, take themes for speaking on a topic etc. They provided unrehearsed contexts to respond. For this activity, students formed groups and each group was given a different picture. Pictures were used for description purposes.

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Students in their groups discussed the picture, and then a spokesperson for each group describes the picture to the whole class. This activity fostered the creativity and imagination of the learners as well as their   public speaking skills. Likewise, they learnt the structuring of the utterances to perform various functions of enquiry, assertion, and even learn to respond to various requests made and enquiries sought.

Before coming to class, students were asked to read a newspaper or magazine and, in class, they report to their friends what they had found as the most interesting news. Students could also talk about whether they had experienced anything worth telling their friends in their daily lives before class.

Some teachers shared their own observations in the group that had benefited other teachers, which established the perspective of collaborative learning as invaluable. The teachers identified that the instructions given in the textbooks were addressed to the readers, it was as if the book was speaking to the reader directing as what to do and what not to do. And they could be used by the teachers in the class to instruct their students.

By the end of four weeks of training period, the learners were asked to express their opinion through a self-reporting questionnaire based on their experiences of learning and observations.

3.4   Post-training Questionnaire

A questionnaire had been administered after the training for a month and the data are analyzed. (See Appendix)

4 Findings

The research indicated that the teachers were able to use different types of materials and do the tasks set before them in their communicative abilities. The intrinsic motivation had been fully utilized as the participants had evinced keen interest in learning to use the language. The interactional techniques explored in the classroom, had made impact on their use of the language more appropriately in different contexts.

The findings showed that the proficiency of the learners had been enhanced in linking the forms with the functions more consciously in order to realize how the language is used in a natural way. The use of formulaic expressions such as verbal phrases used as idiomatic expressions or other formulaic expressions has been a new concept to learners. These expressions which they had recognized while reading the newspapers were brought to the notice of the group and they were learnt and began to distinguish them from the verb phrases.

The learner-centric approach to learn the functional English could be explored in any given situation provided there is the favorable and non-threatening environment marked by purposeful learning. Not only accuracy of expressions has been understood but the importance of the component of fluency had also been established.

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Appendix 1
Questionnaire

S. No.	Opinion	Frequency Scores	
		Very much	A Little
1.	The effect of using pictures	18 (90%)	2 (10%)
2.	The effect of using rhymes	19 (95%)	1 (05%)
3.	The awareness of the forms of language for different functions	14 (70%)	6 (30%)
4.	The effect of speaking extempore on any given topic	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
5.	The effect of interactions and group tasks	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
6.	The effect of narrating a story	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
7.	The effect of reorganise the structures to achieve some intent of communication	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
8.	The increase in speed with which they deliver the utterances	15 (75%)	5 (25%)
9.	Consciously reducing to use mother tongue	17 (85%)	3(15%)
10.	The effect of adjusting their utterances to the comprehension ability of the learners	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
11.	Reformulating utterances to the comprehension of the listeners	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
12.	The ability to verbalise one's thoughts	15 (75%)	5 (25%)
13.	Using various formulaic expressions, short phrases in conversations	15 (75%)	5 (25%)
14.	The effect of acquiring more vocabulary and expressions from group interactions	18 (90%)	2 (10%)
15.	The effect of shedding their inhibitions to speak and interact in English	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
16.	The effect of developing 'can-do' attitude in you	15 (75%)	5 (25%)
17.	Using English in a meaningful and realistic way	16 (80%)	4 (20%)
18.	Grammar is required for using the language for communicative purposes	17 (85%)	3 (15%)

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