



A Pilot Study about the Use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an Omani Tertiary College

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Abstract. One of the fundamental goals of learning English as a foreign language is helping to communicate with people speaking English effectively. The focus on the teaching and learning of English as a Second Language (L2) and as a foreign language, is justified by the fact that English is considered as a lingua franca and the first language used overseas. In this context, the learners of the English language are given little time to practice the language, especially the speaking skill in authentic situations in classrooms or outside of them. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes both meaning and communication in language learning. Hence, the ultimate objective of CLT is to improve the learners' "Communicative Competence". However, implementing CLT in EFL classrooms is somehow challengeable. Consequently, the purpose of this pilot study is to particularly investigate the extent to which an Omani English teacher is aware of some CLT features and its implementation level of such characteristics in EFL classrooms. Moreover, the study at hand explores how the learning activities can help students to improve their 'communicative competence'.

Keywords: *CLT; Omani Context; Implementation; Language Teaching.*

1. Introduction

Language teaching is widely known to be an active field over the time. According to Whong (2011), many changes to teaching approaches and methods have been suggested and implemented because language teaching needs the most appropriate approach and technique. One of the most common approaches according to Cruz (2017) is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, many linguists have adopted CLT in the further learning of languages, and the concept had been debated early by many authors such as Canale and Swain (1980), Hymes (1972) ...The popularization of the approach has since led to the term "CLT Revolution", this sharp description was derived from the positive reception that CLT received from the origin and popularity of the 1980s and 1990s up to the present era in which it is still relatively stable as a tried and tested approach. Kumaravadivelu (1994) pointed this out "during the 1980s. Moreover, Kombo and Tromp (2006) indicated that CLT became so dominant that almost all conceivable components of language pedagogy were governed by its form and function.

In the context of the broader trend in education, CLT has not only developed out of linguistic concern but also as a result of a broader trend in education as well. The progressive education emphasizes the individual needs of the students; it promotes the notion that active learning through learning and discovery is more effective than the passive absorption of knowledge bodies. Moreover, Harmer (2007) mentioned that the CLT definition is ambiguous because the approaches are different. Many linguists have dealt with several factors such as speaking skills and written grammar. Furthermore, the teachers who advocate the CLT approach can teach the learners how to use their skills appropriately in diverse contexts, while also insisting on the grammatically correct use of such expressions. Littlewoods (1981)

stated that one of the main traits of communicative language teaching is that the functional and structural aspects of the language are systematically addressed. It could also include a set of rules, such as how the language teaches the students and how the appropriate action to be taken in the learning environment and the responsibility of the participants in the classroom. As some assumptions that relate to the nature of language teaching and learning are defined, the people who support the CLT regard this as an approach instead of a method. Richards and Rodgers (2014) stated that the CLT approach invents some methods of teaching the four abilities. This means that the CLT approach brought about many techniques for using the right language for a range of purposes and at the appropriate moment. CLT seeks to provide communication skills, for example, informal and formal language. Yule (2016) undermined that all linguistic abilities denote that "functions of language (what it is used for) should be emphasized rather than the forms of the language (correct grammatical or phonological structures). Moreover, using varieties of communication strategies as another consideration of the CLT approach is the technique or the method through which learners learn the language. Yule (2016) stated also that learning a language has two factors, either to learn the language in a foreign language setting or a second language setting. The former indicates learning language in a society where the target language is not spoken. For example, learning the English language in Oman, where the only language is spoken is Arabic. However, the latter indicated learning the language in a society where the English language is spoken. The distinctive features of communicative language learning are different from other approaches, such as language as a means of communication between at least two people. Besides, language is viewed as an arrangement that supports one another with the four learning skills. Another consideration that states that the learning process takes place during the exit from authentic communication, that is when interaction and intervention are required as well as when language and context are real. CLT learners should be responsible in the learning process, and they must use their second language if they want a successful outcome. With these issues in mind, the study at hand took place in one of the leading colleges in the field of Maritime in Oman and the Middle East as well.

This pilot study explored the knowledge and the application of the CLT approach by one teacher from the foundation department. In this context, students who study in Higher Colleges of Education and Universities in Oman, the context of this study, usually enter such institutions with a shallow level of proficiency in English. Despite the fact that little research has been done on the issue, students' competency in English is well below the level needed (Al Issa, 2005). However, most of the students are unable to get an IELTS score of 4.5 or above without intensive training. This is extremely important as the majority of the tertiary education institutions in Oman exempt students from completing their General Foundation Programmes (GFP) if the candidate gets a recent IELTS score of between 4.5 and 6.5 dependent on the field of intended study. To address this problem, most Omani students are asked to complete a one-year foundation program aimed at increasing English additional language proficiency to the level required for academic study at the tertiary level which varies from an institution to another but remains between 4.5 to 6.5 on the IELTS score. A typical foundation program at the International Maritime College Oman (IMCO) addresses four strands of language, namely: reading, writing, listening and speaking. These skills are taught separately and not in an integrated style. For instance, the timetable of a student at IMCO will typically have four English lessons per day, and each lesson lasts fifty minutes in addition to Mathematics and Information Technology (IT). A certain number of classroom hours per week are allocated to each strand of the English language. For example, the rubric "core" denotes the content of the notional/functional textbook series, Total English, which forms the basis of each level of proficiency. More contact hours are allotted to the core and writing strands which would seem to suggest that the mastery of these two strands is either more important or more complicated than the functions of reading and listening as well as speaking which is taught only for four hours per week.

2. Literature Review

The body of the manuscript contains multiple sections describing the main content of the paper (for example Method, Results, Analysis or Discussion, etc.). You may use up to three levels of headings to categorize content as deemed necessary.

The "ideal native speaker" idea quickly declined with the advent of globalization. The purpose of non-native English speakers who now have a higher number of mothers is the English language. The CLT promoters have blown trumpets since its inception to demonstrate its effectiveness in ELT. While the issue is mainly for the CLT approach in an EFL classroom, criticisms have been raised, primarily justified by assessing its application in countries like Korea, China, Japan, Bangladesh, and Vietnam, where EFL

education has been exposed to many obstacles caused by local circumstances. Teaching and learning a foreign language has been one of the debatable issues in the field of education. Brown (2006) claimed that there is a correlation between teaching and learning. However, English is quite a difficult language, due to some aspects such as lack in sound speech correspondence and uncertainty in spelling and pronunciation, it is challenging to learn the language especially for people who speak in a different mother tongue. A teaching method that includes much memorizing and practice shall be ideal to learn this language. The method must also make sure that enough time is given to each zone of learning this language in order to fully be able to master it. Cook (2016) pointed out that “the proof of teaching is in the learning.” The ultimate objective of teaching a foreign language is to enhance the students’ communicative abilities (Liu,2003). In other words, learners should be able to express themselves freely. Also, they should be able to understand others’ communication. In the age of globalization where all countries have formed bonds with each other, it is essential to have a language that connects all of these together to ease communication between people from different countries. This will help information of business association and also for the purposes of development. English is a language that is spoken almost all over the world which is why if a person knows English, he/she will be able to communicate throughout the world helping him/her in a personal as well as professional manner. All these aspects collectively signify why it is so essential to learning the language and due to the difficulty level of it, the language demands an easy and effective teaching method.

3. Methodology

The research context of this study will be the General Foundation Programmes (GFP) department of a college of a higher education institution. The college grants bachelors, diploma and master’s degrees in the industry-specific sector. This study’s research design will be a case study and qualitative. The chosen method will be appropriate for this research study due to its nature.

3.1 Research Questions

Referring to the research problem addressed earlier, this research paper is geared by the following questions: To what extent does the participant teacher of English in the General Foundation Department of the college know the CLT approach? Does the participant teacher use the CLT properly in the classroom? What are the obstacles that hinder the implementation of the CLT in the institution? The participants of this study will be a female Omani teacher of English from the General Foundation Department (GFP) at the International Maritime College Oman (IMCO). The striking feature of the subject is that she has been teaching English at the college for five years. I chose only one participant due to the teachers’ timetable constraints.

3.2 Data Collection Methods

The upcoming research study will depend on two various instruments of data collection, namely a classroom observation and a semi-structured interview with one teacher. To get ample data, the researcher will use effective methods to help him answer the research questions of the pilot study.

3.3 Interview & Classroom Observation

The researcher is going to interview one teacher first to know about the approaches which she knows and that she uses in her classroom. After that, he will conduct a classroom observation for the same participant teacher. Also, both data collection instruments will be guided by checklists that will be made up by the researcher for both classroom observation sessions and various questions for the interview to get ample data. To make this pilot study reliable, valid and respectful to the privacy of the participant teacher, it must guarantee some crucial features such as objectivity, credibility, honesty integrity and openness. In this respect, the subject of the study will be assured of their anonymity in any given information (written or spoken). Accordingly, the teacher will be given a consent form to be agreed on before signing it.

3.4 Data Analysis and Interpretation Approaches

First, the collected data from the participant will be analyzed accordingly. The researcher will also describe what the participant teacher would do in her observed lesson. At this stage, the researcher should only report the teachers' actions and steps in the classroom throughout the lesson. Therefore, the researcher should be neutral at this stage. Then, the researcher will report what each participant (students and teachers) said in the interview neutrally again. Finally, the researcher will analyze the collected data. For the data analysis of the teacher's interview, the transcript will be read, and memos will be written. After that, the interview transcript will be described. At the final stage, the data gathered from the interview transcript will be analyzed accordingly.

4. Findings

In the semi-structured interview, the teacher mentioned that during her teacher training at the university, she studied various teaching approaches such as the Direct Method, Grammar Translation, Audio-Lingual Method, Communicative Approach, etc. As a teacher in the foundation department, the teacher thinks that students need to learn how to be independent, however, the curriculum does not allow them to do so. In line with this, she said that in most of her classes she uses "the Direct Method". However, she sometimes used the "Communicative Approach" saying that the students need to use the language to communicate. Regarding the types of activities, she uses to engage her students in the classroom, furthermore, the respondent said that she uses different activities not to mention the summary of short stories and doing online activities like searching for practicing activities. Thought that CLT is 'a student-centered approach and the students have to do all work in the classroom, as they have to use the language and communicate with each other by the medium of the English language'. The subject claimed that she has never formally studied CLT during her teacher training, but she said that she has a little knowledge about the approach. The participant added that the students at the college were native Arabic speakers, so they need to learn English by using 'the Direct Method', justifying that when students grasp the grammar rules, they would learn how to communicate effectively.

As far as the constraints are concerned, the teacher believes that classes with mixed ability were a remarkable obstacle to improve the students' performance in English as she has to 'guarantee that the low-level students would pass their exams. The participant also assumed that CLT depends on personal experience. She mentioned that 'students do not share their experiences due to their demotivation to communicate in English'. Also, the teacher argues that it is challenging to implement CLT in the Omani context, even though she uses the approach from time to time. The concerned teacher said, "because the Communicative approach depends on experience, I think IMCO students and due to their demotivation, they do not dare to share their experiences with each other." That why she thought that it is really difficult to implement CLT in her classes, although she is trying hard to use it from time to time. Regarding the observed class, I would say that I gathered quite useful information that may serve the objective of this study.

Another point worth noting is that both the field notes and audio-recordings were really practical tools to gather accurate data from the informant as the researcher can capture accurately the extent of using the CLT approach in the classroom and also to reduce the loss of data due to time or memory lapse. Generally, the analysis of the teacher's lesson revealed that the class activities were organized in terms of a whole class approach which fell in the category of the teacher to students or teacher to class (T-Sts/c). Referring back to the lesson observed, the teacher started with a lead-in activity which was group discussions, almost six groups of four students (three male groups and three female groups). In this task, the t the students are given an opportunity to talk about their favorite meal. The teacher gave the students five minutes to complete the task. Meanwhile, she was monitoring and giving support to her students. Once the allotted time for this task was over, the teacher nominated randomly one student from each group to give feedback on the task.

In fact, the majority of the designated participant students expressed themselves in a freeway because the situation is authentic and communicative as well. After that, the teacher asked the students to open their student books again (New Total English) on page seventy where students were asked whether they know about the food in Argentina. "Do you know anything about the food in Argentina? If not, what do you think the food is like? (Part of the task). Here the teacher did not give waiting time for her students to think about the question. Consequently, few students raised their hands to give their answers. The

teacher listened carefully to students' responds and she tried always to praise her students. In part b, Farah asked the students to read the instructions in which they were asked to listen to track 1.44 about "some typical Argentina dishes". Moreover, they need to complete the eight missing words of the given paragraph such as "Asado is grilled(1)....., on a kind of barbecue. "Chimichurri is a kind of marinade, made with (2) The teacher played the recording and went to the back of the classroom to check that all students could listen to the track properly. Three minutes later, the recording was over. Students were given two minutes to check their answers before listening again to the same track. Once finished, the teacher checked the answers with the whole class. The students were motivated because their participation is noticeable. Also, the teacher tried her best to encourage the students to answer and express themselves freely. Regarding part c from this task, the teacher asked the students to find all the words in italics and prepare a description of any Omani meal that includes at least two of the phrases in italics such as "grilled", made with, stuffed with, it is made by, served with....". To carry this task in a good way, the teacher divided the class into six groups (3 male groups and 3 female groups). The time allotted for this task was ten minutes. The groups first choose the food to describe. Then, they discuss how they would describe the food in the photo. I clearly noticed that some students used their mother language "Arabic" in their discussion. However, the teacher did not pay her attention to that point as she was busy monitoring and supporting other groups. Once the time is over, she asked one student from each group to talk about their food choice. This task was typically communicative as all the groups gave presentations about their local dishes such as "biryani, makboos, mandi....". It is worth noting here that the students looked very engaged. This is noticed mainly through their effective participation throughout the task. Personally, I see that this is due to the content of the task which was directly linked to the students' daily lives. The final stage of the lesson was about practicing what has been recently taught in the earlier task. Once again, the teacher chose a group working strategy to carry out this activity based on the same groups of the previous task: each group was given five photos of different kinds of foods and for them to choose one photo and then describe it. For instance, they should mention in their descriptions' what is the name of the food, what are the ingredients used to cook that food, how it looks like, how it is served....'. She gave her students ten minutes to complete the task. While the students discussed the task in their respective groups, the teacher moved around the groups and gave them a kind of enthusiasm and support to carry out the task. Ten minutes later, each group leader comes out of their desks to give a very short presentation (around 3 – 5 minutes) about the food appearing in their chosen photo. The teacher said that the presentation which would use more phrases describing food would win the so-called competition.

The last source of information was the post-observation interview. The researcher asked the respondent teacher only six questions which aimed to make further clarification or prompts based on data collected from the classroom observation. For example, the teacher was asked the following questions: "what area were you satisfied with? And what area were you less satisfied with your observed lesson? She answered saying that she was happy and satisfied especially with the follow-up activities where students successfully produced a short description and used the target language simultaneously. Also, according to her satisfaction came from her belief that she met the main objective of the lesson, namely the ability to use vocabulary phrases related to food in the Omani context. In addition, the teacher was really excited about the students' performance that day. (not as usual as she said). However, the teacher was not satisfied with the listening part because she noticed that most of the students did not complete the missing words in the given paragraph. The third question was about whether my presence affected the classroom atmosphere. Her answer was "absolutely yes" as she told them that I would visit the class and their participation is highly appreciated."

Nevertheless, the researcher noticed that some students (especially females) were shy and did not try to participate throughout the lesson. The teacher claimed that this is due to their low level of English. Moreover, I asked the teacher "why did you choose the last activity for practicing?". She pointed out that most of her students are visual learners. So, she meant to bring photos to facilitate the task. I also asked her "what would happen if you let all the students mingle out in the classroom and each student chooses a partner to describe the type of food s/he selected. By that, we guarantee that all students have equal opportunity to communicate and practice the target language. The respondent teacher liked the idea so much, promising that she would take this valuable remark in her future classes. Question five was "in what way is your lesson related to CLT?" The teacher indicated that most of the activities used in the lesson were undoubtedly communicative as the students not only grasped that target language but also they could give produce presentations to show their mastery of the target language. Accordingly, she saw that

the main objective of teaching English in higher education is using the language in real contexts of the students' social lives.

5. Conclusion

In terms of conclusion, the two data-gathering instruments used in this pilot study showed a considerable amount of data that can answer the research questions which were set in an earlier stage of this study. Generally, this mini-project proved that the subject had a superficial knowledge about CLT and that was reflected in her classroom teaching practice. The participant claimed that the possible solution to implement CLT in the Omani context is through increasing the motivation of the learners to use the English language inside and outside the classrooms. This pilot study explores the general beliefs on the use of the CLT approach in the EFL classroom in a tertiary college in Oman. Additionally, I noticed that the teacher was already preparing communicative activities in her lesson, that was because she already knew the topic of the study from the interview. Accordingly, in the next study, the researcher should do classroom observation prior to carrying out the interview. Moreover, based on the findings, it is quite interesting to recommend further researchers that may involve more participants in order to yield a deeper understanding on the implementation of CLT in the Arab context, taking into consideration the challenges facing both EFL teachers and students.

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