

A Study based on the role of CLT in the Sultanate of Oman

By

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Abstract

English language teaching has faced many challenges for recent decades. Many new methods, approaches techniques have emerged to enhance language learning and teaching process. Still there are merits and demerits of various methods have been discussed and criticized by structural theorists and linguistic experts. It is propounded by the experts that no single method can satisfy the goals and needs of all learners. The new method has emerged this time and despite the challenges it remains influential and approved by language experts and teachers. It is used in number of contemporary ELT texts and contexts. This paper aims to analyses the communicative Language Teaching and its role in language teaching in Sultanate of Oman.

Keywords: CLT, English in Oman, methodologies, techniques, globalization

Introduction

Various methods and approaches have been popular and used by teachers all over the world. Each methods and approaches has its own advantages and disadvantages especially when they teach English as a Foreign language or Second language. Educationists suggest CLT is an improved and contemporary method in teaching and learning process and it helps to enhance our interactions with students to reach the ultimate goal of learning a language. According to Richards (1992), Communicative Language Teaching is an approach to teach foreign or second language which emphasizes to acquire communicative competence. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), the aim of Communicative Language Teaching is to develop the learner's four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) that allow their independence of language and communication.

Literature Review

Fauzia Hasan Siddiqui (2013) has done a research on Capitalizing on Speaking Skill of EFL Learners for the Language Literacy and the study aims at grabbing the attention of EFL /ESL teachers, trainers, and administrators towards the importance of teaching speaking skill to enhance overall language proficiency of EFL learners. Comprehensive research done in the field

of applied linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT) establishes a positive correlation of speaking skill with the overall language proficiency. Despite this obvious significance of speaking skill in language learning process, it has not gained sufficient attention in the ELT or the assessments in Oman. Relying on the available literature on the importance of the speaking skill and its effective role in enhancing other language macro skills (listening, reading, and writing), this exploratory research analyses the current status of speaking skill in ELT and assessments at the General Foundation Programme (GFP) in Oman.

Alistair Charles McLean (2011) in his master thesis investigates awareness and use of communicative language teaching methodology (CLT) in a foundation programme at an institution of higher learning in the Sultanate of Oman, where rapid expansion and a reliance on expatriate skills has resulted in the employment of predominantly native English teachers, many with inadequate formal teacher training. The qualitative research methodology employed involved a core of five teachers using three data-gathering instruments and ten additional English language teachers who responded to a questionnaire. The study finds that the majority of teachers have inadequate knowledge of the CLT approach and do not use it in the classroom. The findings suggest that an adapted version of CLT which embraces local contextual and sociocultural conditions may be pedagogically viable. The study draws comparisons between the idea of a hypothetical, “adapted” version of CLT and the notions of “particularity, practicality and possibility” as suggested by Kumaravadivelu (2006). The contributions of the study with special reference to the local context and relevant variables as prerequisites for official accreditation of General Foundation Programmes in Oman. These prescribe a teaching approach that is characterized by CLT teaching methodology which embraces a move away from more traditionally-oriented, teacher-led versus a learner-centered approach. Finally, the notions of particularity, practicality and possibility as outlined by Kumaravadivelu (2006) are linked to salient features of the study.

Muhammad Arfan Ismail (2011) in his doctoral thesis evaluates the language planning in Oman with the aspects of linguistic and sociolinguistic fallacies states English is increasingly being chosen as the medium of education at the tertiary level in education in the Arabian Gulf. In Oman a decision was taken to switch the medium of education in all colleges of applied sciences from Arabic to English. To assist students with the switch the Ministry of Higher Education requested all colleges to establish foundation years with the focus on teaching English.

This study is an analysis of that decision from both macro language planning and a micro sociolinguistic perspective.

Fauzia Hasan Siddiqui (2013) in her research article entitles “The CLT approach in Oman: Are traditional examinations the major barrier to its success?” Clearly points out the Omani educational system emphasize Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, its implementation is still far from perfect. Underpinning Communicative Language Teaching at the tertiary level faces many hurdles. There are multiple challenges hindering the efficacy of this approach which includes the teachers, the students, the educational system and the CLT approach itself. It can be concluded from the result that as a policy CLT is encouraged but seldom applied. For Oman’s Academic Accreditation, General Foundation Programmes in Oman must comply with the outcome based curriculum, which emphasizes on CLT approach. If the institutions wish to satisfy the pre-requisites of Oman Academic Accreditation then it is imperative to have a teaching, learning and assessment methodology that gels with CLT approach.

The Role of English in Oman

English language is a passport to world and it brings tremendous opportunities to almost all the fields. No matter whether English language is learned as Foreign language or Second language the result is obvious. English may not be one of the seven wonders of the world but its ignorance definitely makes people wonder. It is absolute requirement in this modern era. The role of English in Sultanate of Oman need to be analyzed in various grounds. English has been entertained by the Oman government under different parameters starting from schools to offices. Nowadays any person who does not know English is likely considered a liability subject to whatever his efficiency is in his field. Oman may not be one of the wealthiest countries or a good English-speaking nation; but its growing admiration and cognizance towards English language helps its recognition among other Middle-Eastern countries in the world. In Oman English is used for academic purposes as well as to boost the economic and social development of the country. Learning English in schools and colleges as an additional language as a means of getting job in one of the higher status white collar professions, most of which are found in Public Sector. This will enhance the government’s policy of ‘Omanization. The sole aim of this policy is to curtail the Sultanate’s reliance on both skilled and unskilled expatriate labours. The

motivating force behind this policy is the education of nationals and their placement in key positions in public ministerial and oil industry related jobs.

English in the Public Sector

The government of Sultanate of Oman has embraced English language as an official foreign language and it is believed that one should learn English in order to enter the higher education system. Globalization presents the challenges and opportunities in front of the present generation. Proficiency in English language has an instrumental value and the Sultanate of Oman provides a large number of scholarship for tertiary studies to students who wish to continue their studies in abroad.

English in the Private Sector

The business world in Oman is owned and controlled by Omani nationals. Without proper 'sponsorship' it is not possible to start or own a business for expatriates. Owing to this strict policy it is obvious to claim the importance of English language in the business world. Al-Issa states, "it is believed that the private sector can contribute to the national development of the country as much as the public can. Recently in Oman stress is being laid on the private sector and the quality of contribution it can make to the country's national development. The private sector has been encouraged by the government to play a more dynamic, productive and active role in facilitating the Sultanate's development than it used to a decade ago in the past. This has been materializing steadily in the form of private colleges, universities, hospitals, more factories and plants and so forth. These enterprises are believed to provide and create more job opportunities for Omani graduates. English is also the medium of instruction in these newly opened private colleges and universities. This should help change the public and students' attitudes about the place of English internationally and domestically" (Al-Issa: 2002).

Lack of Research in Oman

Not much research has taken place, and not much has been published with regard to ESL teaching and the CLT approach in particular, in the Sultanate of Oman. The reasons given are that most people involved in higher education have heavy workloads in addition to lacking incentive. One of the most prolific researchers in the field of ESL in Oman is Dr. Ali Al-Issa of Sultan Qaboos University in Muscat, the main teacher training institute in Oman says, "The Omani government has, therefore, opted for English as its only official foreign language... English has been considered a functional tool for "Omanisation" – a systematic and gradual

replacement of foreign skilled labour by nationals. In fact, functional competence in English is a prerequisite for finding a white-collar job in the public and private sectors.Oman has hence, embraced English and placed it at the heart of its educational planning, which has led to the investment of multimillion [sic] US dollars since His Majesty Sultan Qaboos Bin Said came into power in 1970” (2006).

The role of teachers in CLT

There are quite a few roles for teachers in CLT which are determined by the view of CLT. According to Breen and Candlin in the article “The essentials of a communicative curriculum in language teaching” there are two main roles of a teacher in CLT class rooms. The first role is to facilitate the communication process among all the students in the classroom, and between the students and the different type of activities and texts. Secondly, a teacher has to act as an independent participant within the learning teaching groups. The teacher is also expected to act as a resource, an organizer of resources, a motivator, a counsellor, a guide and a researcher. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

The role of learners in CLT

The behaviour and classroom participation of teachers and students play an important role in the successful implementation of communicative language teaching in EFL contexts. Breen and Candlin (1980) describe the learner’s role within CLT in the following terms. “The role of learner as negotiator – between the self, the learning process, and the project of learning – emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes”. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and there by learn in an interdependent way.

Conclusion

Hence, for ideal CLT, it is of paramount importance to have a compliance of teaching and testing system. Following a top-down approach, it is crucial to first amend and reform institutional ELT policy and cascade it to execution level, to practice CLT and task-based learning. Examination oriented teaching which is teacher-centered cannot co-exist with CLT which is student-centered. Until and unless a structurally- based Traditional-examinations with discrete points exist in the Oman’s tertiary educational system, it is impossible to implement and benefit from the goods of CLT. If the EFL centres in Oman seek to incorporate CLT approach teaching then it becomes imperative to eradicate Structure based Traditional- Examinations and

replace it with CLT that must be dynamic, reflecting students' communicative needs rather than being a body of passive items. CLT approach can survive only if the testing is interactive, purposive, contextualized, and based and assessed in terms of behavioural outcomes.

In summary, the above discussion is relevant to the research focus, in that valid suggestions are put forward as to why the practice of CLT is best considered an approach rather than a method. Thus although a reasonable degree of theoretical consistency can be discerned at the levels of language and learning theory, at the levels of design and procedure there is much greater room for individual interpretation and variation than most methods permit. Even proficient English first language speaker instructors may find the implementation of the CLT approach demanding in that flexibility and fluency are needed to cope with the use of the approach in the classroom context. It could be that one version among the various proposals for syllabus models, exercise types and classroom activities may gain wider approval in the future, giving CLT a status similar to other teaching methods.

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