

Difficulties in Executing CLT in Ethiopia: Mismatch Between Policy Imperative and Classroom Realities

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Abstract

Despite the widespread adaptation of communicative approach in ESL contexts, research entails that curricular innovation promoted by the adaptation of CLT in EFL countries have generally been difficult. The literature in curriculum innovation suggests that teachers' understanding of an innovation is central to its success. A study of group of Ethiopian secondary school EFL teachers' perceived difficulties in adapting CLT reveals that the difficulties have their own roots in the difference between the underlying educational theories of Ethiopia and those of western countries. The result suggests that to adapt CLT, EFL countries like Ethiopia needs to change their central approach to education and that the execution should be gradual and grounded in the countries own real pedagogic situation. In the long run, the countries need to be reliant on the findings of local research in order to develop English teaching theories more suitable for their context. Change agents must study teachers' perceptions of an innovation to ensure its success.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has had a vital role in the Ethiopian education system since 20th century when modern formal education was introduced in to the country. The language has served as a medium of instruction since 1930s, mainly after a bilateral agreement has been signed between the Ethiopian government and the British government in 1942. Accordingly, teachers and teaching materials were brought from Great Britain, and English language officially accorded the major role as a medium of instruction at all levels of learning until 1960s.

After early 1960s, paradigm policy change was made in the country, in that Amharic, the national language of the country replaced English as medium of instruction at first cycle primary school levels (1-6), while English sustained to be taught as a subject right from grade 3 and continued to serve as a medium of instruction from grade 7 and on wards (Tamene, 2000).

Currently, in line with the new education and training policy of 1994, English is taught as a subject starting from grade one, and as a medium for all subjects from lower secondary schools (grade 9) to higher institutions with slight difference as per the wills of regional states. Moreover, it is used as an official language in private and public organizations, a medium of diplomatic relations, commerce, trade and truism, and so forth. So, to empower the role of English in diverse walks of the socioeconomic context of the nation, a number of teaching methods have been used since the arrival of modern education in the country.

2. BACKGROUND: CLT IN ETHIOPIA

Before the emergence of communicative approach in to ELT, many countries had been using traditional foreign language teaching methods which did not result in significant and promising development in learners' communicative competence (Brown, 2007). Subsequent to the extensions of the approach to many parts of the world and its application in language classes, considerable achievements have been observed in English instruction. But as the case in many EFL countries, Ethiopian students suffered from lack of ability to use English for effective communication in various contexts because of conventional teaching approaches used. Realizing the problem, Ethiopia ratified a policy to execute CLT approach which considers learners as the center of the learning process at all levels of learning (ICDR, 1994). Hence, new communicative based syllabus was designed; materials were published and delivered to the respective teachers and students. Moreover, to equip teachers with the required theoretical knowledge and practical skills of the approach, various trainings were given to school teachers at various levels (Meseret, 2012). But tremendous number of local research indicates that students' communicative competence has never improved and fading as time went. Thus, it is at this particular juncture that the researcher stanch to study the potential difficulties and problems.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The general objective of the study is to examine the pedagogical practices of CLT approach in EFL classes of selected secondary schools in Oromia state, Ethiopia. Thus, the specific objectives of the study were: 1) to explore contextual challenges which obstruct the practices of the approach, 2) to propose possible recommendations for the execution of the same, so that learners' effective communicative competence can be well enhanced.

4. RESEARCH DESIGN

To the attainment of the research objectives, multiple data production techniques were used so as to consolidate validity, reliability and trustworthiness of the study. Thus, written questionnaire, participant interview and classroom observations were used to collect data from primary respondents. The instruments used in the study were validated through diverse methods and techniques. Thus, the analysis mainly integrates mixed approach whereby both qualitative and quantitative methods were concurrently used in a unitary study.

5. PARTICIPANTS

The participants of in the current study were EFL teachers from the sampled higher secondary schools in the state. Accordingly, 40 (M=31, F=8 and TG=1) EFL teachers were selected for the study from 10 (ten) sampled schools using census method as census reveals no sampling errors and provides researchers with full information from individual respondent (Oberi, 2012). Moreover, a total of 10 (ten) EFL teachers with a qualification of MA=3, B.A=5 and MPhil=2 degree holders with mixed teaching experiences were included in the interview. These teachers were those who responded to the questionnaire. The interview was conducted in English in their natural context and took an approximate of 25-30 minutes. The content of the interview concentrates on challenges of execution of CLT in EFL context. In fact, the contents of the interview protocol were almost similar with the questionnaire for triangulation purpose. With respects to age category, the majority, 21 (53%) of the respondents were in the range of 31-40 years; whereas, 14 (35%) of the teachers were recent graduates within the range of 21-30 years. Moreover, 3 (8%) of the respondents were in their early 41-50s; while, 2 (5%) of the participants were 51 and above years old. Thus, the analyses of the responses were presented in the next section.

6. DATA ANALYSIS

The researcher did not simply describe the data collected through multiple instruments, but through the process of interpreting the data meticulously. The themes and the coding categories in this study emerged from an examination of the data rather than being determined earlier and imposed on the data. Following the strategy of analytic induction designed by (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992), the researcher repetitively read the completed questionnaire and interview transcriptions. In the processes, the researcher identified and noted recurrent themes and significant comments with regard to the constraints that the practitioners encountered in the processes of application of the approach in their own respective classroom. The themes were then put under four (4) main categories and presented to the respondents selected from sampled schools in Oromia national regional state, Ethiopia. These include teacher's related challenges, learner's related challenges, challenges related to education system and challenges related to the approach. In each table the responses were given codes: very serious=4, serious=3, uncertain=2 and not serious=1. For the simplification of the analysis the first two serious and very serious were added together to show seriousness of the factors while the others were put as they are. Thus, descriptive statistics were used to make the analysis of the response to each item so that the most difficult contextual challenges to the execution approach can be identified. The analyses of the responses to the factors were presented in the next sections.

6.1 TEACHERS RELATED CHALLENGES

With regard to factors daunting the actual execution of CLT principles in EFL context, particularly with teachers related snags, four (4) primary issues (teachers' misconceptions of CLT, teachers' substandard English proficiency, teachers' lack of training and preparation, and teachers' lack of sufficient time and resources) were presented to the respective teachers. Thus, the analysis of the responses to each item is put in Table 6.1 below.

Table 6.1: Responses to Teacher Related Challenges

Scale value			4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
Items	Statements	Fr&%						
1	Teachers' misconceptions of CLT approach	Fr&%	17	13	5	5	40	3.1
			43	33	13	13	100	
2	Teachers' substandard English proficiency	Fr&%	10	10	10	10	40	2.5
			25	25	25	25	100	
3	Teachers' lack of preparation and training in CLT	Fr&%	30	8	1	1	40	3.7
			75	20	3	3	100	
4	Teachers' lack of sufficient time and resources	Fr&%	25	11	2	2	40	3.5
			63	28	5	5	100	
	Mean							3.2

As indicated in Table 6.1 above, the majority 30 (75%) and 8 (20%) of the respondents with a mean of 3.7 indicated that teachers' lack of preparation and training were the 'most serious' and 'serious' defies

respectively in deterring the execution of CLT in EFL contexts. Moreover, the majority, 25 (63%) and 11 (28%) of the respondents with mean of 3.5 respectively stated that teachers' lack of sufficient time and resources to execute the approach were the 'most serious' and 'serious' factors tackling the execution of the approach in EFL context in their respective setting. Hence, the majority, 38 (93%) of the respondents with mean of 3.6 verified that teachers' lack of preparation and training as well as lack of sufficient time and resources were the major challenges in intimidating effective execution of the approach. The result of the interview also revealed similar fact that teachers' lack of training is the major constraint to the execution of the approach. Similarly, teachers' short of time for preparation and lack of adequate educational resources were also the most daunting factor in the application of communicative approach in their respective instructional contexts. Thus, the authorities concerned must seek possible solutions to the problems if they want actual foreign language learning to take place.

6.2 STUDENTS RELATED CHALLENGES

An execution of CLT in EFL classes can be constrained by multiple factors associated with learners. The factors have many forms, but four (4) major possible problems were identified and presented to the respective respondents. Then, the subjects sequenced the factors as to their seriousness to the execution of the approach in their specific context. Thus, the detailed analyses of the respondents' responses were presented below in Table 6.2.

Table 6.2: Responses to Student Related Challenges

Scale value			4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
Items	Statements	Fr & %						
1	Students' lack of English proficiency	Fr	31	5	3	1	40	3.7
		%	78	13	8	3	100	
2	Students' lack of interest in CLT approach	Fr	24	10	3	3	40	3.4
		%	60	25	8	8	100	
3	Students' lack of confidence and preparation for CLT	Fr	10	12	9	9	40	2.6
		%	25	30	23	23	100	
4	Students' resistance to classroom participation in CLT	Fr	28	7	2	3	40	3.5
		%	70	18	5	8	100	
	Mean							3.3

Thus, the analysis indicates that, 31 (78%) and 5 (13%) of the teachers with mean of 3.7 witnessed that students' lack of English proficiency was the 'most serious' and 'serious' factors respectively constraining the execution of CLT in their own context. Whereas, the majority, 28 (70%) and 7 (18%) of the respondents respectively with mean of 3.5 claimed that students' resistance to classroom participation in CLT classes was found to be the 'most serious' and 'serious' factors for the execution of the approach in their respective contexts. Still, 10 (25%) and 34 (85%) of the respondents with mean of 3.4 indicated that students' 'lack of interest in CLT approach' was the major factor deterring the execution of the approach in their own context. In short, the majority of the respondents, 36 (90%) with an average mean of 3.6 confirmed that 'students' lack of English proficiency' and 'their resistance to classroom participation' in CLT activities were found to be the most demanding obstacles in the actual execution of CLT approach in EFL context of their own. In a similar way, the interview responses also revealed similar finding that the above mentioned factors are the most serious obstacles to the execution of the approach in their contexts. So, the authorities concerned must consider these problems in the execution of CLT to extend the practices of the approach at all levels. Because students' English proficiency at higher level of learning is reliant on the instructional practices at lower level.

6.3 CHALLENGES RELATED TO EDUCATION SYSTEM

The education system adopted in certain nation has its own effect in the execution of an innovative approach. Understanding the factors, very few major factors related to the educational system subsuming incompatibility of CLT in the existing examination system, unsuitability of the existing syllabus with CLT approach, lack of classroom facilities to aid CLT practices, and large class size were presented to the respondents in the current investigation. Thus, the respondents ranked the factors sequentially according to their extent of seriousness in limiting the application of the approach using four scale close-ended Likert scale. The analyses of the responses were presented in Table 6.3 below.

Table 6.3: Responses to Challenges Related to Educational System

Scale value			4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
Items	Statements	Fr& %						
1	Unsuitability of CLT to the existing exam system	Fr& %	34 85	3 8	2 5	1 3	40 100	3.8
2	Unsuitability of the existing syllabus for CLT approach	Fr& %	7 18	8 20	15 38	10 25	40 100	2.3
3	Lack of classroom facilities to aid CLT practices	Fr& %	27 68	7 18	3 8	3 8	40 100	3.5
4	Large class size	Fr& %	36 90	2 5	1 3	1 3	40 100	3.8
Mean								3.4

As shown in Table 6.3 above, 34 (85%) and 3 (8%) of the respondents with mean of 3.8 claimed that ‘unsuitability of CLT to the existing exam system was the ‘most serious’ and ‘serious’ factors respectively in delaying the execution of CLT in their EFL contexts. Equally, 36 (90%) and 2 (5%) of the respondents respectively with mean of 3.8 claimed that ‘large class size’ is the ‘most serious’ and ‘serious’ factor that constrain the execution of CLT in their instructional context. Furtherly, 27 (68%) and 7 (18%) of the respondents with men of 3.5 claimed that lack of facilities to aid CLT practices was the ‘most serious’ and ‘serious’ factor deterring the execution of CLT. Briefly, 36 (91%) of the respondents with mean of 3.7 stated the unsuitability of CLT to the exam system, large class size and lack of facilities were the most recurrent factors hindering the execution of CLT in their context. So, education system is more rigorous in daunting the execution of CLT in the context under study and needs special attention from concerned authorities.

6.4 CHALLENGES RELATED TO CLT ITSELF

Though CLT approach is a current and widely used phenomenon in target language instruction, it has multiple drawbacks of its own. Of these, four (4) potential downsides, unsuitability of CLT in EFL context, lack of effective and efficient assessment techniques, lack of target language culture and lack of specific instructional materials were set to the respondents. Here is the tabular representation of the analysis in Table 5.4 below.

Table 5.4: Responses to Challenges Related to CLT Itself

Scale value			4	3	2	1	Total	Mean
Items	Statements	Fr& %						
1	Unfitness of CLT in EFL context	Fr& %	10 25	10 25	10 25	10 25	40 100	2.5
2	Lack of effective and efficient assessment instrument in CLT	Fr& %	13 33	10 25	12 30	5 13	40 100	2.8
3	Lack of target language culture in EFL context	Fr& %	33 83	3 8	3 8	1 3	40 100	3.7
4	Lack of specific instructional materials in CLT	Fr& %	30 75	4 10	3 8	3 8	40 100	3.5
Mean								3.1

As indicated in Table 5.4 above, 33 (88%) & 3 (8%) of the respondents with mean of 3.7 claimed that ‘lack of target culture’ in their context was the ‘most serious’ and ‘serious’ factors respectively which constrain the execution of CLT in EFL context. Similarly, 30 (75%) and 4 (10%) of the respondents with mean of 3.5 focus on lack of instructional materials in CLT was the ‘most serious’, and ‘serious’ factor in risking the execution of CLT approach. Thus, 36 (88%) of the respondents with a mean of 3.6 attested that lack of target culture, and lack of specific instructional materials in CLT approach were found to be the most deterring factors to the execution of the approach. The interview results also indicated the same finding that the two factors are the daunting ones. So, teachers must use context-sensitive, location-specific instruction which is based on a true understanding of local, linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities. They also need to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize as well (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 69).

In conclusion, the respondents’ claimed that factors related to education system, student’s related factors, teachers’ related factors and factors pertinent to the approach respectively were the most defiant factors to the execution of the approach. More precisely, unsuitability of CLT to the exam system, class size, students’ lack of proficiency; and resistance to classroom participation were the most serious factors in the execution of CLT. Furthermore, teachers’ lack of preparation and training, and teachers’ lack of sufficient time and resources, lack of target culture and specific instructional materials were the major factors strictly thwarting the execution

of communicative approach (CLT).

7. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The teachers were provided with potential challenges to the execution of communicative approach in target language instruction so that they ranked the factors as to their seriousness. It is evident that the factors do not only affect the practices of CLT approach in Ethiopia alone, but also in other similar contexts. The analysis thus directs that education system, students' related factors, teachers' related factors and factors associated to the approach were the most difficult barriers affecting the execution of CLT in respective sequence. Moreover, the analysis indicates that: 1) unsuitability of CLT to the existing exam system, 2) large class size, 3) students' poor command of English, 4) students' resistance to CLT activities, 5) teachers' lack of preparation and training in CLT; 6) teachers' lack of sufficient time and resources, 7) lack of target language culture, and 8) lack of specific instructional resources were the major factors hindering the execution of the approach in the current context of the study. Finally, factors associated with the education system and student related factors followed by factors related to teachers and communicative approach itself were the most terrible factors stalling the real the practices of the approach in their respective EFL context. Therefore, on the bases of the results of the investigation, relevant and pertinent recommendations were forwarded to authorities concerned.

8. IMPLICATIONS

The results obtained from the respondents in the current study with regard to EFL teaching and the difficulties encountered in the execution of communicative approach (CLT) is more or less similar with the reality in the rest of the other countries. Thus, the discussion here though focuses on Ethiopian EFL instruction; it can also be extended to other similar contexts.

Evidently, controversy has been observed between what the CLT demands and the reality in EFL teaching in the current context. Therefore, to enhance the academic and communicative skills of EFL learners, it is imperative that the problems identified must be resolved.

- Policy makers need to design strategies to employ well trained teachers and equally provide them with relevant and continuous trainings to the respective EFL teachers.
- The policy makers should not only focus on the adaptation of modern education and training policies, but they should focus on the supervision of the execution of the approach, provision of the necessary human/materials supports and ongoing trainings.
- The ministry of education should take the necessary steps to develop standard and systematic assessment strategies to make EFL pedagogic practices most effective. The standard system of assessment strategies must be strictly followed up. The continuous assessment should be conducted in accordance to communicative assessments.
- The concerned authorities should regulate the number of students in a class. This is because class size is a major determining factor in successful execution of CLT which determines the appropriateness and the qualities of students' learning. Thus, instead of having more number of students in a class, it is advisable to recruit more teachers and make the learning environment conducive and student friendly.
- The base for the development of students' communicative competence begins from elementary level. Hence elementary level teachers must be well trained in the theoretical and practical aspects of the approach. The curriculum, the syllabus and instructional materials and assessment at all levels should be designed as the prerequisites of communicative approach. All EFL teachers at all levels must have constant training on the new innovation which is widely used in the global context.
- Teachers are expected to actively take part in diverse professional development training programs in association with joint knowledge sharing, modelling best teachers, keeping dairies of the learning process, conducting action research and assessing their own performance in line with the effect on students' successful learning.
- Different stakeholders are working with the ministry. However, their contribution to the best of the educational aims is limited resulting in students' poor communicative and general academic competence. So, they are expected to support the execution of the policies and provide the required support for materials development, teacher training and to ameliorate inclusive learning conditions.
- Further research in the area should be conducted on a large scale and the execution of the approach should be assessed on different levels. All the skills should be studied. Further work is also needed in curriculum development, syllabus design, materials development, and test construction in line with the approach.

9. CONCLUSION

In the current study, an attempt has been made to investigate the major constraints in the execution of EFL instructional policy-communicative approach and the classroom realities. Accordingly, a number of potential

challenges in the application of the approach were identified and presented to the potential respondents. So that the respondents specifically stratified the factor that pertains to their real situation and intern the researcher identified which factors are the major obstacles to the application of the approach. As such, appropriate recommendations were provided to authorities concerned. Thus, it is highly expected that if the recommendations are implemented to the fullest, EFL students' communicative competence in English and general education can certainly be achieved.

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