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# The Impact of Communicative Approach in Developing English Language Skill in Business Education

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**Abstract**

A completely new approach in language teaching and learning with innovative attributes was introduced as Communicative English in 1970. The same approach was launched in Bangladesh in the 90s with much enthusiasm. The new approach with all the innovative and useful blessings met criticisms both from the academicians as well as the non-academicians for the lack of grammar and translation. Everyone happens to highlight the limitations of the new approach and held it responsible as a prime hindrance to language learning. The article attempts to address problems whether Communicative English is the prime solution of the problem the country is facing or the problem lies elsewhere. The study believes that the problem is not solely with the approach but with the other related auxiliaries as well. The pedagogy, language learning and teaching strategies, teachers' role in teaching a FL/SL and necessity of teacher training, feeble infrastructures, imperfect evaluation system etc. related to and responsible for the problem apart from the methodology of English language teaching and learning are held responsible for the failure of the approach. In the light of the above-mentioned problems, the study proposes how the innovative and unfamiliar contents and technique can be made operative as an instructional method. The paper also addresses a host of solutions like developing the teaching methodology, the outlook of the teachers as well as the students and their guardians towards the new approach with its innovative contents, suggestion for an eclectic method, innovative curriculum and evaluation system, etc. which are the various suggestions proposed by the author.

**Keywords:** Communicative, Bangladesh, ELT, CLT, Eclectic, Business Education.

## 1.0 Introduction:

Task-based language teaching (TBLT), much modern and advanced version of language teaching getting special interest of teachers and government agencies in Asia, specially the Eastern part in Business Education. TBLT in initial stage proved much successful in the primary and secondary schools for its ready-made and appealing tasks. In this connection it may be said that TBLT helped CLT to make a room for itself as a language teach technique. Many methods, techniques and approaches like grammar translation method, audio-lingual method, functional notional methods etc. were used in Bangladesh in teaching and learning a foreign language. From time to time various new methods and approaches replaced the older one with new tips, techniques and with extremely new prospects. "In the long search for the best way of teaching a foreign language, hundreds of different approaches or methods have been devised" (Azam 2005). In this connection the most popular and effective method which has already become the most popular in the West— the Communicative English, started making a room for itself in Bangladesh. But linguists and educators all over the globe "felt that students were not learning enough realistic, whole language. They did not know how to communicate, using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions; in brief, they were at a loss to communicate in the culture of the language studied" (Galloway 1993). As a result, Bangladeshis who are good in English can correspond with a foreigner very smoothly in written form without any hesitation. But the same person proves dumbfounded silent in face-to-face meeting and social-situations due to the so long adopted and cherished grammar based faulty educational system where only

reading and writing skills in English are emphasized. Thus the need of an all-comprising approach was badly needed, proving the classical or traditional method as limited in its endeavor. "Communicative Language Teaching, a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use" (Richards et. al. 2001) gained a wide acceptance in this matter. The government over-night tried to replace a long cherished and practiced method with an entirely alien approach— the Communicative English. But within a very short-span of one year with the publication of the ever first board result of the H.S.C (Higher Secondary Certificate) level, reflecting the utter failure of the newly introduced Communicative English, doubts, suspicions and ambiguity regarding the completeness or exclusiveness of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) started becoming obvious to all. All over the country people started reproaching a very modern and scientific approach— Communicative Approach, without giving a second thought to the limitations of the teachers, teaching strategies, curriculum, text books, incompetent students, class size, class environment, logistics and above all the rapid and unwise ways of implication methodology as faulty and incomplete in solving the problems of learning and teaching a foreign language like English. Thus the paper endeavors to uplift the down trodden reputation of a well-groomed program by suggesting various ways out of the problem and to prove the blessings of Communicative English to the much expected teachers and learners of English in Business Schools of Bangladesh.

## 2.0 Impairments to the Acceptance of Communicative Approach in Business Education:

Besides the few urban-based Business Schools, Bangladesh owns a majority of backdated, poorly-run institutions consisting of insufficient teachers, text-materials, and other logistics, in the suburbs and the rural areas. It is a misery to say that teachers, especially English teachers in such institutions mostly conduct their classes in Bangla as they themselves are deprived of modern training, up-to-date journals, mechanized modern language teaching tools, etc. As a result when Communicative English was introduced rather imposed by the Educational Board, such teachers found themselves in a fix. The teachers could not but adopt the approach against their own will. But as the program was entirely new with completely innovative and practical features, it proved frustrating to both the teachers and the students who were much habituated in the classical grammar-translation method. Referring Johnson and Morrow, Liao (2000) advocates, "new movements often begin as reaction to old ones. Their origin lies in discontent with an existing state of affairs"(p-10). Liao (2000) further asserts the truth: "Many teachers have tried to change the dominant teaching procedures but quickly get frustrated, lose their initial enthusiasm, and acquiesce to tradition" (p-11). Thus allegation pointing out the shortcoming of the new approach started becoming the headline of top dailies. A quick and sudden motivation in favor of the CLT came in the form of newly introduced textbooks initiated by the educational boards. The new text materials with its extremely modern and contemporary features changed the outlook of both the teachers and students alike. Though found difficult to teach and cope with the new program, teachers along with students understood the shortcoming of the grammar-based syllabus and the blessing of the Communicative Language Teaching which aims at developing the communicative competence of the learners. Another mention worth endeavoring in popularizing the CLT in Bangladesh is the emphasis of regular training of the English teachers by British Council through the short but very beneficial training programs like ELTIP (English Language Teaching Improvement Project) the objective of which was "to improve the quality of ELT and learning through communicative ELT introduced in secondary and higher secondary education." (Hunter 1998)

## 3.0 The objectives of Communicative English

The objectives of Communicative English should be clear both to the teachers as well as to the students. Communicative English is not meant to habituate one to memorize some letters, essays, grammars that usually a learner practices in Bangladesh. "Students must use language to acquire academic content in mainstream classes, second language teaching must be integrated with the social, cultural, and political contexts of language uses" (Gonzalez & Darling 2000). Many "teachers suggested that the basic goal of CLT is to be able to exchange message in English without paying too much attention to details or linguistics forms" (Sakui 2002). "One way of helping pupils to enjoy their language activities, and of building up their confidence, is to explain to them, as far as we can, what we are doing in class, and why"(Bright & McGregor 1977). To achieve these objectives Liao (2000) declares the following guidelines:

- Teaching should start with listening and speaking.
- Drill on language form should not be excessive
- English should be used in class Use of translation should be limited.

 

- Audio - visual aids like regalia, picture, overhead transparencies, audio tapes, videos, computers, should be fully utilized the teachers role should be facilitator and helper to guide students develop effective learning habits.
- Teachers should be aware of the individual differences among student in the learning process.
- Appropriate encouragement should be given to students to reinforce their initiatives.

**4.0 Ground-breaking text materials and curriculum:**

The traditional text and the prevailing curricula in our country should be replaced with a modern one, because "the new curriculum gives greater importance to communicative skills for specific situational uses (i.e. shopping, telephone conversation) and some sociolinguistic functions (i.e. requesting, complaining)" (Sakui 2002). Our Education-Board-prescribed English text materials are so poor in contents like backdated essay writing, paragraph writing, letter writing etc; getup like poor binding, black and white pictures both on the cover pages and inside; presentation like very typically translated English, highlighting regional and pidgin English etc. that those nearly de-motivates the learners. The traditional books, materials, and even the pedagogy seem to be a bit unfit in the modern age. Students should have free and easy access to authentic materials. From personal teaching experiences the author believes that the goal of Communicative English especially in Bangladesh seems to be achieved if students may have access to technologies like audio-visual devices, listening lab, Computer Assisted Language Learning devices, CD and DVD systems etc. Teachers should be experienced and tactful enough in motivating students for group discussion, teamwork, effective assessment and appreciation of oral performance with an aim to build an English-speaking environment both in the classroom and outside the classroom. In Bangladesh the classes of English lack English-speaking environment. "The core of this approach (CLT) is teaching whatever the learners need and doing that interestingly through proper contextualization". (Akter 2003) Akter (2003) further adds "such good features of this approach may prove to be ineffective if the teachers are not well-trained and creative enough and are not supported by other related aspects like evaluation system, design of textbooks etc." To learn a foreign language attractive and innovative ELT materials accompanied by cassettes and other devices should be prescribed. We are fortunate that at present ELT materials are cheaply and easily found in Bangladesh.

Nunan (1991) opines "the role of instructional materials within a functional/ communicative methodology might be specific in the following terms:"

- Materials will focus on the communicative abilities of interpretation, expression, and negotiation.
- Materials will focus on understandable, relevant, and interesting exchanges of information, rather than on the presentation of grammatical form.
- Materials will involve different kinds of texts and different kinds of media, which the learners can use to develop their competence through a variety of different activities and tasks.
- Teachers should be equipped with proper armours:

Communicative English which is a complete and fruitful package in learning a foreign language, proves partially beneficial in Bangladesh due to the physical constraints not in its part but on the implementation level which can be turned into a blessing if suitable grounds are provided. Communicative English is a revolution in language teaching in Bangladesh. Mahmud (2004) urges, "Teachers should praise, encourage and thank the learners as CLT makes use of real-life situation that necessitate communication." Thus to materialize or to have the full play of the Communicative English teachers concerned should be built up through frequent and effective in-service trainings. "Training is a process of preparation towards the achievement of a range of outcome which are specified in advance" (Widdowson 1991). Otherwise the incompleteness of the course will be apparent to all which is not at all a true picture. Our teachers teaching at various levels of educational institution rarely get opportunity to pursue higher degree from abroad. But if we survey and compare the condition of teachers of other countries we will be a bit disappointed. The education boards sanction a huge budget for teachers training and researches in most of the countries of Asia, which is quite opposite in Bangladesh. "The Monbusho has allocated generous funding for selected senior professors and teachers educators to undergo re-training on these (Communicative Approach) programs in order to be familiarized with the theory and practice associated with the CA" (Collins 1999). Mahmud (2004) suggests the following tips for the teacher to be successful as a Communicative English teacher:

- always be friendly with the learners to identify their problems
- rectify the students in a friendly way
- emphasize contextual teaching to make the learners capable of communicating in real life
- give feed back to the learners to let them know about their development in learning English
- prepare the teaching materials as per the need of the students
- give importance to a particular skill and using culturally appropriate teaching materials
- Facilitate students 'exposure to the English culture.

### 4.1 Student Motivation:

A Communicative approach is entirely different from that of a grammar-translation method, because in such classes the class size, the role of the students, students' participation during the lecture, student motivation and concentration are ardently necessary. . Students have to be motivated, pursued through various modern tools and techniques and exploit to speak out their mind in the class instead of an utter silent observer. "Nevertheless students will find it difficult to learn a second language in the classroom if they have neither instrumental (learning the language for a career reason or other practical reason) nor integrative (learning the language to take part in the cultural of its people) motivation"(Cook-1991). In a communicative class the teacher plays the role of a manager or a facilitator rather than the traditional all comprising receptacle. "The teacher sets up the exercise, but because the students' performance is the goal, the teacher must step back and observe, sometimes acting as referee or monitor"(Galloway 1993). This way the learners will be easily motivated towards achieving their target.

### 4.2 Learning Environment:

Galloway (1993) opines that "language is interaction; it is interpersonal activity and has a clear relationship with society. She further suggests 'in this light, language study has to look at the use (function) of language in context, both its linguistic context and its social, or situational, context ". But the scenario in the sub-continent and Bangladesh in particular is alike, considering the role of a teacher. The teacher is adored in a class by his/her students as an all-knowing intellectual. As a result the students never dare to interact with the teacher related to their lectures in the class. Thus the teacher appears to be the superior authority in the whole classroom. "The average class size in private ELT centers in the UK, Australia and Canada is around 15" (Collins 1999). Thus to extract the maximum benefit out of the Communicative English class size of maximum 30 is preferred. In this connection Collins (1999) admits "Effectively monitoring and correcting students' utterances, paying attention to pronunciation and giving guidance for personalized language practice in these activities become a much more difficult task, and often proves a psychological barrier to less experienced teachers." He further declares, "Because of the continuing emphasis in preparation for examination, conversation classes tend to be perceived as being of less value to the students" (1999). Students' only target is to appear in the exam, to pass and to have a degree. They care less for what has been learnt through such training, because in Bangladesh exams are totally based on grammar-translation, reading and writing having no scope of evaluation of the two major skills – speaking and listening.

### 4.3 Students' attendance and class performance and participation:

In Bangladesh most of the time Business Schools fail to make the classes motivating and interesting, which is responsible for students' minimum attendance and participation in the classrooms .The syllabus is designed in such a way that if students remain away from classroom, their performance is not much hampered. Learners have to be oriented prior to attending a CE (Communicative English) class because "learners in CEP (Communicative English Program) also receive training in study skills such as regular attendance, active classroom participation, asking questions in class and completing homework assignments on time" (Warwick et. al 2001). But CLT demands students' attendance in the class regularly if they are to improve the basic four skills. Students are more interested to gain credits rather than to learn the language. Thus the total marks should be distributed in continuous evaluation process; every class should possess some amount of mark, which will compel the students to attend the class regularly for the sake of securing marks at the least. Moreover, some amount of the total mark may be assigned for class tests, tutorials, and presentations and viva-voce, etc. "Regular homework assignments keep students on-task, extrinsically motivated, and prepared for each day's lesson. Students are constantly exposed to new ideas and vocabulary through graded reading" (Warwick et. al 2001). And rest of the50% marks may be allocated for a final written exam. Such measures can only stop the students' absence from the classroom. The Prospectus (2004) of Shanto-Mariam University of Creative Technology, Uttara, Dhaka, a private university,

 

exposes the following classification of the total marks in the assessment of its courses:

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|---|---|
| Class Performance (class test, assignment, oral test, attendance) | 40% |
| Mid-term examination | 20% |
| Final Examination | 40% |

One of the striking aims of Communicative English (CE) is to enable the students to communicate naturalistically to develop communicative competence in them. One interesting method of eliciting information in the form of question answer is to allocate marks for every question asked by a student in the class which will be added in his final marks sheet under the heading of class performance marks. "During in-class speaking activities, instructors go around the class and award participation points to students who are speaking or who are asking questions in English"(Warwick et. al 2001). For my practical experiences in the language classes at the tertiary level, I can confirm that such method will prompt even a dull reluctant and passive student to participate actively in the class, as he/she is to acquire some marks to pass the course. To materialize this system a teacher has to work very hard in keeping the records of the marks etc. But once habituated or experienced everything will appear easy and hassle-free. "It is a means for students to see in a concentrated manner that their attendance and participation are rewarded and that their actions visibly count towards grades." (Warwick et. al 2001)

**5.0 Crying need for a test reformation:**

In Bangladesh a board exam, an admission test or any kind of aptitude test means only a comprehensive written test consisting of some grammatical items, reading comprehension, translation, and the writing of essay, letter, and paragraph etc. "Moreover, when we are introducing CLT into our curricu-lum, there is no room for measuring two important language skills in our exams namely speaking and listening"(Akter 2003). Such tests or examinations most of the time neglect the necessity of testing one's pronunciation, intonation, listening ability, communicative competence etc. As a result out of the four vital skills required for a second language learner only partial of his / her language is tested giving an imperfect picture of his/her mastery on SL/FL. "Tests should be designed to reveal not simply the number of items which are answered correctly, but to reveal the quality of the candidate's language performance" (Brumfit & Johnson 1985). But it is believed time has radically changed, a test or a language exam to a modern teacher means a complete diagnosis of a learner's complete mastery over the language- speaking, listening, reading and writing etc. In such a test a learner may be given a small listening test of 10 minutes consisting of 10 marks. Then a mini presentation of another 05 to 10 minutes of 05 marks may follow. It may be succeeded by a role play or quiz, puzzle solving test of a group of two to three students by assigning 05 marks. Conducting such tests might be time-consuming on the part of the teachers, but its effect is beyond expectation. The rest of the 30 marks may be allocated to writing and reading test. Regret to mention that in Bangladesh two of the most prominent skills, speaking and listening are utterly neglected during a board exam. As a consequence the outcome only infers a partial picture of a learner's aptitude making the CE complete failure. According to Warwick et. al. (2001) "An appealing aspect of the grading scheme is that everything is interconnected. Students who attend regularly and excel in one area tend to well in other areas also. Warwick et. al. further opines, "Students who, for example do not participate in class will see a ripple effect throughout their grade, as homework, speaking and listening tests are affected by the students' work in classes." (2001)

**6.0 The essentials of an eclectic method:**

Though CE has been imposed and introduced to the various levels of education in Bangladesh by the government still many teachers teach English language by following the traditional grammar translation method. The teachers solely cannot be held responsible for such anomalies. Due to long experience in former grammar translation method, the teachers feel comfortable to teach in that method and feel a bit uneasy with the new approach. Taking the instances of other countries where CE faced such resistance from teacher, "so it is frequently necessary to introduce an eclectic approach in which aspects of different methods are selected to meet the demands of the learners in particular teaching situations"(Azam 2005). In this connection Sultana (2003-04) advocates, "There is a dire need to customize the present teaching approach considering our context, curriculum, test methods, class size, class schedule, students' background and their personality, teachers' background, existing teaching materials that are available at the moment and the availability of modern equipment and other resources." Quoting Long, she further proposes, "the syllabus should give importance to both the communicative activities and the formal grammar instruction."(2004-05)

**7.0 Conclusion:**

Finally the study reflects that a unique approach like Communicative English is not the only solution of the problem of teaching and learning English in Business Education in Bangladesh. Thus the study advocates that keeping in mind the dire necessity of English in the modern era and the physical constraints Bangladesh should adopt a tailored version of CE and grammar-translation method in teaching and learning English in Bangladesh. The study further proposes the need of the development of the teachers of English of all levels through up-graded and modern training and research. The students should alike be motivated in learning English by establishing English language clubs, debate society which will ensure friendly English learning environment, as well as supervising them personally and rigorously in cutting good grades and if possible place them to prospective careers, and above all arranging congenial atmosphere to go abroad for higher study. "As we are moving towards globalization, global village, being the reality of the present world IT development, along with other inventions and modern thoughts, should be accommodated in language teaching for a meaningful English teaching-learning program (Sharif 2004). If the proposed factors are brought into practice and a proper environment is created to accommodate Communicative English in Bangladesh, only then the blessings and the boons of CE will be apparent to the students, teachers, guardians, and the relevant authority alike very soon.

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