

# Efficacy of Communicative Language Teaching in Primary School – Bangladesh Context

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## Abstract

Teaching English at primary level school in a non-English speaking country like Bangladesh requires intensive caring and dynamic method at the beginning of learners' education. The study aimed to explore the efficacy of CLT in primary school in Bangladesh. From July to September in 2013, a qualitative investigation included in-depth interviews with teachers and classroom unstructured observation was conducted at schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The study explored CLT would be an effective way of teaching language that requires extensive training for teachers, setting up unique curriculum in the school syllabus, using more teaching techniques to encourage English learners in improving their language skills.

**Keywords:** CLT, ELT, Education Curriculum, Bangladesh Primary Education

## 1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to develop students' four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing in a communicative context in Bangladesh. CLT focuses mainly classroom activities, which based on communicative methods like group work, task-work, and filling the information gap. The issue of English language learning in primary section is a very important phenomenon for the Bangladeshi students. English language is taught in the primary levels to improve the basic knowledge on a foreign language in Bangladesh. A host of variables comes into play an important role in determining the issue, which may vary from one context to another. It may be difficult to make a complete list of the variables, however, some of them are lack of proficiency of the teacher, attitudes of the students, socio-cultural background, and in particular, language learning policy itself (Mondal, 2012). The main purpose of using language is to communicate one's needs, necessities, feelings, thoughts and ideas to others (Banu, 2009). From senior teacher's observation, the study indicates that many of the primary graduates are failing to learn English language skills, which they can use effectively.

Children need to learn different reading strategies in primary sections. Warm up activities, puzzle words and pictures, scanning and locating information throughout the text to solve different reading problems play an important role in reading. On the other hand, writing is a learned process and it never ends. For this reason young learner's need different types of activities like paragraph writing, dialogue writing etc. Therefore, implementation of proper teaching strategy is very important for young learners. In the Bengali medium school, the majority of the teachers follows GTM method that is knowledge based teaching method but not performance. On the other hand, teachers from English version school use different methods to teach English language at primary level, which helps students for interactive communication. It helps learners to develop their thinking through language, and develop their language through thinking. There are many schools where there is English version as well as Bengali medium. Both English versions and Bengali medium are following the National Curriculum and Text Book Board (NCTB) curriculum. The main objective of teaching English at primary level in Bangladesh is to enable students understanding simple commands, instructions, and requests in English and carry them out (NCTB, 2006). For this reason to learn English at primary level is necessary for the students.

The CLT situation in Bangladesh is comparable to other English as foreign language countries. Textbooks are designed according to the learners' age level and by learning English students will speak in English as well as they will convey their message. According to Burg (2006), 2-13 years is the proper time for language learning. NCTB prepared English curriculum for primary level to consider proper approaches and method although unfortunately the curriculum is not implemented properly, especially in rural areas (Sadek, 2002). Most of the students of Bengali medium schools are not able to attain the primary English language competencies due to prevailing challenges in our education system where as English version students are overcoming these barriers at the same institution. This study aimed to explore the efficacy of CLT in primary sections.

## 2. Methodology

From July to September in 2013, a qualitative investigation included in-depth interviews with teachers and classroom unstructured observation was conducted at schools in Dhaka, Bangladesh. We interviewed 20 teachers each from a Bengali version school and an English version school. Each interview took 45 – 60 minutes was followed by a semi-structured questionnaire that included teachers' perceptions and experiences regarding factors that contribute to improve English proficiency of students. In addition, we conducted four observations of English class at primary level using a guideline that included classroom size, teacher per student, equipment used for teaching, available facilities for teaching and learning.

For all in-depth interviews, we recorded all interviews using a digital recorder. We translated the data into English. We manually coded the data according to our research objectives related to the barriers to implementation of CLT in English version and the Bengali medium classroom. After coding, we then performed the thematic content analysis. We contrasted them from 'Bengali medium' and 'English version school with respect to the quality of education, training, curriculum, facilities, and school environment.

We had received training on how to protect the rights of the study participants prior to conducting qualitative study, including obtaining written informed consent. As part of the consent process, we made clear the amount of time we were asking prospective study participants to give. We explained that there were no individual benefits or compensation for participating, that there would be questions about academic and professional performance, knowledge, and informed that these topics could be sensitive, and/ or that it could be uncomfortable to have a stranger interviewing them in their teaching method. During the consent process, we specified that participation was voluntary. We explained to the study participants that they could withdraw their consent at any time. The study protocol was reviewed and approved by the Bangladesh Content Group authority.

## 3 Findings

### 3.1 Socio Demographic

The majority of study participants were women (31 women, 9 men). More than three-fourths of the study participants reported that they have completed postgraduate degree. Almost every one of them was permanent teachers.

### 3.2 Training

Although teachers in Bengali medium and English versions were graduated in English literature, but were not up-to-date with modern English language teaching methods and techniques. Nearly half of the teachers of Bengali medium reported that they did not participate any special training in English language teaching and perceived that lack of training in terms of quality, content, trainer, duration, mode of training provided, or the syllabus partial or as a whole might affect their teaching properly. In contrast to Bengali medium, some of the primary level teachers from English version reported that they were

benefiting more from CLT training as they had prior academic knowledge of communicative language teaching.

### *3.3 Curriculum and Syllabus*

The school curriculum is changing often due to political reasons, or when any new method introduced by education experts or policy makers. The curriculum is designed for a whole year while the syllabus is designed twice or more for a year round, which is changeable. Teachers from both English versions and Bengali medium reported that the curriculum followed by Bengali medium was not appropriate for improving English language both writing and speaking skills of the students. Despite the curriculum was designed for developing English language skill but in reality that had not achieved. In addition, teachers were instructed to complete the syllabus in any way by one academic year, which was identified as another barrier by the teachers.

Some of the senior teachers identified change of the curriculum as a problem to deliver the lessons to the students for teachers. Moreover, guardians also faced the similar problem to guide their children at home when new curriculum introduced.

### *3.4 Interaction among Teachers and Students*

Bengali medium and English version teachers interact among them regarding the syllabus, question answer, fill in the blanks, word meaning, and question paper. It is noted that question paper is same in both Bengali medium and English version, but question papers are translated in English for English version. The majority of the English version teachers was from the English Language Teaching (ELT) background and was oriented in modern and diversified teaching techniques. Therefore, if syllabus even changes but their method does not change, this makes their classes more communicative. The teachers from English version school reported that as they follow ELT method, students had developed their four skills in reading, writing, listening and speaking.

In contrast to English version teachers, the Bengali medium teachers were more experienced in terms of length of teaching, but they followed only the ‘Grammar Translation Method (GTM)’, because they were not willing to other method than GTM, because they perceived that other methods took much of their time to implement. Teachers from Bengali medium school perceived that their students had developed their skills in reading and writing only.

### *3.5 Teaching Aids and Materials for CLT*

We found a difference in the mode of teaching between the English version and Bengali medium schools. Bengali medium teachers did not use necessary teaching aids and except those pictures in the textbook. We also found no. of students per class were too high and teachers required to manage the class, class works, diary and lessons as well that seemed difficult for them.

While we found no. of students per class in English, version school was less than Bengali medium school. Teaching aids and materials were available in English version school, which played an important motivator for the students towards learning and understanding the

content knowledge. Though primary students are very young and they did not get interest to learn English, they only memorize the answer to get good grades that affected quality of education for Bengali medium students.

### *3.6 Necessity to Read other English Books*

Reading more books that are English is necessary to improve English language reading ability. The majority of the teachers from both English versions and Bengali medium reported that English version students read more English books in addition to their textbook than Bengali medium students did. The reasons for Bengali medium students not to read extra books in addition to text might be lacking in vocabulary, shame and fear of the English language, and their parents' understanding of English and limited financial capability.

### *3.7 Lack of Speaking Practice in Bengali Medium*

Speaking English in the classroom improves English language skills. Teachers from English version school reported that they instructed their students to speak in English in classroom and followed up regularly. Most of the time teachers from English version school used the English language to instruct and communicate with their students. They perceived that this practice helped their students to improve their speaking skills.

In contrast to English version school, we found students from Bengali medium schools were not practiced the English language as regular communication. The reasons might be hesitation, nervousness, poor vocabulary, using grammar structure, pronunciation, using lots of hedges and pauses. Interestingly, teachers from Bengali medium school were not using English in their regular conversation or instruction among themselves or with their students, not even in English classes.

Without listening practice of English language, perfect pronunciation and speaking style cannot be achieved (Sadek, 2002). In the English version of the classes where children needed to be intensive care like - KG-1, KG-2, class-1, and class 2 and rarely uses Bengali in class-3. Bengali is used in the classroom but not all time. Classroom environment varies from class to class and it depends on the class that how much students understand English.

### *3.8 Teachers' Role*

The English version school follows Communicative language teaching (CLT) method and classroom environment is interactive where students can share their ideas and experiences, and do many activities that helps them to learn. Teachers also use different methods to improve students listening, speaking, reading and writing these four skills. On the other hand, Bengali medium teachers use GTM method, which is knowledge focused very much not performance focused.

## **4. Discussion**

The study explored combined training for senior section teachers and junior section teachers could not be effective because of different categories of learners. We therefore suggest conducting separate training for primary school teachers. While both Bengali medium and

English version teacher follow communicative language teaching method as it is mentioned by NCTB text book ‘English for Today’. The education experts considered this textbook will improve learners listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. However, in reality the existing textbook only can improve learners’ reading and writing skills. Though schools have both Bengali medium and English version in the same school, teachers from English version were more dynamic in delivering teaching than Bengali medium in terms of following different methods, which made a significant difference in learners’ knowledge e.g. teacher-student interaction, student-student interaction, project work, peer work, and other task based activities within the school. We recommend that Bengali medium English teachers also have to apply different methods in the classroom along with GTM method. Teachers from English version use different information, education and communication (IEC) materials such as pictures, posters, maps, charts for learning English. However, teachers of Bengali medium use only pictures from the textbook along with a whiteboard and marker. We recommend that Bengali medium teachers also need to introduce different materials like English version teachers for teaching English. In addition, Bengali medium teacher should encourage their students to read other English books beside the textbook, which will improve their grammar, vocabulary, and level of understanding. Classroom practice in English version improves learners’ skills related to listening, speaking and pronunciation, and decreases their nervousness. Where as in Bengali medium primary learners are not able to speak English fluently due to lack of knowledge of grammar structure, pronunciation and feel shy. The teacher acts as an analyst, counselor, and group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Along with English version teachers, Bengali medium teachers have to encourage students for learning English. Teachers have to be more responsive to their students, so that students can share their problems and can get solutions easily.

## 5. Conclusion

The study revealed that using CLT in primary section would be most effective for the learners with learning English. Qualified teachers can play vital role in improving learners’ quality, therefore appropriate training should be provided to teachers. Policy makers should emphasize more on communicative language at primary level to ensure strong basic knowledge of learners.

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### **Glossary**

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching.

ELT: English Language Teaching.

GTM: Grammar Teaching Method.

IEC: Information, education and communication.

KG: Kindergarten

NCTB: National Curriculum and Text Book Board.

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