The Role of CLT in EFL Classroom

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ABSTRACT

The present paper tries to give a qualitative report on communicative language teaching`s advantages and disadvantages. Meanwhile, it investigates some studies in various countries on CLT and examines its theoreticians` ideas.

Keywords: CLT, Advantages, Disadvantages

I. INTRODUCTION

The use of Communicative language teaching approach CLT in English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom has been a controversial issue for decades. Some researchers insist that the use of CLT can facilitate learners' acquisition of the second language (L2), (see Canale, 1983; Brown 2001;Nunan, 1991)andLittlewood,2007), while others oppose the idea, proposing that CLT neglects the context which is the most important aspect of second language learning (Bax, 2003). This literature review will examine how the communicative language teaching (CLT) as a general approach may be employed for teaching English in the Omani contexts by looking at research conducted in different EFL contexts. Implications for utilizing CLT in the classroom will be considered in the light of the empirical evidence driven from the literature review and suggests directions for continuing inquiry in this field.

II. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

2.1. Summary of CLT

Since its commencement in Europe in early 1970s, CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice around the world. There are numerous researches that investigated CLT, in particular, Li (1998) points out that CLT has extended in scope and has been used by different educators in different ways. The term CLT is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence (Hiep, 2007). As Hiep (2005) and Nazari (2005) share the view that the beginning of CLT was in the early 1980s but the concepts of communicative competence were first illustrated by Chomsky and Hymes a period of time ago. Chomsky (1965) suggests that linguistic deals with the language knowledge of an ideal speaker-hearer in a homogeneous community and unaffected by performance variables. Arguably, Hymes (1971) emphasizes that the competence Chomsky had shed light on, was linguistic competence, a limited aspect of a broader concept of communicative competence which included not only linguistic competence but also other aspects such as socio-cultural dimension.

Some other researchers examine CLT in terms of syllabus and methodology like Breen and Candlin (1980-89 cited in Kumaravadivelu, 2006) who indicated that communicative classroom could become the meeting place for realistically communication such as learning, communication about learning and meta-communication. They asserted that the classroom is the ground for using communicative methodology. Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (1986) elaborated that CLT is a theory of language teaching that begins from communicative model of language and language use. They explain that CLT seeks to translate this interaction into usage for each of instructional system, materials, teacher, learner's roles and behaviour from one side and for classroom activities and techniques from the other side.

In terms of tactics, Kumaravadivelurs (2003:2008) provided three macro-strategies principles for CLT. First principle is particularity, which takes local language culture and politics in consideration. Second

principle is practicality which requires teacher to be not only language teacher but also researcher and participant in students' activities. Last principle is possibility, the potential to empower learner in the process of learning and scaffolding them to use their schemata in the classroom.

The Communicative approach gives priority to the semantic content of language learning. This means learners learn the grammatical form indirectly through meaning. Thus, learning activities are selected to match learners' needs and accordingly engage them in meaningful and authentic language use rather than merely practicing of language patterns (Richards & Rogers, 1986).

2.2. The role of CLT to develop EFL classroom (advocates)

In order to acknowledge the role of CLT, it might be necessary to consider studies that have highlighted the potential advantages of CLT. Extreme studies report that communicative language teaching approach is welcomed in EFL context and result in positive learning outcomes. This focus on the benefits of CLT would seem particularly relevant to Anderson's (1993) argument that despite the difficulties that teachers and learners might encounter, there is a growing recognition of the advantages of using communicative language teaching approach. In addition, Wang (1990) points out to the role of CLT in foreign language schools in China emphasizing on the oral communication. The findings highlight that CLT is possibly contributes to learners' development of skills that goes beyond listening and speaking to reading and writing skills.

In addition, researches have suggested that in order to acknowledge the significant role of communicative components, itmight be necessary to consider it in instructional practices. Savignon and Wang (2003) for example have conducted a study in Taiwan focusing on Learner attitudes and perceptions. The study has taken into account learners as essential for classroom language learning in making pedagogical decisions over reflecting their attitudes and beliefs about English language learning, in general. The study involved a sample of first-year university students from different elementary and secondary school backgrounds. One hundred seventy four students from two Taipei universities, 105 female students and 69 male students

responded to a questionnaire designed for the aforementioned purpose.

The findings of the study indicate that a majority of the learners in both groups show a preference for communicative tasks. Their acceptance of such tasks was expressed with statements such as "I liked my (high school) English teachers to create situations that encouraged us to use English in class" and "I liked communicative activities where we could interact in English with peers" (Savignon and Wang, 2003).

2.3. Challenges of CLT

Obviously, the search for the one best method would seem to be well and truly dead (Nunan 2001). Hence, Communicative language teaching (CLT) has contributed to thrive the language teaching for many years, particularly, Mitchell (1994) argues for the function of CLT as a corrective to the shortcomings of the previous approaches such as, grammar-translation and the direct method. Though, CLT has subsidized to address the weaknesses of the earlier methods, it is also been criticised by research for a number of reasons such as neglecting the context (Bax, (2003). However, it is not correct to assume the evidence is therefore balanced because the findings of these studies are based on different methodologies and each study has its own merits and limitations. We shall now explicitly analyze some of these studies that conducted to examine CLT in different EFL context.

Bax (2003) in his article ''the end of CLT'' argues that a radical reason to reject the CLT is neglecting the context. He suggests that CLT needs to be replaced because it concerns the language teaching by not considering the context which is the most important aspect of second language learning. Likewise, Thornbury (1998) has observed ESL classrooms and training courses in a number of contexts in Western Europe, Egypt, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. He hypothesized that "from a communicative perspective, CLT is not only weak but very weak" (1998, p.110).

A further criticism appointed to CLT by Littlewood (2007) in his study of applying CLT in fifteen EFL countries in East Asia is the issue of classroom management. This problem is likely to arise when students are assigned in a task to work independently

and consequently the teacher loses the control over them. To illustrate, A South Korean teacher involved in this study comments that it is extremely difficult for the teacher to administer the class when CLT is used. He explains that when they start a communicative task, the class become chaotic and that brings complaints from other teachers (Li, 1998).

Another influential concern that led to critique of CLT is the conflict with the education values and traditions. In other words, some particular cultures' values that hold culture of learning differ from Western setting would contradict with CLT style of teaching (Cotrazzi& Jin 1996). For instance, Samimy and Kobayashi (2004) point to the mismatch between theoretical perspectives of CLT and the Japanese culture of learning referring to the difficulties that might arise as a result of emphasizing on the meaning rather than the form.

2.4. Implication of CLT in Oman

English language teaching in Oman has become more demanding and sophisticated under the influence of the current teaching methods (The national report on quality education in Oman, 2004). Syllabus design has to account for not only structural aspects of language but also social and cultural issues. Methodology has been refined to substitute drill and rote teaching and to include engaging activities. According to Breen & Candlin (1980) greater demands are placed on teachers as organizers of these activities and have described the teacher in a multiplicity of roles such as facilitator, researcher, participant and learner.

Meaning has given a great attention in the current Omani school curriculum (e.g. English for Me[1]) by providing sufficient opportunities for students to interact meaningfully in potentially real life situation. Hinkel (2006) points out that interaction gets students to self-monitor which consequently leads them to identify and correct their own obstacles in the conversation. Such collaboration could derive students to produce the language using their schemata about a particular topic.

A variety of CLT activities have practically incorporated into classroom to enhance speaking skill, for example problem solving activities. In this activity

students are assigned to work in group to solve a particular problem. For instance, it may include mathematical or systematic operations or could be a measure of an individual's critical thinking skills, so they communicate together seeking to solve that problem. Other activities that could be found a lot in this curriculum is role-play activity. In this activity students are encouraged to improvise to act on a particular turn as the doctor and the patient, they attempt to produce the appropriate language in such specific situation. Hinkel (2006) points to the advantage of using such task that would afford learners opportunities to cope with cognitive demands of fluency, accuracy and linguistic complexity.

However the current curriculum is expected to align with student's needs and alleviate the prospective difficulty in language learning, yet numbers of concerns are seen to contradict with Arab learners when come into practice. These issues could be summarized in the following; the absence of some English sounds in Arabic language is considered as principal obstacles that face students in pronunciation (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1997). Moreover, there is no word with two consonants preceding each other without an intrusive vowel in Arabic which known as consonant cluster. But in English, it is possible to have a sequence of four consonants in one word preceding each other with no intrusive vowel (i.e. grandfather). This matter seems to complicate the Arab learners pronunciation in which they tend to add an intrusive vowel while they pronounce such words (e.g. sipring). As the fact that a primary function of CLT is interaction and communication (Richards &Rogers, 1986), students would not get enough opportunities to improve accuracy. Fonocchiaro and Brumfit (1983 cited in Celce-Murcia, M. et al. 1997) highlight that fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal of CLT, while accuracy is conducted in the context.

Furthermore, McLean, (2011) in his dissertation entitled investigation into the awareness and use of communicative language teaching methodology in a college of higher education in Oman conducted a case study aimed at investigating the knowledge and use of the CLT approach in the classroom. He used a number of techniques like questionnaire, classroom observation and unstructured interview to collect his data. The subjects of the study were 15 full time teachers from the English language department at the institution. The

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[1]School curriculum that that use to teach English as a Foreign Language.

teaching staff consisted of several different nationalities, namely British, Canadian, Indian, Omani and South African. The study used combination of inductive and deductive methodology. The purpose of that was to create a research practice in which data sampling, analysis and theory development are embraced in combination with the goal of describing and explaining the phenomena under research. As a supportive points to the previous findings, the study finds that majority of teachers have inadequate knowledge of the CLT approach and do not use it in the classroom.

However, a very limited number of studies examining CLT in Oman have conducted; these findings highlight the concern of teachers' deficiency in CLT knowledge. To address these shortcomings a number of strategies need to be reconstructed. The following section would suggest possible recommendations in this domain.

2.5. Implication for professional development

Out of those aforementioned conceivable concerns of CLT, it can be seen that, most of the problems refer back to the misusing and misconception of CLT by teachers in EFL contexts. To apply CLT more appropriately, a number of crucial points need to be taken into consideration.

As shown in the studies, it is likely to be challenging to adopt the western style of CLT to imply in EFL contexts. In other word, researchers for example, Pennycook (1989), Holliday, Kramsch and Sullivan have emphasized that it can be awkward to take a set of teaching methods developed in one part of the world and use it in another part. That is due the issues emerge, given that the socio-cultural, political, and physical conditions of these countries markedly differ from those in the UK or the USA. Consequently, research suggests adapting CLT rather than simply adopting it. For instance, in Japan, Samimy and Kobayashi (2004) propose that 'English education should embrace CLT in a culturally sensitive and appropriate way that match the Japanese own culture.

Furthermore, those who argue for the notion of adapting CLT includes Carless (2004) who points out that adaptation or reinterpretation, is a radical part of the innovation process in order to form a localized methodology that supports the effective teaching and learning of English. Therefore, CLT need not to be embraced as a package of formulaic that control of

classroom, but EFL teachers need to make their own efforts to develop and generate, within the communicative approach and classroom techniques that match their conditions (Hiep, 2005).

In addition, researches have suggested that CLT need to be combined with other methods to achieve better results. Xu (2010) for example has shown that teachers should integrate more than one approach in order to obtain a suitable teaching and learning outcomes. He demonstrates that there is no single approach which can cover all aspects of content and the use of the target language at the same time. Teachers find a homogeneous teaching of English using both CLT and grammar translation method as a considerable combination that focus on form, content and the features of English which seems to line up with EFL contexts (Kong, 2011). Correspondingly, Bao and Sun (2010) explored the issue of Chinese undergraduate students. One conclusion from their research is that if the grammatical rules have been illustrated and explained indirectly within a context, learner's chances to comprehend and use of the target language is likely to be better. Then the grammar usage can be realized and applied outside the classroom. Thereafter, it seems important to note that a balanced approach comprised of a mixture of grammar drill activities interwoven with communicative teaching activities, create a practical environment in classroom situations, particularly if learners are familiar with the traditional type teaching approaches.

Bax (2003) argues that CLT approach is insufficient model while it is focusing on one aspect which is the methodology "content" similar to the role of grammar translation method that insists on the "grammar" aspect. His study suggested that CLT needs to be demoted as the main paradigm but adapting new approach which he called context approach. In this approach he considers the methodology "content" as a one aspect of language learning that must be in combination with the other aspects of grammar, student's attitudes, cultural background, local conditions and other individual needs of each student.

Besides, many other researchers have changed the perspective of targeting the native-like accent in second language learning. For example Taronr (2005) focused on the intelligibility where the listener could understand the speaker's utterance other than native-like accent.

Likewise, researchers suggested a number of strategies to teach pronunciation for example, Chun (2002) focused on giving instruction in pronunciation before speaking task and teach pronunciation in a contextualized setting rather than idealistic language models.

2.6. Recommendations for efficient use of CLT in Oman

In order to apply the discussed ideas of adapting CLT and how to use it effectively in EFL context, further strategies will be pointed out below.

It is suggested that combination of all technological, technical, academic, social and cultural sources would provide opportunities for students to practice the four skills of the language equally. The underlying of this incorporation was highlighted by Nunan et al. (1987) in their curriculum development program in Oman suggested that integration of the four skills and perceive them as equally, is important for Omani students' proficiency.One reasonable suggestion, adapt the narrow approach to CLT to meet regional requirements of learners alternatively to the "broad" approach which is likely to focus on second language teaching in a European or American context (Holiday, 1994).

Follow this; there is a need for teacher to contribute in enhancing this approach to have better outcomes. This could be fulfilled through number of suggestions that offered by some scholars in Oman. One example is suggested by AL-Jadidi (2009) for both monolingual and bilingual teachers. In her research she recommended that a professional development program in CLT is needed for those teachers. As for bilingual teachers she suggested that they need to incorporate variety of communicative activities in their classes with taking into consideration the cross-cultural framework. Unlikely, monolingual teachers are advised to focus on students' issues by learning Arabic and learning about Islamic culture.

III. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, insufficient adoption of the western style of CLT cannot be used as evidence to hinder the advantages of CLT; teachers of English as well as other EFL teachers can help L2 learners' acquisition by understanding the role of CLT and using it judiciously in classroom. As Bax (2005) states, teachers have the ability of determining the best way to teach the lesson. They should not treat CLT as a package of formulaic, prescriptive classroom techniques. But rather they need to make further efforts to support and generate, within the communicative approach, classroom techniques appropriate to their circumstances.As numerous literatures have revealed; excluding CLT would deprive opportunities to acquire L2 effectively of learners. Therefore, it might be crucial that teachers acknowledge the significant role of CLT, and keep thinking about when it might be the most beneficial to use CLT to a particular learner group in order to help their L2 acquisition. Overall, it is clear from this literature review that more qualitative and quantitative research is required to investigate for suitable solutions to use CLT in EFL context.

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