Teaching Speaking Using Post-Method Framework: A Possible Complement to CLT in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT
It has now been 20 years since the CLT was introduced in Bangladesh. The expectation that CLT created in the English language teaching-learning community, seems still far away from its destination. CLT appeared with a promise to develop learners’ communicative competence. However, research reveals that a significant number of students in Bangladesh even after many years of schooling have not progressed in English beyond the initial competence (English in Action, 2009, p. 26). The current situation, therefore, calls for more effective ELT practices compatible with the contextual realities of Bangladesh. Considering the constraints of teaching English using CLT, this paper suggests post-method pedagogy as a possible complement to CLT for the improvement of English language pedagogy in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Post-method pedagogy; CLT; context sensitive pedagogy; English language teaching.

Introduction

Of all the four language abilities namely ‘tuning in, speaking, perusing, and composing,’ speaking is the most essential one for compelling correspondence (Ur, 2000). At present the ability to speak in English is gaining importance as English is considered the leading means of international communication. It is “the lingua franca of business, commerce, science, arts, literature of the whole world” (Nesa, 2004, p. 8). The ability to use English successfully for communication offers better life opportunities and opens up many more choices in future such as pursuing higher study and
increasing employment opportunities within or outside the country. Therefore, the ability to speak in English also empowers a person.

Considering its importance, English is taught as a compulsory subject in Bangladesh at primary, secondary, higher secondary, and tertiary level. When traditional methods such as Grammar Translation Method and Audio-Lingual Method failed to develop learners’ communicative competence, CLT was introduced as part of the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) in 1998 which brought changes in textbooks and examinations; it also introduced in-service teacher training program and teachers’ guide to help teachers develop their teaching skills.

However, it has now been 20 years since CLT was introduced in Bangladesh. Students’ overall competence in English language is very poor although they receive twelve years of compulsory English teaching at schools and colleges (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2011). A number of researchers have blamed the existing teaching approaches, such as CLT, for the present sickly condition of English skills of Bangladeshi students (Huda, 2013; Jahan, 2008) as those approaches are unable to address the contextual realities of Bangladeshi classrooms. The researchers are in favor of a more ‘context sensitive’ pedagogy (e.g. post-method pedagogy) in the teaching-learning context of Bangladesh. Therefore, this paper first highlights the challenges for CLT in Bangladesh, and then discusses the possibility of post-method pedagogy in aiding the teaching-learning of English.

The Contextual Challenges for CLT in Bangladesh

Teacher-student ratio and large class size

Teacher-student ratio is a crucial indicator of education quality. Developing speaking skill requires individual speaking time and a teacher should spend enough time on each student. However, it is a great challenge for teachers of Bangladesh as nearly all English classrooms are overcrowded. The teacher-student ratio (TSR) in both primary and secondary schools in Bangladesh is higher than UNESCO standard as well as the South Asian average (1:50 in government primary schools and 1:36 in secondary schools). In higher educational institutions, the reality is not different. While the University Grants Commission (UGC) recommends TSR 1:16 for science universities and 1:22 for general universities for imparting quality education to students, BANBEIS (2017) shows that there is the highest 1:67 teacher-student ratio at one university and 1:34 in at least six other universities. As a result, it
becomes difficult for teachers to adopt communication focused teaching approach such as CLT in classrooms.

**Infrastructural constraints and limited classroom resources**

Most of the schools of Bangladesh do not have proper learning environment that CLT demands. Infrastructure problems such as inadequate number of classrooms, small rooms with unfavorable seating arrangements, interrupted electric supply, and scarcity of books in the library affect the teaching learning management and challenge the curriculum implementation process in rural areas of Bangladesh (Hossain, Nessa, & Kafi, 2015). According to Hamid (2011) Bangladesh’s socioeconomic reality is mainly responsible for these constraints.

Limited availability of classroom resources is another challenge for language teachers of Bangladesh. A research carried out by Hasan and Akhand (2009) covering all the 64 districts in Bangladesh including both urban and rural colleges found that the scarcity of appropriate teaching materials is one of the main challenges for Bangladeshi students’ spoken English. For example, listening is fundamental to the development of speaking skill which cannot be effectively practiced without audio and multimedia systems. Moreover to introduce new vocabulary items (which is essential for teaching speaking), teachers cannot use visual aids because the institution may not have those facilities (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012).

**Inappropriate language teaching materials**

Moreover, most of the textbooks and audio-visual materials used in CLT approach to language teaching do not represent local culture. The situations and environments described and used in these materials are designed to teach how to communicate in the Western society and culture which is quite unfamiliar to the Bangladeshi students. There is dearth of materials in the market representing local culture. Thus, a cultural gap hinders the use of language in real life communication (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2011).

**Limited exposure to the target language**

In Bangladesh, English is a foreign language and seldom used for daily communication. Learners get little exposure to English outside the classrooms. Even in the classrooms, they get limited exposure. There is also a shortage of trained and proficient teachers (Chowdhury & Shaila, 2011; Huda, 2013) who moreover prefer using Bangla as a medium of instruction.
even in their English lessons (Farooqi, 2014; Haider & Chowdhury, 2012; Hamid & Honan, 2012; Milon, 2016). This ultimately spoils the principal of CLT.

Underqualified teachers

Most of the primary and secondary school teachers are only Secondary School Certificate (SSC) or Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) qualified who lack the efficiency to teach using CLT. Thousands of teachers are recruited every year and sent straight to classrooms without any training. Often a graduate from a different field becomes an English teacher who attends only one English course in their Bachelor in Education (BEd) course. Sometimes due to the administrative politics underqualified teachers in different educational institutions are also seen to be recruited (Farooqi, 2014).

Insufficient training opportunities and lack of quality training are the other challenges for English language teachers in Bangladesh. A survey conducted by Milon (2016) covering 20 rural primary schools of Bangladesh discovered that 78% teachers did not receive any training to teach English. Some teachers commented that through attending different training courses on CLT they received only superficial idea about classroom management and student engagement which neither addresses the actual classroom reality and nor includes practical tips to apply knowledge.

The Pragmatic Limitations in CLT’s Framework

With regard to the contextual challenges for CLT in Bangladesh mentioned above, it seems, CLT have failed to account for the local linguistic, historical, political, and sociocultural aspects that directly or indirectly influence L2 education. One of the major limitations that CLT has is lack of particularity as it cannot account for the ‘holistic interpretation of particular situation’ (Kumaravadivelu, 2001) which affects the teaching-learning practice. Bangladeshi learners’ beliefs, learning styles and preferences, values and thinking pattern are shaped by their culture, which are disregarded in the present CLT practices. The CLT prescribed role of teachers and learners, learning items, and pattern of interactions are in conflict with the local variables such as cultural profiles of teachers and learners, situational strengths and weaknesses, availability of resources, and teachers’ skill in target language (Huda, 2013).
Secondly, CLT lacks practicality as it cannot be practiced successfully in Bangladeshi context. The socio-cultural context fails to provide learners with the ideal environment needed for CLT. CLT advocates ‘Natural Approach’ to learning, and it depends mainly on the learner’s exposure to real life communication in target language. As Bangladeshi learners do not have sufficient exposure to the target language in real life context, CLT loses practicality.

Finally, the pedagogy of possibility seeks to empower the participants by allowing them to work with the experiences they bring with them in the classroom to recreate their identities both from local and global perspectives. To this end, it is essential to develop the learners’ consciousness about the local as well as global culture. However, the teaching-learning practices as well as the textbooks assigned by CLT reflect neither the foreign culture nor the local culture appropriately (Huda, 2013).

Relevance of Post-Method pedagogy in Bangladesh

Post-method pedagogy advocates context sensitive pedagogy. It is a three-dimensional system consisting of three pedagogic parameters: particularity, practicality and possibility. The parameter of particularity asserts that the language teaching practice should not conflict with the local variables; the parameter of practicality claims that any theory to be chosen for any pedagogy must have the quality to be applied into practice; and the parameter of possibility suggests that second language teaching and learning should provide the learner with the opportunities of recreating their identities both from local and global perspectives.

Post-method framework empowers the practicing teachers to come up with their personal theory of teaching in the form of varied micro-strategies relevant to their contexts. Therefore, Kumaravadivelu (1994) proposed a framework consisting of 10 macro-strategies based on which teachers can generate their own situation-specific, need-based micro-strategies, or classroom techniques to produce the desired learning outcomes.

Conclusion

Pedagogical innovations cannot be made ignoring the local context within which the teaching-learning takes place. Post-method pedagogy nurtures teachers’ autonomous thoughts and actions, so that they can go beyond the academic and administrative constraints and make necessary changes to
make their teaching practice ‘location-specific’. However, a number of situational constraints need to be addressed to make post-method pedagogy applicable in Bangladesh. Post-method pedagogy sees teachers as autonomous individual. Teacher autonomy is placed at the heart of post-method pedagogy, as teachers are supposed to build and implement their own theory of practice that is responsive to the particularities of their educational contexts (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Importantly, teacher autonomy entails a reasonable degree of competence and confidence on the part of teachers and the development of which requires strong desire and determination as pointed out by Kumaravadivelu (2001). Therefore, it is essential to concentrate on improving the quality of teacher education and training to develop teachers’ professional competence.

It is also high time to rethink about the appropriateness of CLT in the teaching-learning context of Bangladesh to embrace a more ‘context-sensitive’ pedagogy that allows holistic interpretation of existing situations and prioritize local exigencies to improve those particular situations. Post-method’s three pedagogic parameters of particularity, practicality, and possibility allow context-sensitive language education based on a true understanding of local linguistic, sociocultural, and political particularities. Those also empower teachers by enabling them to construct their own theory of practice and tap into learners’ sociopolitical consciousness in order to aid their quest for identity formation and social transformation (Kumaravadivelu, 2001). Therefore, by using the post-method framework, teachers can think of modifying an established approach such as CLT to make it compatible with the realities of their local contexts and thus recreate it as their own (Kumaravadivelu, 2001).

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