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## Effectiveness of the Application of Communicative Language Teaching Approach at Higher Secondary Level in Bangladesh

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### Abstract

*English is taught continuously from class I to class XII to develop students' communicative competence in English. English has been taught to the students of Bangladesh applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach for more than two decades. The study aims at assessing the effectiveness of the application of CLT approach at higher Secondary level. 200 students, 20 teachers from 6 colleges participated in this study. 3 students were also selected for case studies to picture the application process of CLT at higher secondary level. The study applied convenient sampling technique for selecting students and teachers. The study applied mixed method approach in this research. Result reveals that the application of CLT at higher secondary level does not effectively help the students for the further steps of their life. The problem is lying with the teaching methods, classroom practice, teachers and students' perception about CLT and examination system. Incorporation of listening and speaking test in the public examination, modification of teaching trend and change of students and teachers' perception about CLT may make it more effective at higher secondary level.*

**Keywords:** HSC, Approach, NCTB, Curriculum, Modification, Commission, CLT, application.

### 1. Introduction

CLT has been practicing successfully in many countries of the world for teaching English since it was introduced in Europe in 1070s (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). CLT has become popular in many countries for teaching second or foreign language for its effectiveness. The ultimate goal of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Brown and Campione (1994) states the main purpose of CLT is to develop students' communicative competence instead of linguistic ability by emphasizing on practical, basic, functional application of language with the emphasis on speaking and listening skills. Though CLT has been proven as fruitful approach in teaching second and foreign language, the secondary level students of Bangladesh are not getting competent in English after having instruction in English for 10 years (Rashed, 2011).

Higher secondary level poses a paramount importance for the students who want to pursue tertiary level, professional or vocational study (Farhad, 2013). English Textbooks titled *English For Today* were prepared for classes from class I to class XII basing on CLT curriculum. Hasan & Akhand (2009) found in their studies that in spite of tremendous benefits of CLT, students have failed to achieve satisfactory standard in English. Students of higher secondary level study two papers comprising of 200 marks where English 1<sup>st</sup> paper consists of 60 marks reading test and 40 marks writing test, English 2<sup>nd</sup> paper consists of 60 marks grammar test and 40 marks writing test. The question pattern of 1<sup>st</sup> paper comprises of two parts. There are Multiple Choice Question (MCQ), Comprehensive questions from Textual Seen Passage-1, Information Transfer or Flow Chart from Textual Seen Passage-2, Summarization from Textual Seen Passage-3, Vocabulary Test, Rearrangement in part-1 and there are paragraph writing, Story Writing, Formal Letter, Graph writing and Theme Writing in part-2. These aim at developing reading skill.

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Similarly, two parts consist in English 2<sup>nd</sup> paper: Grammar Part and Writing part. Grammar part contains twelve items: article, preposition, special phrases and words, clauses and phrases, right form of verb, changing sentences, narration, pronoun referencing, modifiers, sentence connectors, synonyms & antonyms and punctuation of which each carries five marks. Writing part also consists of 40 marks including email/letter writing, report writing, paragraph and composition. The purpose of grammatical part and writing part is to develop students' writing competence. Listening and speaking are two vital skills in any language. The study conducted by Renukadevi (2014) stated, "People gain 45% competence from listening, 30% from speaking, 15% from reading and 10% from speaking". Teaching speaking and listening English is not sufficiently practiced in the classroom as these two skills are not tested in the public examinations (Rao, 2019). Teachers mostly emphasize on examination related items to make the students passable in the examination. In such cases, the two skills such as listening and speaking are ignored. IELTS test is regarded as the yardstick for testing students and professionals' competence in English. Four skills are equally important in this test. According to the British Council report (2019), the mean score of the Bangladeshi nationals in academic IELTS test is overall 6.2; mean score of general training IELTS 6.5 which indicate the poor standard of Bangladeshi nationals in English.

### 1.1 Rationale of the Study

Though CLT has been practiced in Schools and Colleges of Bangladesh to develop students' communicative competence in English; majority students do not have the sufficient communicative competence in English (Mahmudul, 2015). It is generally found that the majority of the HSC graduates face difficulties in writing anything beyond the areas of their memorization, speaking English in their practical situations, taking input from the English speaking world. Eventually, there arises a question about the effectiveness of the application of CLT approach at higher secondary level. So, it is a nationally important to look into the application system of CLT approach in Bangladesh. At the same time, it is crucial to identify the trend, method and problems in the application process of CLT approach in the higher secondary level.

### 1.2 Research Questions

- (a) To what extent is the application of CLT effective at higher secondary level?
- (b) What are the existing drawbacks in the application of CLT in higher secondary level?
- (c) How can the application of CLT be more effective?

## 2. Literature Review

In linguistic point of view, there are two propositions of acquiring a language such as linguistic competence and communicative competence (Song, 2019). Chomsky advocates on the importance of linguistic competence on the other hand Hyems (1972) highly emphasizes on the communicative competence (Miller, 2003). Bangladesh government introduced the CLT approach to develop students' communicative competence in English in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century (Maniruzzaman, 2009). To develop students' communicative competence in English, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was launched in secondary and higher secondary level in 1996 (Rahman, Islam, Karim, Chowdhury, Rahman, Seraj & Singh, 2019). Again the National Curriculum 2012 gives more importance on how to develop Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Simultaneous development of four language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing through increasing participatory activities in the classroom is the ultimate target of communicative approach (Sultana & Ahsan, 2013). But because of many existing problems in the application method and environmental difficulties such as lack of language teaching equipment, large number of students in the class, insufficient number of teacher, lack of qualified teachers, poor socio-economic background of the students and uncongenial classroom atmosphere are generally regarded as the fundamental obstacles in achieving proper standard in



English (Roy, 2016). After all, lack of trained teachers is considered to be the main cause of a generally poor standard of teaching and learning of communicative English (Begum & Farooqui, 2008). Hamid and Baldauf's (2008) study discovered the similar situation where CLT failed to create sufficient opportunities for genuine interactions in the classrooms as most of the teachers are not aware of the importance of the aural-oral method in CLT. Roever (2009) found in his study that there is a big gap between the learning objectives and the actual teaching and assessment practices. The fact is that there is no provision for formal testing of speaking and listening in Secondary School Certificate (SSC) and Higher Secondary Certificate (HSC) and this might be one of the reasons why learners cannot show the skills as expected in the curriculum (Roy, 2016). Stiggins (2002) also pointed out that a few teachers are prepared to face the challenges of assessing the English language skills. Poor socio-economic background is another factor that paralyzes many students to learn English. There is a strong relation between the examination system and the learners' progress (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). Exam system and the question pattern mirror the ultimate progress level of the learners. But in respect of learning English, most of the students in the existing exam system depend on memorization and short suggestion of the probable questions (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018).

A majority of teachers tended to "teach to the test" (Hoque, 2016). Many renowned researchers (Alderson & Hamp-Lyons, 1997; Watanabe, 2004; Shih, 2010), however, found that tests affected both how and what teachers taught but not all teachers reacted the same way to the same test. Several researchers found that teachers reported a greater sense of pressure from the tests (Wilkins, 1973). Hoque (2016) pointed out that it has long been widely recognized that a high-stakes test such as the HSC examination can have a major impact on educational systems and on the societies. In this case, Arfae (2020) states that "public examinations influence the attitudes, behaviors, and motivation of teachers, learners and parents because examinations often come at the end of a course; this influence is seen working in a backward direction, hence the term 'wash back'".

### **3. Study Gap**

In spite of having many challenges, CLT has been practiced for more than two decades in Bangladesh. Though many research have been conducted on the prospects, challenges and effectiveness of CLT in Bangladesh, no particular study has been conducted on the effectiveness of CLT at higher secondary level in Bangladesh other than the study conducted by Faria and Ahsan (2013) titled 'Efficacy of Communicative Language Teaching in Primary School-Bangladesh Context'. Hence, the researcher intends to explore the effectiveness of the application of CLT at higher secondary level.

### **4. Research Methodology**

The study applied mixed-method approach for data collection and analysis. The study employed separate questionnaires for teachers and students and conducted 3 case studies for collecting data. Before collecting data, researcher took permission from the principals of the selected colleges through forwarded consent letters. The teachers, students and the selected students for case studies were made clear about the purpose of the study that there is no personal benefit rather the study is related to the national issue. Researcher collected data using both online and offline sources. Case studies were conducted face to face for having clear inference regarding students' competence in English.

#### 4.1 Population and Sampling

The researcher mainly depended on the primary data for the study. 20 English teachers (10 from government and 10 from non-government colleges), 200 students (100 from government colleges and 100 from non-government colleges) and 3 students for case studies were selected on the basis of convenient sampling (Sedgwick, 2013) from 6 higher secondary level colleges. All the selected teachers were experienced in teaching English in the higher secondary level for more than five years. These colleges (3 in urban area and 3 in rural area) are located in Cumilla district under Cumilla Education Board. There is homogeneity in sampling as both the teachers' and students' mother tongue is Bengali and they use English as a foreign language.

#### 4.2 Instruments and Data Collection

The purpose of the questionnaires for students and teachers is to justify the effectiveness of the application of CLT and the existing factors in the present trend of teaching English at higher secondary level which function as a catalyst for making CLT more or less effective. The researcher also case dealt with three students as case studies for having clear inference about students' standard in English. By conducting case studies, researcher tried to explore students' competence in listening, speaking, reading and writing skills having studied English for 11 years. The researcher also presented three students' obtained marks in three public examinations for drawing a comparative inference between their obtained marks and communicative competence they have gained. Teachers' trend and concept regarding CLT were, in addition, explored (Teegavarapu, Summers & Mocko, 2008).

### 5. Findings and Discussions

#### 5.1 Findings from Teacher Questionnaire

Teachers' questionnaire consisted of 16 items which were divided into four groups relating to the research questions. Group A (item Nos. 1, 2 &3) is related to the trend of class conduct, group B (item Nos.4 &5) to students' reading and writing ability, group C (item Nos.6,7 &8) to teachers' concept about CLT, group D (item Nos.9 &10) to examination system and class and group E(item Nos.11,12,13,14 & 15) to the change of application to make CLT more effective. Each of the items was on Likert scale (1932) and teachers had the liberty to choose their options:

**Table-1: Findings from the Teacher Questionnaire**

SL	Item	No of Respondent	Agree%	Disagree%	Strongly Agree%	Strongly Disagree%	Neutral %
	<b>Group A: Trend of class conduct</b>						
1	I conduct the English class fully in Bengali medium.	20	10	70	20	0	0
2	I conduct the English class in mixed language (Bengali and English).	20	70	0	20	10	0
3	I emphasize more on reading and writing skills than speaking and listening because speaking and listening are not tested in the public examination.	20	50	20	30	0	0
	<b>Group B: Reading and writing</b>						
4	Students can read out smoothly and can make sentences in writing anything.	20	15	45	10	30	0
5	Students can comprehend the texts and	20	10	40	15	30	5



	answer composition part without depending on memorization.						
	<b>Group C: Concept of CLT</b>						
6	I know English is a skill based subject rather than content based one.	20	20	20	28	0	32
7	The ultimate purpose of English as a subject is to pass the exam as like as other subject.	20	40	20	15	10	15
8	I believe all the teachers and students are well aware of the ultimate target of CLT.	20	25	40	15	16	4
	<b>Group D: Exam System and Class</b>						
9	I think the present syllabus and exam system are helpful to develop students' communicative competence in English.	20	10	20	10	50	10
10	I think the present trend of testing is good enough to test students' communicative competence in English.	20	10	20	25	35	0
11	Big class size is a problem in implementation of CLT	20	27	15	37	12	10
	<b>Group E: Implementation and effectiveness</b>						
12	I think speaking and listening test should be incorporated in the public examination	20	40	20	30	10	0
13	The present trend and practice of CLT should be changed for getting better output	20	30	19	38	11	2
14	I application of CLT should be more pragmatic as per students' need.	20	35	14	31	14	6
15	Language teaching materials should be available and properly used.	20	33	11	34	17	5
16	Listening, speaking, reading and writing should be equally emphasized in the class.	20	37	16	23	13	11

Group A indicates that 90% teachers conduct English class mixing Bengali and English with giving emphasis on reading and writing more than listening and speaking. Group B shows that 75% and 70% students have weakness respectively in reading and writing. Again, teachers' response, Group C reveals that 52% teachers do not have clear concept about CLT, 55% teachers treat English as like as other subjects and 56% are unaware of the goal of CLT. In group D, 70% teachers think that the existing syllabus and examination system are not effective for language development, 55% believe present teaching trend and practice ineffective and 64% find class size unusually large. Similarly, teachers' response Group E exposes that 70% teachers are in favor of incorporating speaking and listening English in the public examinations, 68% opine to change the trend and practice of language teaching, 66% favor to adjust the application process as per students' need, 67% opine to ensure available language teaching materials and 60% argue to arrange separate class for speaking and listening skills.

## 5.2 Findings from Student Questionnaire

The questionnaire for the students consists of 14 items relevant to the research objectives. The respondents had five options (Likert Scale, 1932) such as Agree, Disagree, Strongly Agree, Strongly Disagree and Neutral in each item. The items were divided into three groups. Group A (Item Nos. 1, 2, 3) focuses on speaking, group B (Item Nos. 4,5) on listening, group C (Item Nos. 6,7,8) on reading, group D (Item Nos. 9,10,11) on writing and group E (item Nos. 12,13& 14) on



the ways of making CLT application more effective. Indeed, they were put in different groups to reveal the picture of the prevalent CLT implementation at higher secondary level.

**Table-2: Findings from the Student Questionnaire**

SN	Group A: Speaking	No of Respondent %	Agree %	Disagree %	Strongly Agree%	Strongly Disagree %	Neutra 1%
1	I do not feel discomfort in presenting anything in English or facing any oral interview in English	197	29.9	45.2	6.6	6.1	12.2
2	Teachers speak both Bengali and English in the class	198	52.5	9.6	19.2	3	15.7
3	I am not satisfied with the standard of my pronunciation of English words.	199	53.8	22.6	8.5	2	13.1
	<b>Group B: Listening</b>						
4	Teachers conduct listening class	197	9.9	65.2	6.6	6.1	12.2
5	I do not face problem in understanding English lectures, English news and dialogues.	197	26.9	50	5.6	7.1	9.6
	<b>Group C: Reading</b>						
6	I memorize Letter, Application, Story, Composition, Report writing and Dialogue for the exam.	200	55	20.5	15.5	6.5	3.5
7	I can smoothly pronounce the textual words, read newspaper and magazine	198	20.5	17	15	35	13.5
8	I can understand reading English newspaper and Magazine.	199	16	45	19	15.5	4.5
	<b>Group D: Writing</b>						
9	I can understand the meaning of the text and can write answer question accordingly in the examination.	198	26	16	25	30	3
10	I have the ability to make sentence in writing Letter, Application, Story, Dialogue and Composition.	199	20.5	17	15	35	13.5
11	I cut more marks in Composition part than Grammar Part as I memorize grammatical rules.	196	30.5	20.5	26.5	17.5	5
	<b>Group E: Ways of Improvement</b>						
12	I think separate speaking and listening class in the class routine may improve students' speaking and listening skills.	200	36.3	19.7	24.4	9.6	19.6



13	I believe listening and speaking skills should be tested in the public examination	197	33.7	20.5	25.5	11.2	9.1
14	I think four skills should be practiced using relevant teaching and learning materials.	200	39.2	16.1	23.5	15	6.2

The study includes three research questions. The first objective is “to what extent is the application of CLT effective at higher secondary level?” Group A reveals that 51.3% students feel discomfort in speaking, 62.3% students dissatisfied with their English pronunciation. The second research question is “what are the existing drawbacks in the application of CLT in higher secondary level?” In Group B, 57.1% students admit their problem in listening English and 71.3% opine that teacher do not conduct listening class for developing listening skill. Moreover, in Group C, 55% students express their dependency on memorization, 52% face problem in pronunciation and 60.5% have problem in understanding text. Likewise, Group D shows that 56% students have difficulties in answering questions from texts, 52% cannot make sentence successfully and 57% have no command on writing skill. The third research question is “how can the application of CLT be more effective?” In Group E 60.7% students opine to include separate speaking and listening class in the class routine, 59.2% favor the test of listening and speaking skills in the public examination and 62.7% emphasize on the equal importance of four skills.

### 5.3. Findings from Case Studies

The present researcher conducted 3 case studies to explore the real picture of the standard of students in respect of English language. The case study of 3 class XI students reveals the picture of English teaching and learning environment of the educational institutions and the standard that they have achieved in listening, speaking, reading and writing English.

#### 5.1.1 Case Study -1

Sabina (Pseudonym) is a girl of 17 and studies in class XI in K College in Science Group. She studied in P Government Primary School in Cumilla. She passed the PSC examination in 2014 from the same school. Then, she got herself admitted into Y High School and passed the JSC and SSC examinations respectively in 2017 and 2020 from the same school. Her father was an affluent man and she did English coaching all the year round in batch since she had studied in class VII and VIII to cut a good figure in English in the PSC examination. Teachers, in the school and coaching class, mainly emphasized on the model question practice and gave suggestion to memorize some specific suggestions. Teachers read out the text and told the Bengali meaning of the lesson in teaching English 1<sup>st</sup> paper. Sometimes, teachers let students read out textual lesson. Some important textual passages were given to practice for the examination.

In English 2<sup>nd</sup> paper, firstly, teachers taught grammatical rules along with exercise. Sometimes, dialogues are practiced in the class engaging students in conversation. Secondly, teachers let students do exercise from the board questions of the previous years. Thirdly, teachers encouraged to memorize some suggested compositions, paragraphs, emails and stories. Now, she can write the memorized story, composition and paragraph having revised. She feels shyness in introducing herself in English and cannot continue conversation in English. She can read newspaper and English journals and magazines but not with proper pronunciation and smooth continuity. She understands what her teachers speak in the class but does not understand English news and dialogues in English movies:

**Table-3: Exam result of case-1**

No	Examination	English	Total Marks	Obtained Marks	
1.	PSC	Paper-1 & II	100	90	
2.	JSC	Paper-1	Reading	100	85
			Writing		
		Paper-2	Reading	100	78
			Writing		
3.	SSC	Paper-1	Reading	100	85
			Writing		
		Paper-2	Reading	100	80
			Writing		

### 5.1.2 Case Study -2

Samiul (Pseudonym), a 16 years old boy, reads in class XI in X College in Humanities Group. He got admitted in class I in X Kindergarten School in Cumilla. After passing class I, he got admitted in class II in Y Cantonment Public School and College. He passed the PSC, JSC and SSC examinations successively in 2014, 2017 and 2020 from the same institution. His father renders service in Bangladesh Army and is solvent enough to let him do English coaching all the year round in batch since he started studying in class V.

Teachers, in the coaching, taught model questions to get him prepared for the examination. Teachers, in teaching English 1<sup>st</sup> paper, sometimes spoke English in the classroom and explained the text in Bengali. In teaching English 2<sup>nd</sup> paper, teachers advised students to memorize the grammatical rules. In this way, he cut a sound figure in English in PSC, JSC and SSC examinations. Teachers usually did not encourage students to speak English in the class. Now, he does not have sufficient command on reading, writing, speaking and listening. He cannot read English newspaper with proper pronunciation. Moreover, he cannot comprehend the news column. He faces difficulty in understanding teachers' English lectures and English news on TV channels. Even, he cannot speak English well and mostly depends on memorization for writing.

**Table-4: Exam result of case-2**

No	Examination	English	Total Marks	Obtained Marks	
1.	PSC	Paper-1 & II	100	70 (A)	
2.	JSC	Paper-1	Reading	100	70(A)
			Writing		
		Paper-2	Reading	100	70 (A)
			Writing		
3.	SSC	Paper-1	Reading	100	60 (A <sup>-</sup> )
			Writing		
		Paper-2	Reading	100	60(A <sup>-</sup> )
			Writing		

### 5.1.3 Case Study -3

Shohel (Pseudonym) reads in class XI in Business Studies in Z College and is aged 17. He started his primary schooling in an English version school at five. After passing PSC examination from the school, he got admitted in Bangla version at M school. He passed JSC examination obtaining A<sup>+</sup> and then took admission in Business Studies. He passed the SSC examination in 2020 securing GPA 4.75:



**Table-5: Exam result of case-3**

No	Examination	English		Total Marks	Obtained Marks
1.	PSC	Paper-1 & II		100	80 (A <sup>+</sup> )
2.	JSC	Paper-1	Reading	100	70(A)
			Writing		
		Paper-2	Reading	100	70 (A)
			Writing		
3.	SSC	Paper-1	Reading	100	80 (A <sup>+</sup> )
			Writing		
		Paper-2	Reading	100	80(A <sup>+</sup> )
			Writing		

After appearing at the SSC examination, he attended at an English language learning center to develop his speaking skill and continued until the SSC result was published. Then, he got admitted himself in Business Studies in W college. He reads English newspaper in the college library in his leisure period. He also collects weekly English magazine. He listens to national English news, BBC and Aljazeera on television. He also tries to write his diary in English. He exchanges greetings with teachers and students in English at college. He tries to speak English in the class though his classmates jeer at him. Now, he can speak English and continue conversation. He can also read the textbook, newspaper and magazine smoothly. Moreover, he can easily make out English news, dialogues in English movies and English lectures in English class.

#### 5.1.4 Inference from Case Studies

The case studies show that the students' English results in PSC, JSC and SSC are good enough. First two students have made good results. But their listening, speaking, reading and writing skills have not been sufficiently developed. The teaching methods both in private coaching and classroom have not sufficiently helped them to develop communicative competence in English. In spite of having been 11 years with the present practice of teaching and learning system, their communicative competence is not up to the mark. The third case study reveals that the student has undergone some additional practices besides the institutional trend. His involvement in additional activities has helped him to develop language skills which ultimately have led him to develop his communicative competence. It is inferred from the case studies that the existing CLT practice in the educational institutions of Bangladesh does not sufficiently develop students' English language skills. It is also assumed that the students who get involved in additional activities for developing language skills along with institutional practices may be more successful.

#### 6. Recommendation

On the basis of survey result and case studies, some specific recommendation may be proposed to make CLT more effective at higher secondary level. Firstly, classroom should be more interactive emphasizing on four language skills (Sultana, 2019). Secondly, listening and speaking should be given as much importance as reading and writing (Rahman, 2019). Thirdly, classroom should be equipped for practicing listening English. Fourthly, listening and speaking test should be included in the public examination. Fifthly, development of language skill should be given more importance instead of making students passable in the examination. Sixthly, Classroom should be more interactive and congenial for developing language skills. Seventhly, English should be treated as a skill based subject not as content based one.



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## 7. Conclusion

The findings of the study show that the implementing strategy of CLT approach at higher secondary level is not sufficiently effective. It is also revealed that the students are dissatisfied on their own command in speaking and pronunciation. In addition, students admitted that they do not feel confident in speaking English. Most of the students depend on memorization in writing anything. Most of the teachers are not aware of the ultimate goal of CLT. Teachers treat English as like as other subject. Both teachers and students emphasize on passing the examination instead of developing language skill. The ultimate goal of National Education Policy (2010) is to develop students' communicative competence but the ultimate has not been fulfilled yet.

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