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Practices and Outcomes of Communicative Language Teaching in Higher Secondary Schools in Rural Bangladesh

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Abstract

This paper aims to provide insights into the challenges of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practice at higher secondary level in Bangladeshi rural settings. Employing qualitative approach, in-depth interviews were conducted with 24 rural English language teachers to explore the problems they face in CLT implementation. The interview data were scrutinized using thematic analysis. Three major themes emerge from the analysis which are: (i) pedagogical factors; (ii) contextual factors; and (iii) personal factors that obstruct CLT implementation to reach at its expected outcome. The paper reveals the gap between the objectives of the present ELT curriculum and teachers' practices. The teachers are optimistic with CLT approach for improving students' English skill, but they need viable support to overcome the factors working as the barriers of its proper implementation. Based on the teachers' suggestion, the study recommends the aligning of curriculum and test format, and also the training and logistic support for the teachers to overcome the issues surrounding the CLT implementation in the rural context of Bangladesh.

Keywords: challenges, communicative language teaching, practice, Bangladeshi rural setting

Prácticas y Resultados de la Enseñanza de la Lengua Comunicativa en Escuelas Secundarias Superiores en Zonas Rurales de Bangladesh

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Resumen

Este documento tiene como objetivo proporcionar información sobre los desafíos de la práctica de Enseñanza de la Lengua Comunicativa (ELC) en el nivel secundario superior en los entornos rurales de Bangladesh. Empleando un enfoque cualitativo se realizaron entrevistas en profundidad con 24 profesores de inglés de áreas rurales, para explorar los problemas que enfrentan en la implementación de ELC. Los datos fueron examinados utilizando un análisis temático. Tres temas principales surgieron del análisis: (i) factores pedagógicos; (ii) factores contextuales; y (iii) factores personales que obstruyen la implementación de ELC para alcanzar el resultado esperado. El documento revela la brecha entre los objetivos del presente currículo ELC y las prácticas de los docentes. Los maestros son optimistas con el enfoque ELC para mejorar las habilidades de inglés de los estudiantes, pero necesitan un apoyo viable para superar los factores que actúan como barreras para su correcta implementación. Basado en la sugerencia de los maestros, el estudio recomienda alinear el currículo y el formato de las pruebas, y también la capacitación y el apoyo logístico para que los maestros superen los problemas que rodean la implementación de ELC en el contexto rural de Bangladesh.

Palabras clave: desafíos, enseñanza de lenguaje comunicativo, práctica, configuración rural de Bangladesh

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach in the teaching ground of foreign and second language where interaction and communication among learners is done properly (Ahmed, 2016; Sherwani & Kilic, 2017; Albahri, Yang, & Moustakim, 2018). It can be elucidated as a bunch of principles about the objectives of language teaching through different types of classroom activities that effectively promote language learning through communication (Athawadi, 2019; Roy, 2016). It involves learners in interaction and helps them to excel their language skills in a personalised way through the elements of real life communication in natural settings. It focuses on meaningful communication instead of concentrating on grammatical perfection (Islam, 2016; Richards & Rogers, 2014). As a multi-perspectival approach CLT can be seen to originate from numerous disciplines such as sociology, philosophy, psychology, linguistics and education. It gives attention to carry out and implement methodologies that are efficient of improving functional language aptitude of the learners through active association in genuine communicative events (Huang, 2017; Savignon, 2007).

The core concept of CLT is based on Hymes' (1972) communicative competence theory, which refers to the ability to use language appropriately in different social context. It is an extension of Chomsky's (1965) theory of linguistic competence (Zhou & Niu, 2015; Savignon, 2018). Chomsky's linguistic theory separates two aspects of language, 'competence' and 'performance'. In the words of Chomsky, competence of a language consists of the prime knowledge of the grammatical system, and this knowledge enables a user of a language to produce and understand a limitless set of sentences from the limited set of rules, on the other hand performance refers to the use of the fundamental knowledge to communicate (Newby, 2011). However, the idea of ignoring the social elements of language was criticised by Hymes. He points out that Chomsky's linguistics theory does not reflect socio-cultural aspects or differential competence in a diverse speech community, and therefore, finds his view of performance is an incomplete image of competence (Rahman, 2018).

Based on Hymes' communicative competence theory, Widdowson (1978) established the notion what is now termed as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Ibrahim & Ibrahim, 2017). According to Widdowson, language learning does not mean only acquiring the knowledge of grammar rules, but also acquiring the aptitude to use language to take part in

communication and interchange meaningful information. As a prominent language teaching approach CLT originates from the socio-cognitive ground of the socio-linguistic theory, focusing on communication and meaning to improve learners' communicative competence, advances and gradually switched the earlier Audiolingual Method (ALM) and Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) (Rahman, 2018). Prior to that time, some distinguished linguists and educators contended that learning language as a system (vocabulary and grammar) and cramming language structures were not helping learners to use language in their real-life communicative situations (Alam, 2015). In the words of Savignon (2018) "a rusty old key, ill-suited to unlocking the door to language proficiency" (p. 2). So, it can be confessed that due to the disappointment of the earlier structural language teaching methods, CLT appeared in the late 1960s and gained reputation quickly around the globe (Rahman, Singh, & Pandian, 2018a; Savignon, 2018; Sarab, Monfared, & Safarzadeh, 2016). For English Language Teaching (ELT), CLT is proposed and practised currently as a potentially powerful approach with a view to developing learners' capacity of interaction in English (Brown, 2014; Littlewood, 2014) in many English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/ EFL) contexts (Huang, 2017; Rahman et al., 2018a; Sarab et al., 2016).

There is a large body of research in ESL/ EFL contexts dealing with CLT innovation. Whereas some studies have focused on local needs for English, the learning environment in the EFL countries, particular English teaching strategies and the importance and success of traditional language teaching methods (Alam, 2015; Imam, 2005; Mitchell, 2017; Rahman, 2018), others have strongly recommended the acceptance of CLT in EFL countries (Ariatna, 2016; Athawadi, 2019; Jahanzaib & Zeeshan, 2017; Noori, 2018; Rahman, Pandian, & Kaur, 2018b; Toro, Camacho-Minuche, Pinza-Tapia, & Paredes, 2019). However, most of the studies have identified the difficulties in implementing CLT in EFL contexts.

Athawadi (2019) investigated the factors that obstruct the implementation of CLT in the EFL context of Libyan university English classes. The study reveals that lack of teaching resources and teacher training, education system and non-qualified students impede the output of CLT. In order to better practice of CLT the study suggests in-service teacher development programs and observation from well-trained colleagues during teaching session to point out the drawbacks and support the teacher. Also the study recommends

that new students should take placement tests for admission so that students with low level of English could be placed in special language training programs to enhance their English level before commencing the actual courses. Athawadi (2019) further suggests that along with mid-term and final assessment informal assessment through class projects and presentations should be introduced.

Toro et al. (2019) conducted a study in Ecuador to determine the implementation of the CLT in the English classroom as well as the resources and strategies applied by the teachers to improve learners' oral skills. The study reveals that group work, pair work, repetition and modelling are not enough to endorse active participation in the classes because these strategies were not applied as frequent as they are needed. The study suggests incorporating more strategies like elicitation and metalinguistic feedback that can help students to improve their oral skills. In the context of China, Luo and Garner (2017) assert that CLT is official policy in the country, but the outcomes are far from satisfactory. They concede cultural difficulties to overcome if this approach is to be successfully adopted. In deeply Confucian culture of China, learners are oriented to receive passively from the teacher rather than engaged in constructing it actively for them. Similarly, Abe (2013) and Smith (2017) reveal in their studies that Japanese students are typically reserved and they are reluctant to communicate in English as they perceive themselves to be poor speakers of English. While this may be attributable to the Japanese tendency to deflect attention and modesty, for many students such self-assessments should be seen as leading to a phase of further demotivation and negative associations. In Japan, teachers' preference for traditional teaching methods, grammar-focused examinations and the pressures of university entrance exams which emphasize reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, are the reasons for problems in implementing CLT (Mitchell, 2017; Samimy & Kobayashi, 2004; Thompson & Yanagita, 2017).

In another study Panhwar, Baloch and Khan (2017) explored the causes of failure of CLT in Pakistan and found that students seldom get opportunities to engage in interactive activities with one another due to the contextual problems like large classes and overuse of traditional methods of teaching. In line with this Hussain (2017) shows that CLT approach in Pakistani current educational environment is applicable but the main problem is "large class size" (p.159). Panhwar et al. (2017) further claim that CLT is

a method developed and used in the developed countries where the contextual issues are found rare in the educational institutes comparing to developing countries. Manzano (2015) investigated the beliefs, practices, and problems faced by University English language teachers whereas, Maestre and Gindidis (2016) addressed primary language teachers' beliefs in using CLT in the Philippines. Both studies show that teachers' pedagogical practices are inconsistent with their beliefs on the nature of language and language learning. Furthermore, some of the teachers' viewpoints are more aligned with other approaches such as Grammar Translation Method and Audio Lingual Method which make their conceptual understanding of CLT ambiguous. They indicate also some other problems with materials, assessment tools, learners' roles and institutional/departmental policy which are all together hampering the implementation of CLT properly in the Philippines. However, Lasala's (2014) investigation on the communicative competence of secondary senior students in the Philippines shows the level of communicative competence in oral and writing skills of the students is both acceptable. Ariatna (2016) and Rahman (2018) identify almost the same problems such as limited teacher expertise and teaching time, structure-based syllabus, textbooks are mostly designed to teach grammar and absence of communicative language testing which impede the adoption of CLT in Indonesia. Ariatna (2016) suggests that CLT implementation in Indonesia can be improved if the status of English as a foreign language (EFL) could be changed to English as a second language (ESL) status because this current EFL status is responsible for impeding the progress of CLT.

Ghofur, Degeng, Widiati and Setyosari (2017) conducted a quasi-experimental study in Indonesia and they suggest that Audio Lingual Method (ALM) contribute to the improvement of basic speaking skills, whereas CLT is likely to form speaking competences referring to appropriate contexts. Therefore, the two methods can be integrated in EFL classrooms. Susanto (2017) in his study shows that the implementation of communicative language teaching approach is very effective in Indonesia when it is combined with extracurricular activities. Whereas, Astuti (2016); Astuti and Lammers (2017) propose the use of Cooperative Learning (CL) which consists of group learning activities where individual students' contribution to the learning is realized through their presentation or performance, in attaining improved communicative competence. In line with this, Muthmainnah (2017) suggests the concept of English Corner, a designed

place to practice English, to enhance students' English skill, especially speaking as CLT stating language is communication.

In Malaysia, CLT is introduced as early as the 1970s. Previously the structural syllabus was the mainstream approach in Malaysia (Chung, 2017; Rashid, Rahman, & Yunus, 2017). Raissi, Nor, Aziz, Saleh and Zainal, (2013) investigated student's understandings and practices regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Malaysian Secondary Schools. They found that most of the students' have favourable attitudes towards the CLT principles but there are some mismatches between curriculum and its implementation. Similarly, Chung (2017) and Sidek (2012) assert that, though some parts of the textbooks attempt to assimilate the communicative elements, most exercises are structural mainly with the inclusion of grammar-rule explanation. However, Mustapha and Yahaya (2013) optimistically state that CLT approach is seen to be potential in developing communicative skills in Malaysia, despite some negative feedback on it.

Background of the Study

CLT is introduced and substituted for long-standing GTM in Bangladeshi national curriculum in 1997 and at higher secondary level in 2001 for the students of 16 to 17 years of age range (Karim, Mohamed, Rahman, & Haque, 2017; Nur & Islam, 2018; Rahman et al., 2018b; Rahman, 2015; Roy, 2016). Although the learners of higher secondary level in Bangladesh have been learning English for about two decades following CLT approach, this has been changed a little (Alam, 2015; Trisha, Akter, Yusufi, & Munna, 2018). Numerous issues have promoted the existing difficulties associated with CLT implementation such as issues related to teaching practices and teachers (Rahman et al., 2018b; Rahman, Islam, Karim, Chowdhury, Rahman, Seraj, & Singh, 2019). As per Fullan's (2007) curriculum innovation model, numerous components add to teachers' curriculum operation. Among these components, features of curriculum innovation are: (i) deficiency in curriculum clarity and multifaceted nature related with curriculum; (ii) avoiding teachers' necessities; and (iii) practicality and quality of other materials and textbook.

In Bangladeshi context curriculum improvement and implementation is a top-down process (Rahman, et al., 2018b). Therefore, teachers did not get the

opportunity to express their views in curriculum development (Ali & Walker, 2014). Teachers were then the products of GTM but they had to cope with the new hope of CLT without any prior training, supporting materials and required facilities in implementing CLT. With the advent of CLT, teachers' needs were ignored; rather it was imposed on them (Rahman et al., 2019). Consequently, the outcome of CLT in Bangladesh is not as successful as it was expected (Karim et al., 2017). A curriculum applied from top down lacks clarity and generates complexity (Fullan, 2007). Rahman et al. (2018b) found that CLT principles and teachers' practice are not congruent. Similarly, Das, Shaheen, Shrestha, Rahman and Khan (2014) found that English teachers in Bangladesh do not have clear understanding of CLT curriculum and therefore, they have a mixed estimation about its implementation. Therefore, considering the few empirical research presently available, it is essential to scrutinize further the comprehension of the curriculum by the teachers that could uncover fresh perspectives.

Moreover, English textbook in Bangladesh frantically lacks the listening and speaking activities (Kirkwood, 2013). In line with this Ali (2014) asserts that the textbook deficiencies communicative aspects and authenticity in its content. Earlier, Chowdhury and Le Ha (2008) avow that the learning materials are borrowed from abroad, these are not contextual. However, Rahman et al. (2018b) point out that lessons are authentic and more contextualised in the revised new book. Further studies should be carried out to validate this finding and to investigate the real improvement and application of the English textbook, bearing in mind that limited research has evaluated the CLT textbooks used in Bangladesh.

The achievement of language policy and curriculum execution relies primarily on the quality of evaluation and testing system (Das et al., 2014). In Bangladeshi context there is a close tie between the failure in the application of English language curriculum, teaching or learning and improper techniques of evaluation (Khan, 2010; Rahman et al., 2018b). In the public examinations the two vital language skills, listening and speaking remain untested (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Sultana, 2018). This old-fashioned attitude to test format causes reduction of the curriculum implementation and this is a clear sign that the assessment system is not aligned with the national language policy and the national curriculum (Rahman et al., 2019). Further studies are therefore needed to assess the

content being tested and how these tests are taken in the high-stakes examinations (Ali, Hamid, & Hardy, 2018; Sultana, 2018).

However, curriculum implementation relies on several factors. Among these factors, many scholars believe that teachers are at the heart of effective curriculum execution (Borg, 2009; Fullan, 2007). It is, of course, the teacher who will implement the curriculum in the classroom (Wang, 2008). Therefore, the current study aims to explore the challenges EFL teachers' face in practicing CLT in the rural context of Bangladesh and it addresses the following research question: What are the problems faced by the teachers in implementing CLT at higher secondary level in the EFL classroom in rural Bangladesh?

To guarantee the best practices of CLT, it is essential to explore the present practices and find a way out for proper execution of CLT. Despite the extensive investigations on the implementation of CLT, little is heard from the Bangladeshi rural settings. Since the voices of rural teachers may differ from the voices of urban teachers, their insight and impressions are worth considering. This research is significant as it could be used as a resource that provides a comprehensive image of CLT application in Bangladeshi EFL rural setting.

Methodology

This study is an attempt to investigate the problems faced by English language teachers in CLT implementation at the higher secondary level in rural Bangladesh. In line with the interpretive theoretical perspective, the study employed a qualitative methodology because qualitative data allow us to comprehend an issue from a critical and in-depth view, which leads to a stronger comprehension of the phenomenon (Creswell & Puth, 2017). Moreover, teachers' experiences are interpreted in words, not in numbers as Bryman (2012, p.380) states, "Qualitative research is a research strategy that usually emphasises words rather than in the collection and analysis of data". In this study, the research question is explorative and interpretive; therefore, the researchers approach it qualitatively. Furthermore, this study aims to uncover the participants' opinions, feelings, and experiences about CLT, which is in tune with this method, as qualitative research is a process of inquiry into how people comprehend and form meanings of social or human problems (Creswell, 2007; Holloway & Wheeler, 2013).

Participant Selection

Higher secondary English language teachers from different schools located in the rural areas of Bangladesh is chosen purposively as the participants for this study. In purposeful sampling the participants are selected depending on what type of relevant information the researchers want to collect (Bernard, 2000). In participant selection procedure, the researchers first consider the interest of the teachers to participate with this study and later on, two criteria are maintained: (a) English teaching experience of at least five years, and (b) teaching experience at higher secondary level in rural colleges. The rationale for this criterion is that the experienced teachers may have the insights and can disclose the factors vividly, which are influencing the curriculum implementation; and the rural teachers are selected intentionally as they usually receive the slightest back up from administration (Choudhury, 2010).

Snowball technique is employed in the purposive sampling. In snowball sampling process, a small number of participants help in recommending other potential participants of the population (Gray, 2004). In line with this, Denscombe (2007) states that “the sample emerges through a process of reference from one person to the next” (p. 37). In the context of this study, this process was very helpful to contact participants and invite them to take part in the study voluntarily. The researchers had planned to interview 30 teachers but the saturation point was reached after interviewing 24 participants. Saturation point is when new data remained unproductive to give any further insights upon the issue investigated. According to Maxwell (2013), the goal of qualitative research is to reach at saturation point, where quantity of participants is not an issue in a sample as qualitative study does not go for statistical speculation. The educational qualification of all the participant teachers was Masters in English language and literature and they all were informed about the tenacity of the study, their rights to withdraw participation, anonymity and confidentiality as designated by Creswell and Poth (2017).

Data Collection

This research study aims to elucidate the authentic scenario of CLT implementation in the rural context of Bangladesh where teachers are the

main role players. Therefore, it was necessary to obtain their thoughts on CLT in that EFL setting. To receive the needed information the researchers applied semi-structured interview with 24 English teachers of higher secondary level in the rural areas. Smith (1995) supports this view that “researchers use semi-structured interviews in order to gain a detailed picture of a respondents’ beliefs about, or perceptions or accounts of, a particular topic” (p. 9). Therefore, it was expected that the obtained data from the semi-structured interviews, would be a rich source of qualitative data in the study.

As a data collection method, the further rationale behind selecting semi-structured interview is that, it provides a compromise between what Dornyei (2007) refers to as two extremes, structured and unstructured interviews. Moreover, “semi-structured interviews may be more manageable than unstructured ones, while avoiding the inflexibility of the fully structured approach” (Hammond & Wellington, 2013, p.93).

During each interview, the researchers clearly explained the purpose and the usage of the data. All participants had the opportunity to read the information sheet which described the motivation for the research and what it involved. The researchers asked permission to record the interview and later it was transcribed verbatim, checked by the participants as member checking to establish credibility and validity of this qualitative study (Creswell & Poth, 2017). Depending on the participants’ preferences, both English and Bangla (native language) was used during the interviews. The interviews were semi-structured, and consisted of open-ended questions, the goal of which was to produce interaction similar to a conversation.

Analytical Approach

In this research, thematic analysis was applied to analyse the interview data. Themes of this study emerged from a close scrutiny of the collected data and developed inductively in this analysing process (Barun & Clarke, 2006). The analysis was made up of three steps: Topic selection, category selection, and theme selection. The study used a similar procedure in analysing data that was used by Luttrell (2000) in her data analysis. After transcribing data, the researchers read through the scripts to develop an overall understanding of the respondents’ perspectives on the practice and outcome of CLT for their contexts. The researchers familiarized themselves with the data and field notes by continuous reviewing and re-listening to the recorded data in an

active way in the sense that of searching for meanings and patterns (Creswell & Poth, 2017). The researchers named this phase “topic selection” as “topics” were identified from the data. Class size is one such topic. For example, the respondents, referred to large class size either by words (e.g., “My class is big”) or by numbers (e.g., “I have 80 students”). During the second review, the study started looking for relationships between the topics and similar topics were put in one category as “category selection”. A “category” is defined in this study as a group of topics with common characteristics that formed a similar larger concept (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Such topics for example are “Poor Subject-matter Knowledge” and “Lack of CLT Training” that refer to the common issue faced by teachers during the implementation of CLT. Both refer to insufficient teacher training and were therefore grouped under the “Teacher Training” category. Once categories were branded, the researchers began to scrutinise them again to determine patterns that appeared across the data as “theme selection”. Themes evolved from this exercise. Theme is defined in this research as a set of categories representing a quality or concept that is recurrent and unifying.

Findings and Discussion

The findings from interview data of this study show that the practice of CLT at higher secondary level in rural Bangladesh is not up to the expectation. The major themes of interview data reveal that pedagogical, contextual and personal factors act as barriers on the way of full phase practice of CLT. The analysis is drawn from the teachers’ responses to in-depth interviews, and addresses the research question concerning problems faced by the teachers in implementing CLT approach at higher secondary level in the EFL classrooms in rural Bangladesh. The major themes which emerged from interview data are grouped under the three headings: pedagogical factors, contextual factors and personal factors.

Pedagogical Factors

In terms of pedagogical factors, there are two main categories: (i) Discrepancy between curriculum and assessment; and (ii) Lack of teacher training.

Discrepancy between curriculum and assessment

Discrepancy between curriculum and assessment system is one of the major causes for which CLT is not being implemented properly. Participant teachers unanimously report that English language teaching and learning goals are greatly influenced by the examination system. Out of the four skills of English language learning only two modules (i.e reading and writing) are tested in the examination. Since college authorities, guardians, students all want a good result in the exam; teachers make the classroom exam oriented. Consequently, the contradiction between the objectives of the CLT curriculum and the testing system restricts CLT implementation in the classroom. The teachers report:

[...] I think CLT is the appropriate approach which could support students to develop their fluency. [...] But in examination system fluency is not measured. [...] So, I employ only certain activities of CLT. [...] I need to focus more on examination rather than communication. (Dollar/ 17)

[...] I know we need to teach and practice listening, speaking, reading and writing skills in the CLT classroom. [...] Rural students do not have any interest in listening, speaking skills as these skills are not tested in the examination. They think only how to do well in the examination and get good grades. (Banu/10)

Interview data analysis reveals that teachers have positive attitude towards CLT. They approve CLT as a better language teaching approach for achieving four skills of English language. They assert the superiority of CLT as a teaching approach over the grammar-translation method but due to the contradiction between curriculum and assessment system they do not put focus on communicative activities. Participants report that the current practice of English assessment endorses blind memorization with the least understanding of contents. Some researchers also assert that the inconsistency between CLT pedagogy and the examination system hinders the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh (Amin, 2017; Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Choudhury, 2010; Hassan, 2013).

Lack of teacher training

Teachers start their teaching profession in Bangladesh without training. They begin teaching career depending mainly on the memory how they were taught by their teachers and they practice whatever they feel easy and comfortable. With time their practice become fossilized and later this practice conflicts with the in-service training if they are rarely provided with. One of the respondents states:

[...] I have not received any training yet, though I have been teaching English for eight years.[...] I just try to remember and follow what I learned during my student life and how my teachers taught us in the class. [...] I think without training we cannot teach good enough. (Naila/5)

Another respondent Mamun (16) stresses that the teachers will be benefitted if they are provided with continuous training, as shown below.

[...] I am given training for 7 days ones in my 14 years teaching career. It was helpful for professional development. [...]As far I know most of the teachers in our rural areas are untrained and who get the opportunity of training, get it ones or twice in their entire teaching life.

Mamun (16) further claims that if teachers are provided just one-time training and there is no monitoring, evaluation or follow-ups then the objectives of the training would be meaningless. Likewise, (Jamal/11) also ratifies on-going training. Another interviewee Fedel (1) speaks about the necessity of training since he gains familiarity to conduct group work and teaching vocabulary from training. All the participants of this study unanimously agree that teachers must be provided with sufficient training and follow up basis training to ensure the proper implementation of CLT in teaching and learning English.

Though the participants approve that training can be contributory in bringing qualitative changes in English teaching practices in the rural context of Bangladesh, some also indicate that until the structural issues remain unaddressed, it is difficult to conduct CLT activities such as group work, pair work as per the recommendations of the trainings. Akram (8) complains that

the attention of the training sometimes does not encompass the issues that he and many teachers like him also consider important. Akram (8) goes on to add:

[...] We cannot apply what we learn from the training due to the huge number of students and limited facilities of the classroom.

From the finding it is clear that majority of the English teachers in rural context of Bangladesh remain untrained, let alone retrained. The analysis reveals that teachers need training on an on-going basis considering the context. It is obvious that lack of training means lack of pedagogical knowledge which constraints to fulfil the expectation of implementing CLT.

Contextual factors

The data analysis discloses that there are certain contextual difficulties within the college setting that put the barriers on the way of successful implementation of CLT. The contextual difficulties pointed out by the participants are large class size, restraint class hour, poor facilities of the classroom, non-existence of English speaking environment. The contextual difficulties are discussed in the sections below.

Large class and limited time

The interview data expose that large class size is a significant obstruction to effective CLT implementation. Participant teachers report:

[...] Every year around 150 students take admission. Most of the students attend in the class when their first year class starts. It continues for two three months and gradually their attendance reduce and finally their attendance sustain up to 70 to 80. The room where I take class now was previously two separated rooms. To accommodate all the students we had to remove the partition wall and we made two classrooms into one. In such a large classroom it is difficult for one teacher to cater all the students individually. Communicative activities like pair work, group work poses haphazard situation (Kazem/14).

A case in point is Rahman's (22) classroom experience. He stresses the inability to maintain the CLT activities since his class is of more than 60/70 students and class hour is of 45 minutes. Mizan (17) also made the same criticism about the large class size and short class time.

All the participant teachers report that large class size poses numerous problems. They state that they cannot cater to every student's requirements in a large class size with a short class period. Due to the large class and limited class time they cannot involve students in practising spoken English. Participants also revealed in their interview that it is difficult to conduct CLT activities in a big classroom and therefore, they try to control over the whole class, deliver lecture alone on some particular lessons of the textbook and assign students in learning grammar and vocabulary.

The overhead discussion suggest that as other major problems, large class and limited class duration also hamper CLT practice and its implementation in the rural context of Bangladesh. According to Richards (2001), "class size should not exceed 15 for most language classes" (p.387). In line with this Holliday (1996) also asserts "fifteen or fewer students" should be in the classroom; so that teacher can "hear what students say and to be able to provide repair where necessary" (p. 6). Many other scholars also find large classroom and short class time as the obstructions for CLT implementation (Choudhury, 2010; Hassan, 2013; Nguyen, 2016; Rahman et al., 2018b).

Poor facilities of the classroom

The participants indicated that due to the lack of appropriate teaching resources, they cannot make the classes up to the standard of CLT environment. Most of the teachers reported that textbook, black board, chalk and duster are the only teaching aid provided by the colleges. To make the CLT classroom participatory, using teaching aids is an integral part of practice (Brown, 2001). McGrath (2002) also argues that teaching resources have a significant role in teaching and learning a second or foreign language. But due to lack of financial constraints, government cannot provide the requisite teaching materials (Hassan, 2013). However, the teachers cannot employ CLT up to the expectation mark due to the poor facilities of the classroom. For instance, the teachers report:

[...] I want to make my class interesting and interactive and for that sometimes personally I bring pictures and posters related to English language teaching. Students feel enthusiastic learning English along with these teaching materials but I cannot buy and bring these teaching aids all times (Mamun/ 16) [...]

Akram (8) utters similar concerns about the inaccessibility of teaching resources, affirming that teachers do not get any materials from the college authority or government except the textbook.

Sumon (23) claims:

[...] Government has supplied a projector and laptop to our college but the principal kept it locked in the cupboard for about one year instead of installing it. Principal thinks as teachers are untrained handling these, so these devices could be spoilt [...]. Due to the lack of educational equipment we cannot display the proper image of CLT. We teach student applying chalk board method [...].

The participants report in interviews that due to scarcity of teaching resources they skip curricular expected teaching patterns. English is taught typically in the same classroom where other subjects are also taught. The classrooms are not also congenial for performing communicative activities as the arrangements of furniture are with heavy benches of wood and metal and fixed together. There are two to three rows of hi and seat benches set close to each other with an aisle in the middle. Consequently, it is almost incredible for students to involve in any communicative activities that require high mobility such as role play. In operation, teachers can move only in the classroom.

Non-existence of english speaking environment

Bangladesh is a mono-lingual country. In the rural environment students get opportunity of learning English in classroom only with their English teachers that is mostly based on reading and writing. Outside the classroom there are very few chances of using English language. In family or social life there is hardly any chance of practicing English language skill especially in the rural environment.

Regarding this, Mamun (3) discloses:

[...] parents of the rural areas have no ability to help their children with any problems of their English lessons. Students have opportunities only in the colleges with their classmates and teachers if they want to practice English language skill.

In addition Sahabaz (6) reports:

[...] facilities of shadow education are unavailable in rural context in comparison with the urban counterpart. In the cities, English language learning coaching centres are available where student can get extra tutorial. But rural students; out of the college campus get almost detached from educational activities. Few opportunities are there of private tuition but these tuitions are also target for passing examination, not for language learning.

Another participant Masud (4) gets emotional and claims:

English language learning in a subconscious way from the surroundings is quiet a nightmare in the rural atmosphere. Here we most of the teachers use the native Bangla language with the regional tone for our classroom interaction, let alone English. Even if an English lecturer; for casual leave or other reasons; needs to apply, he writes that application in Bangla. Furthermore, situation is like that, Principals of these rural colleges are also ignorant and reluctant in using English. In maximum colleges you will find the culture of writing official application, addressing any meeting or function, notice board, and all the activities and information marks in Bangla. For example, on the gate of the library, it is written library, the same English sound but alphabet in Bangla. Market areas, office or any building's name, wall writing, road side poster, signboard, banner for advertisement everywhere everything is written in Bangla. Rarely you may find anything written in English. Therefore, students get to see only a few things in English in the villages. How could they learn English? Only 45 minutes class in a day is not enough.

The findings suggest that English learning opportunities are very limited with the socio cultural support of rural surroundings and this is one of major barriers of learning English. However, many scholars avow that the absence

of an English using environment generates complications in implementing CLT in the class (Hassan, 2013; Huang, 2011; Nguyen, 2016).

Personal Factors

Findings from the interview data show that some personal factors from rural teachers' and students' side which situate barriers in CLT implementation in their context. These factors are: (i) extreme formal relationship between student and teacher; (ii) Students' poor background of English; (iii) Teachers' deficiency in speaking English; and (iv) Poor socio-economic background.

Extreme formal relationship between student and teacher

The extreme formal relationship between student and teacher is one of the major causes of the failure of CLT in the rural settings of Bangladesh. For CLT activities, Rahman and Karim (2015); Roy (2016) termed this gesture as inappropriate socio culture phenomenon. Bulbul (7) reports:

[...] From their early childhood students learnt to sit mute in the classroom. [...] out of respect and extreme formal relationship with teachers they develop a sense of non-argumentative character. They accept their teacher as the superior on every argument. [...] as a result, if we even ask them ever to express their opinion on some issues, they keep looking for our opinion. [...] when I arrange any communicative activities like pair work, group work or role paly they feel shy to speak in English.

Wasim (8) states:

[...] I need to deal with a class of around 100 students. [...] I take control over the class and do not want any disturbance during lecture. [...] I let students to ask question when my lecture is finished. To keep control over the big class I maintain strict personality [...]

Data analysis reveals that students prefer to hold their position silent rather than interactive. Students do not dare to share their own estimation if not they are asked to do so. They linger humble and smiling simply as a way

of responding albeit they do not understand fully what they are being stated. Teachers are also authoritarian in the class to hold the discipline of the big class. They typically perform the role of an omniscient figure of the class instead of a facilitator as advocated by CLT. This general Bangladeshi rural culture prevents genuine communication which is the basic requirement of CLT class. Many other scholars also found that extreme formal relationship between student and teacher hampers the goal of CLT (Nguyen, 2016; Roy, 2016; Rahman & Karim, 2015).

Students' poor background of english

Teachers reported that the rural students' poor English background compels them to conduct classes in native Bangla language. They unanimously states in their interviews that students' lack of English skills hinders CLT implementation in the class. For instance, the teachers report:

[...] I had fascination to speak in English for conducting my class as I had found our teachers to deliver their lectures in English at university level. But at the beginning of my career here at this college I found the students who were very weak in English. They could not understand when I delivered my lecture in English. I encouraged them to speak out in English but very few students responded accordingly. As a result I had to teach them English using Bangla, the mother tongue. Students are reluctant to take part in communicative tasks. [...] they never experienced English lecture in the classroom in their previous schooling. Moreover, a lot of students passed their previous public exam, Secondary School Certificate (SSC), who was not supposed to pass that exam. Besides, students who get good grades in the SSC exam and whose parents are solvent, usually take admission in the urban colleges. Therefore, we get here low quality students of poor families and their target is to pass just another exam (Sumon/ 8).

Another participant also blames students' lack of knowledge in English. He reports:

If I ask a student, 'what is your father?' He cannot understand the meaning of this question. You see, they do not know very simple

English. So, how can I use English in the classroom? We just try to make them able to pass the exam in some shortcut ways (Jamal/11)

This is our rural college. Here maximum students belong to the poor families. They do not know how to speak in good Bangla even, let alone English. Though they are studying at higher secondary level but their standard of English is not even up to the primary level. Many students here cannot even read English properly (Mithu/ 19).

However, most of the teachers claim that students' poor English leads them to conduct their classes in native language. Some other researchers also found that students' poor background in English restricted CLT implementation (Hassan, 2013; Islam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2018b). Along with the students' poor English background the following category evident teachers' lack of proficiency which is another major cause of obstruction for CLT implementation.

Teachers' deficiency in speaking english

It is disheartening that most of the English teachers at higher secondary level in the rural areas of Bangladesh are unable to speak in English fluently. They use mother tongue instead of English in teaching English in the classroom. In the interview session Kader (13) discloses:

[...] Most of the teachers in the rural areas might not be able to deliver their lecture in English as they are not habituated to speak in English and they also learnt English in this way when they were students. Majority of the teachers are the product of GTM. Therefore, it is difficult for them to instruct in the classroom in English and encourage students to speak [...].

Kader's explanation reveals that the rural English teachers' English language ability does not match to the requirement of CLT implementation. Furthermore, the previous traditional language teaching method still has influence on rural teachers which permits them to instruct their class in their native language. Consequently, the rural teachers remain unable to improve their ability of speaking in English language and they do not talk in English in the classroom which is the prerequisite of CLT implementation (Islam,

2016). Many researchers also pointed out that teachers' deficiency in spoken English is also a big challenge for the implementation of CLT (Roy, 2016; Hassan, 2013; Islam, 2016; Rahman et al., 2018b).

Poor socio-economic background

Additional findings reveal that in the rural communities of Bangladesh, students generally grow up in poverty, which affects their learning outcome adversely. The teachers' responses are shown below.

[...] There are a lot of students in my class who belong to the very poor families. Their poor parents cannot support them all the way. Sometimes students cannot manage their college fees, necessary notes or books due to the lack of money. Even their parents want them to earn and support them financially. [...] Many of my students attend college occasionally and get involved in earning. They usually work in farmlands to support their parents in cultivation or catch fish. Sometimes they work as day labourer in others farmland or become salesman at grocery shops etc. Therefore, their irregular attendance hampers their academic carrier as well as learning English opportunities in the class [...] Kazem (14).

[...] It is unfortunate that most of the parents of our college students are illiterate and they are not financially well off. [...] My one is a women's college. I found a number of girls students usually get married off and stop their study or in some cases they attend the college very irregularly. In the rural community parents' major concern is to marry their daughters off when they are just at the age of 16/17. [...] Besides, many girls join in garments or any other factory in the urban areas as day labourer to support their poor parents. Their poor economic condition forces them to join work at their student life [...] Mainul (15).

In spite of poor financial background, some students are self-motivated. They are good at English but they are small in number. As Wahed (9) posits:

[...] Despite the financial constraint some students are regular in their classes and doing well in English as well as other subjects. They know English is an international language, which opens door of

opportunities of higher education and better future. Their parents are also keen in educating their child. But they are very rare in numbers [...].

While the socio-economic factors such as, poverty or parents' illiteracy are reported as the barriers of learning English in the rural areas, the participants also indicate that the surroundings of the rural communities lack the needed environment to support improvement of English proficiency for both students and teachers. Almost all the participants state that outside the classroom they cannot practice English in their rural context because there is no need to communicate in English with anyone. Mamun (3) points out:

[...] Beyond the class or college premises there is no usage of English here in our locality. Therefore, English speaking and listening remain unpractised in our real life situation [...].

The above analysis encapsulates that in the rural based communities of Bangladesh, the chances of practicing English is almost absent. Moreover, the poor socio-economic condition aggravated the situation which can largely be attributed as a cause of unsuccessful CLT implementation in the ELT classroom. Some other researchers also highlighted the similar phenomenon (e.g. Ansarey, 2012; Hamid & Erling, 2016; Hassan, 2013, Roy, 2016). The aforementioned findings on the participants' interpretation reflect the research question of this study concerning to identify the problems faced by teachers in employing CLT in the rural Bangladesh.

Recommendations and Conclusion

The research question examines the problems teachers face in implementing CLT at higher secondary level in the EFL classroom in rural Bangladesh. The findings suggest, the implementation of the communicative approach is being obstructed by many impediments that exist in the rural Bangladeshi teaching-learning context. To overcome these impediments, as one of the implications of the study, the curriculum and the test format must be aligned. The present assessment system is incongruent with what CLT defines in the literature as said by Richards and Rogers (2001). Fullan (2007) also maintains that the assessment and instructional materials make the curriculum practical.

Teachers and students avoid the communicative task (listening and speaking) only because these parts remain untested in the examination (Al Amin & Greenwood, 2018; Rahman et al., 2018b). Hence, listening and speaking test must be incorporated in the examination system. It will have an effect on classroom practice automatically (Rahman et al., 2018b). Some of the interviewed teachers state that they try to teach all the chapters including communicative activities of the mandated textbooks, but when the examination gets closer, they recognize that, they focus on what is more essential for the examination. The entire mismanagement of the impractical curriculum evaluation has an impact on the entire system.

To maintain the practice of communicative activities, teachers must be trained and re-trained not only on curriculum but also on English proficiency and this process must be continued and followed up. Teachers' practice should be observed so that their wrong practice could be navigated instantly. Professional development should be consistent and based on teachers' requirements for CLT implementation. The participant teachers assert that they do not receive regular efficient training therefore; they do not have very clear idea how to implement CLT. Fullan (2007) avows that the more knowledge teachers have, the higher the chances that the curriculum will be disseminated into practice. The voice of rural teachers should be integrated in the development of the curriculum. Policymakers' uncontested top-down mandate requires to be changed. This will lead to a better comprehension of the curriculum by the teachers, and likewise will decrease complexities.

English classroom infrastructure must be improved by installing technological devices so that teaching and learning session could be interesting and interactive. Interaction will not be successful if the class is abnormally big. So, student teacher ratio should be abridged. For the completion of communicative activities class duration should be extended. Above all, students and teachers should be motivated to come out from their cocoons for a better change from their age old traditional teaching learning style to the updated version.

This study shows that the expectation of CLT is not fulfilled due to the pedagogical, contextual and personal difficulties which influence the practice of CLT and its outcome at higher secondary level in rural Bangladesh. By eliminating these shortcomings, we can expect the full implementation of CLT. The expectation of introducing CLT was to make our students competent in four skills of English language but due to some superficial

problems like examination system, lack of teachers' training, and some other contextual problems, our rural students are exploited and deprived. Policy makers, administrators and teachers should realize that students need English not to pass in the examination but to use it in real life situation. To come on tune with the pace of global world there is no way of denying the necessity of learning English language. Higher secondary level is that educational level of a student's life from where their future career and professions are mostly determined. CLT had set its foot on the Bangladeshi ELT landscape for about two decades earlier but still the curriculum is following the previous testing format. It can be argued that geographic location and socio-economic status are vital in mediating students' access to language resources at colleges, home and the community. Nevertheless, it is also evident that some students are capable to overcome these barriers by exercising their agency. Therefore, investment in English predominantly in the rural context in terms of logistics, infrastructural, expertise, teacher skills and students' educational requirements must be revised with care to expect the proper outcome of the innovative curriculum.

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