

# CLT and ELT in Bangladesh: Practice and Prospect of Speaking and Listening

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**Abstract**—This paper aims to investigate the reasons behind the lack of practice of listening and speaking at the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) classroom of Intermediate level in Dhaka. After fourteen years of introducing CLT in the education system of our country, lots of students of post intermediate level cannot utter a single correct sentence. This poses a serious question on the efficacy of practicing speaking and listening at the classrooms of our schools and colleges. This study was conducted on four colleges among the English teachers of Dhaka. To collect the data, questionnaires and personal interviews were conducted. The findings attempt to suggest some prior measures to recover from the unsavoury situation that is going on at present in our education system.

**Index Terms**—CLT, speaking, listening, classroom, practice, teachers, students, English

## I. INTRODUCTION

In the 1970s in European countries, the inclusion of CLT to the different methods of foreign language teaching was due to the failure of those methods in making the students communicatively competent and the reason behind its adaption and success in language teaching in EFL contexts in many countries is, CLT aims to develop all four language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. The proponents of CLT believed “activities that involve real communication promote learning” (Richards and Rodgers 161).

When teachers communicate in English with the students studying in the first year at university, they find that a majority of them still cannot speak with a reasonable proficiency and cannot grasp the meaning from listening to the foreign accents of English. The main reason behind this problem lies in the lack of practice in speaking and listening in classrooms in schools and colleges. But, CLT textbooks were introduced at the Secondary and Higher Secondary levels with a particular aim, to quote Nipa Vhattacharjee, “Prof. Md. Yousuf Farook writes that the book is based on the principle that guided the writing of *English for Today* books from class 6 onwards—the principle of learning a language by actually practicing it. But the fact is that, the existing curriculum of secondary and higher secondary levels lacks the insights to develop speaking skills actually by practicing and experimenting with the language. The theoretical emphasis has overshadowed the much needed practical side and missed out the scope for practicing language ...”

The Government’s aim with the introduction of the CLT approach will remain unfulfilled if we cannot make our students efficient in real life speaking and listening.

The core of the study tries to find out:

1. Why cannot the students of the post Intermediate level speak English or understand English while listening?
2. Why listening/speaking modules of CLT are not effective, introduced and taught at the Intermediate level?
3. What practical barriers do the teachers face in conducting a speaking /listening class?
4. What prior initiatives could the Government take to make the speaking/listening modules more effective in the classroom?

### **Literature Review:**

Since the initiation of research in the 1960s into effective teaching methodologies in EFL context in Europe, it became obvious that only the Structure does not constitute the whole of a language. Scholars Christopher Candlin, Henry Widdowson, British Linguists John Firth, M.A.K. Halliday, American Sociolinguists Dell Hymes, John Gumperz and William Labov- all felt that “functional and communicative potential of language”(Richards and Rodgers 154) ought to be included in classroom practice, so that, if needed, the students can transfer the knowledge and performance of language to real life situation as well.

While trying to develop a communicative syllabus for language teaching, British Linguist D.A. Wilkins(1972) illustrated two types of meanings, “1) Notional Categories(concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, frequency) and 2)Categories of communicative function(requests, denials, offers, complaints) Richards and Rodgers 154).

Hymes’ (1971) point of view is, “being able to communicate required more than linguistic competence, it required communicative competence-knowing when and how to say what to whom”(Cited in Diane Larsen-Freeman). So apart from the structure of the language, the CLT approach deals with pragmatics-situational context, shared knowledge, personal relationship and all the factors that one should be cognizant of while communicating in a foreign language.

According to Richards and Rodgers, CLT sees language from the following points of views:

Language is a system for the expression of meaning.

√ The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.

√ The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.

√ The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse. (161)

So, from the views of the proponents of CLT, it can be assumed that speaking and listening should be the prior concern of the foreign language teaching that follows CLT approach.

Some of the cardinal goals of CLT are summarized by William Littlewood:

1. The learner must attain as high a degree as possible of linguistic competence.
2. The learner must distinguish between the forms which he has mastered as part of his linguistic competence and the communicative functions that they perform.
3. The learner must develop skills and strategies for using language to communicate meanings as effectively as possible in concrete situations.
4. The learner must become aware of social meaning of language forms. (06)

CLT is very effective in helping the learners get introduced with various aspects of linguistic competence, knowledge of discourse and pragmatics etc. But to make it fruitful, to attain its goals, we must practice listening and speaking at the classroom.

Teacher's role is of paramount importance in attaining the goals of CLT in classroom. In the classroom, apart from acting as co-communicator, the teacher should bridge the gap between structure and function to "contextualize the language and as learners to practice responses which would be:

- a) Realistic ways of performing communicative acts in
- b) Situations they might expect to encounter at some time" (10)

For that such situations should be created at the classroom where the learner "must use language as an instrument for satisfying immediate communicative needs and where the criterion for success is functional effectiveness rather than structural accuracy." (Littlewood 07)

Extrapolating from the above discussion, we can rightly say that speaking and listening are the first and foremost aspects of CLT. Ignoring them, we can never make our students communicatively competent.

#### **CLT in Bangladesh:**

In the 1930s, an American National Curriculum commission observed, "Experience is the best of all schools...The ideal curriculum consists of well selected experiences." (Richards and Rodgers 158)

From the Bangladeshi perspective, it is only the experience of using language that is missing in the classroom. Only written discourses are dealt with in the classroom whereas spoken discourse should be practiced more because spoken discourse is much difficult than the written discourse in a number of ways, "Spoken discourse is instantaneous. The listener must process it 'online' and there is often no chance to listen to it again....unlike written discourse, spoken discourse is usually unplanned and often reflects the processes of construction such as: hesitations, reduced forms, fillers and repeats." (*Teaching Listening and Speaking from Theory to Practice* 3-5)

For all these reasons of difficulties, the speaking and listening practice should have been done more frequently in the classroom than going haywire.

Another importance to practice listening arises from the fact which is mentioned by Masum Billah in his feature *Is CLT Working in Bangladesh?* in The Financial Express that "40% of our everyday conversation we do through listening, 35% speaking, 16% reading and only 9% through writing." Since in the melee of practicing only reading and writing in the classroom, listening and speaking do not get a chance to stand its ground in our country, it means "we assess our students' performance only on 25% skills. It clandestinely proves that our assessment is seriously faulty." (*Is CLT Working in Bangladesh?*)

CLT started its journey in European countries in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century but in our country, it was introduced as the English language teaching method at the secondary level in 2001 and then at the higher secondary level which remains effective still now. English is a compulsory subject to the students of our country up to class twelve. But in most cases, it is taught following Grammar Translation Method, that is only the practice of reading and writing get momentum in the classes of schools and colleges. Since English had a high demanding status in the society, educational institutions and job market during the colonial period, the teaching and practicing of English received greater attention which continued till 1971. After the Liberation War of 1971, Bangla became the national language of the country and as a result of Bangla Implementation Act of 1987, the status of English started deteriorating day by day. To check the decline in English proficiency, 7 education commissions over the last decade have recommended various steps, unfortunately, none of them could be effectively implemented. As a result, there was a lack of harmony in English teaching methodology in terms of syllabus, materials, methodology, testing and evaluation. After the failure of Grammar Translation Method in bringing the expected English proficiency among the learners, CLT was introduced in 1999 by the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) which was sponsored by the Ministry of Education. The Government's intention in introducing the CLT method in English language teaching failed to integrate the practice of 4 basic skills of English in the classroom because much less attention was paid to listening and speaking skills.

Ellis (213-18) contends, “CLT does not respond well to Asian education conditions.” But what could be the probable reasons behind that? Barman, Sultana and Basu (156-60) identify eight basic constraints that hinder the practice of listening and speaking:

1. Inefficiency of ELT practitioners
2. Economic constraints
3. Administrative set-up
4. Infrastructural limitations
5. Cultural conflicts
6. Sitting arrangement in classroom
7. Class size and language teaching and learning
8. Testing

Also most teachers get extremely poor salary which is a seriously demotivating factor to them. The demotivation of the teachers is tantamount to the demotivation of the students. At present the Government policy is to ensure the highest percentage of pass marks at the board exams, which deflects the students from putting the best effort to pass the exams. The worst of all is, the administrations of most institutes are cognizant of the guardians’ demand of exam oriented class conduction, and the result is, they run the English courses based on totally reading and writing skills. But the survey of the Institute of the Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, reinforces the demand of the adult learners of foreign languages of being efficient in speaking and listening. This survey was conducted on 600 students of various foreign language courses from July 2008 to March 2009. The result of the study shows that 57.5% students wanted to most proficient in Speaking, 14.5% students wanted to be efficient in Listening, 8.2% in Writing and 19.8% in Reading. (Mohammed Ansarul Alam 2008). So, the necessity of the practice of Speaking and listening in the classroom is undeniable. But in our country, the worst thing is, as the corollary of not testing the speaking and listening at the board examinations, they are not encouraged to be practiced at the classrooms which confirms the view that “if listening isn’t tested, the teachers won’t teach it.”(*Teaching listening and speaking from Theory to Practice* 1-3)

**Limitations of the study:**

First of all, the sample size of the study could be a limitation. The questionnaire and the interview covered only 4 colleges of Dhaka. The second limitation could be the data collection procedure. Thirdly, the information gathered from the study could be dissimilar to the actual practice of the real life classrooms.

II. METHODOLOGY

The method of random sampling was used to conduct personal interview and administer questionnaire survey on the teachers of four non-government colleges of Dhaka. Questionnaire survey provides data that is easily quantifiable, less time consuming and demands less efforts from the participants, as well as ensures the anonymity of the participants. The procedures of data collection and analysis reflect both qualitative and quantitative nature, that means, the methodology of the present study is the mixed method approach which “enables the researchers to draw on all possibilities” (Tashakkori and Teddlie, cited in Diana Ansarey 2012)) and provides a broader perspective to the study as the qualitative data helps describe aspects that the quantitative data cannot address (Cresswell, 2003).

**Description and results of the study:**

The participants of the study were 10 English teachers of 4 non-government colleges of Dhaka city and 70% of them are aged between 38-50 years holding teaching experience for 10-18 years. There were 7 open ended and 5 close ended questions for them. The return rates are high, almost 100%. Frequency rates are calculated to elicit the central tendency of the teachers.

**Findings:**

The core findings of the study are presented on two tables below. Table 1 enumerates the major problems in conducting speaking and listening classes and table 2 shows the probable remedies.

TABLE 1:  
IMMANENT REASONS FOR NOT PRACTICING SPEAKING AND LISTENING CLASSES AT THE INTERMEDIATE CLASSROOMS

Problems	Frequency	Percentage
√ The students don’t respond /like the speaking/listening class	5	50%
√ There are no available apparatus at the institution	10	100%
√ Teachers do not use English all through the class always	10	100%
√ Teachers are not Trained in conducting speaking/listening class	7	70%
√ Students do not need speaking/listening class to pass the board examinations	5	50%
√ The classes are teacher centered	2	20%
√ The students cannot speak English fluently	3	30%
√ The students have problems in understanding listening class	2	20%
√ The students cannot pronounce English correctly	2	20%

TABLE 2:  
THE TEACHERS' RECOMMENDATION TO REMEDY THE PRESENT SITUATION

Recommendation	Frequency	Percentage
√ Steps should be taken to boost up speaking/listening practice at the classroom	10	100%
√ There should be proper materials/equipment	4	40%
√ The government should allot marks/include speaking and listening tests at the board exams	5	50%
√ The teachers should be trained	3	30%
√ The institutions should arrange seminars	1	10%

### III. ANALYSIS

So, the results of the study show that after 14 years of introduction of CLT into the national education system, approximately only 30% of the teachers at the college level are trained to hold speaking/listening sessions. The rest 70% are not even trained to hold speaking/listening class, so they do not ever hold any speaking or listening class. Again, none of the institutions where the study was conducted had necessary apparatus/instruments for holding a speaking/listening class which is a serious drawback for implementing CLT approach at the classroom. 50% of the teachers mentioned that speaking/listening classes are not held at the intermediate level, because the students do not require them to pass the board examination. So, our board examination system is a major demotivating factor for conducting speaking/listening class. It is high time we started incorporating speaking and listening testing at the board exam. To quote Wilkins (1976), "while some people are experimenting with the notional syllabus as such, others should be attempting to develop the new testing techniques that should, ideally, accompany it (Cited in C. J. Brumfit and K. Johnson)." One of the teachers observed that "Having no compulsion (to do speaking/listening class) as the whole syllabus (200 marks) is on writing" is one of the inherent reasons for lack of practice of speaking/listening at the classroom. Another factor to be taken seriously is, 50% of the teachers reported that one of the problems they face while conducting speaking/listening class is that the students want exam oriented class and that they do not like/respond enough for the teachers to be enthusiastic to conduct speaking/listening class on a regular basis. 30% of the teachers feel that the students cannot speak English at the class which makes a speaking class a failure. 20% of the teachers found out that the students cannot understand listening sessions. And last but not the least, 90% of the teachers mentioned that they use English all through the classroom "sometimes" and one of them exposed the reason for that, "considering the standard of English among the students, I've to take the step." But to quote Fakhru Islam (2008) "if learners get used to hearing nothing but English lesson, they will very soon understand and later learn to say words like 'good', 'alright', 'fine' etc. This will help them to use relevant word/words in specific context."

From the Table 2, it is clear that the teachers of all the institutions where the study was conducted hold positive attitude towards the importance of developing listening and speaking skills of the students. 100% of them supported the view that measures should be taken to boost up speaking/listening practice at the classroom. 50% of them feel that marks should be incorporated at the board exam/syllabus to reinforce the necessity of practicing speaking/listening at the classroom. One of the teachers commented, "It should be compulsorily included in the syllabus and suitable environment should be created." At this point, Ranjit Podder (2012) put forward the collective opinion from his *Demand from a CLT Workshop* "Although it is feasible to include the assessment of listening and speaking in schools if the schools are proactive, the workshop decided, a government order asking the schools to start assessing listening and speaking skills can bring momentum in the secondary English classrooms where, all teachers and students will practice English." (<http://newagebd.com>) 30% of the teachers think that the teachers should be properly trained to hold speaking/listening class. 40% of them opined that the educational institutions should be provided with necessary instruments/materials.

#### What to do in the classroom:

Before going for the classroom practice, we have to focus on what kind of problem the students normally may face in interpreting English from the listening. The students face a number of difficulties while they try to segment sound units from the continuum of speech. Here are the answers to the question "What are your problems in listening to English?" (Cited in Tsinghong Ma, 2009)

1. Trouble with sounds: I have trouble catching the actual sounds of the foreign language.
2. Have to understand every word: I have to understand every word; if I miss something I feel I'm failing and get worried and stressed.
3. Can't understand fast, natural native speech: I can understand people if they talk slowly and clearly; I can't understand fast natural native sounding speech.
4. Need to hear things more than once: I need to hear things more than once in order to understand.
5. Find it difficult to keep up: I find it difficult to keep up with all the information I'm getting and can't think ahead or predict.
6. Get tired: If the listening goes on a long time I get tired, find it more and more difficult to concentrate.
7. Insufficient vocabulary: My vocabulary is smaller than the text demands and there are some words that I can't understand.

This study shows that most of the students are following the Bottom Up strategy, they would not feel some of these difficulties if they followed the Top Down strategy. According to Top Down strategy, the students have to activate their existing schema at the pre-listening stage that will help them to 'keep up' with the listening speed, at the same time they will still understand some messages from the listening text if they miss some words from the text. Apart from the Top Down or Bottom Up strategies, there are some other apposite strategies, some of them are enumerated by Nunan, 1999 (Cited in Tsinghong Ma 2010):

1. Listening for the gist: Is the speaker describing a vacation or a day in the office? Is the radio report about news or weather?
2. Listening for purpose: Are the speakers making reservation or ordering food? Is the speaker agreeing or disagreeing with the suggestion?
3. Listening for main idea: Why is the speaker asking the man questions? Did the speaker like or dislike the movie?
4. Listening for inference: What are the speakers implying by what they said?
5. Listening for specific information: How much did they say the tickets cost? Where did she say the meeting was being held?
6. Listening for phonemic distinctions: Did the speaker say first or fourth? Did the speakers say they can or can't come to the party?
7. Listening for tone/pitch to identify the speaker's attitude: Did the speaker enjoy the wedding or not? Is the speaker surprised or not?
8. Listening for stress: What is more important, where he bought the watch or when?

To save the weak students from performing poor listening comprehension task, the teacher can gradually introduce these strategies to the students one by one, can tell them beforehand what is their aim with today's listening practice, can give them some prior information regarding that days' listening text and lead them through the listening text. Here one thing should be taken into consideration, we should give the students practice in listening with an aim of not only developing their listening comprehension skill but also facilitating its role to help their acquisition of English. According to Schmidt, 1990 (Cited in Jack C. Richards, 13-16), the conscious attention to the learning is of paramount importance, he says that "we won't learn anything from input we hear and understand unless we notice something about the input. Consciousness of features of the input can trigger the first stage in the process of incorporating new linguistic features into one's language competence". Schmidt (1990:139) further clarifies this point in distinguishing between input (what the learner hears) and intake (that part of the input that the learner notices). According to him, "only intake can serve as the basis for language development." So our target in EFL context of CLT approach at the classroom should be to encourage the students to notice the part of the text or practice that could be taken as intake and transfer them to the real life communication. At this stage, to develop not only the linguistic competence (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) but also the communicative competence. We can follow some teaching models that will help the students of all difficulty levels to participate at the class activities.

The model for teaching receptive skills proposed by Harmer, 1991 (Cited in Tsinghong Ma, 2009) contains five basic stages:

1. Lead-in: here the students and the teachers prepare themselves with the topic of the listening tasks and exercises.
2. Teacher directs comprehension tasks: Here the teacher makes sure that the students know what they are going to do. Are they going to answer question, fill in a chart, complete a message pad or try and re-tell what they heard/saw?
3. Students listen for task: The students then read or listen to a text to perform the task the teacher has set.
4. Teacher directs feedback: When the students have performed the task the teacher will help students to see if they have completed the task successfully and will find out how well they have done.
5. Teacher directs text related task: Teacher will then probably organize some kind of follow up task related to the text. Thus if the students have filled a form based on a heard discussion, the text related task might be to discuss in groups the same or related topic.

#### IV. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The implications of the study show that after introducing CLT in our country, proper measures have not been taken to implement it as long as the attention to practice speaking and listening is concerned. Relegating some cardinal issues like teacher training, allotting marks to the board exam, supplying instruments, motivating the students, it can never be implemented successfully. Extrapolating from all the discussions, we can incontrovertibly contend that, as long as our teachers are positive minded about practicing speaking/listening at the classroom, even at the lackluster classroom, the Government should take some effective measures to make it ubiquitous in the classroom practice. On the prior basis, first and foremost, practicing speaking and listening at the classroom should be made compulsory by the inclusion of speaking/listening test at the board exam, it not only will make the students and the guardians to appreciate speaking/listening session, but also will make the administrations of the concerned institutions think that it is not a mere waste of time to allot enough time for speaking and listening sessions at the classroom. Secondly, the teachers should be properly trained and last but not the least, the institutions should be supplied with available materials and apparatus to conduct speaking/listening classes.

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