

Implementing Communicative Language Teaching in ESL University Contexts

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to compensate for the shortcomings of other teaching methods. Over the years, CLT has revolutionised teaching. However, critics have debated on whether it is an approach that can be adopted successfully in the ESL contexts. This study aims to determine whether ESL lecturers in Nigerian universities implement this approach in their classes. The study also seeks to discover how lecturers adopt CLT in their classes and the difficulties they face. Twenty lecturers from four different universities in the northern Nigeria are involved in this study. The results show that lecturers adopt certain aspects of CLT. However, there is a lack of varied communicative activities. This study shows that it is feasible for lecturers to adopt some aspects of CLT in ESL classrooms, but the implementation of 'pure' CLT might still be challenging to adopt.

Introduction

English language still maintains its autonomy as the official language of the world, especially in the Anglophone countries. Due to the fact that it allows languages of the world to infiltrate into it. It is used to express indigenous world views, culture and traditions. For instance literacy and oracy in English language is seen as a sign of influence in Nigeria. English language therefore is used in Nigeria as the nation's official language and the medium of instructions. It remains the language with which the nation conducts its business, it is also recognized in politics for drafting the constitutions and in the judiciary for writing proceedings and giving judgements. So everything is virtually done in English by Nigerians.

In the light of this, Nigerians began to strive hard to have at least a considerable control of the English language and for this reason, lecturers in the country use different teaching techniques to teach English language for students to have proper understanding of the subject and to use it effectively for different functions in the real world. Therefore the introduction of communicative language teaching method has been a great assistance to the lecturers in the Nigeria universities since its main function is to improve students speaking skills. For example Savingson (2001) observes that communicative language teaching helps students improve their communicative competence in English language.

I believe that the more active the learner is in the classroom, the more quickly he or she will learn as much as possible. Consequently, the teaching and learning process should be learners' centered. Learners should be active in the class, their questions should be entertained and their efforts should be adequately rewarded in order to motivate them towards learning. In this wise, every learning item in the English language classroom should incorporate a speech

component because language skills are learned effectively if items are represented in spoken form before the written form .

Furthermore, ESL students of the Nigerian context use English through interaction in the real world, so learning the language for communicative purpose is compulsory in Nigeria. The Students in the ESL context need to learn the target language to grow and survive. Ellis, (1990). Hence the study investigates the challenges lecturers faced in the implementation of communicative language teaching CLT in Nigerian secondary schools and their perceptions of the implementation of CLT in the English language classroom.

In order to give direction to this study, the following research questions are raised:

What are the challenges faced by lecturers in the implementation of CLT

What are the perceptions of lecturers towards the implementation of CLT

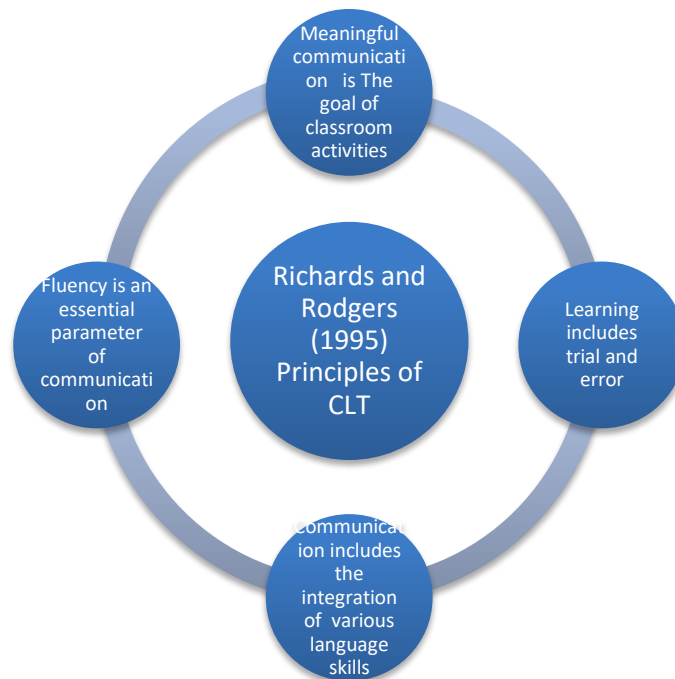
Literature Review

Communicative language teaching method is an approach used to support language learning communicatively and its major objective is to promote the students' communicative competence and talents. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000) CLT is the approach that recognizes language freedom in communication and it makes speaking competence the target of English language teaching and learning. The above definition implies that CLT focus is mainly on Fluency as put forward by the proponents (Halliday, 1970; Hymes, 1972) that the goal of learning a target language is to be able to competently speak and relate in the language in a suitable context.

CLT is centered on the view of developing communicative competence among the students According to Hymes (1972), human communication should put him in a social place in the world to be able to communicate competently in his community .In the real world for instance a speaker should not only make a sentence but should also put into consideration the environment which the sentences are used. Communicative competence should also include the understanding of the language and the skill to make use of the understanding in different contexts.

Communicative competence should be grammatically accurate and accepted to suit the context which it is being used. It includes the understanding of linguistic rules as well as suitable language use in various contexts. It should also contain the utterances in a conversation and different language procedures. Although, communicative language teaching put significance importance in contextualizing language, however it does not disregard the fundamental part of it .It is an integrated approach that supports learners towards developing all the four skills of language concurrently. According to Littlewood (1981), the CLT outstanding feature is that it places emphasis on the functional part as well as the structural part simultaneously, hence bringing together communicative aspect of the target language. This means that communicative language teaching unlike the grammar translation method does not give instruction on the

language in isolation, rather it gives scenery or view of what the students will meet apart from classroom context. In other words, it braces them up for the real situation outside the classroom. For instance Richards and Rodgers (1995), identified the principles of CLT as shown below:



This means that language should not be learned for learning's sake, instead language should be learned for functional reasons, the concept here is that the main purpose of learning a language is to be able to use it meaningfully in any context e.g., seeking assistance, seeking direction, ordering food in a restaurant, etc. Seeing that, language in context will encourage the students to have self-confidence, this can bring positive changes to their lives.

Auerbach and Wallerstein (1987) examined a set of English lessons which involves dialogue, asking questions and different reflective activities .They are of the view that students should be given a chance to express their vision or give their perception on an issue in the classroom to enable them take a decision on their own on any issue and to re-ascertain the social dimension of the questions posed to them. They made a conclusion that language development and active exercises in the classroom built the student's self-confidence and enabled them to take decisions on their own outside the classroom.

In addition, CLT is not an approach with a specific syllabus or content of teaching the target language, rather it is a method of teaching language which encloses a great number of teaching techniques and materials in language teaching. There is no distinct techniques or material

generally recognized by CLT approach, it allows the use of different methods materials and teaching techniques suitable for contextualizing language learning.

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) and Brandl, (2008) . The materials are designed according to the needs of the learners by the lecturers who serves as the facilitator and a guide to the students .As put forward by Li(1998) that it is important for lecturers to produce their own teaching materials according to the needs of the learners during the lesson .Besides, the learners should feel safe, protected and unthreatened in the classroom and the lesson should be learners centered. Therefore, to some people communicative language teaching is an integration of functional and grammatical teaching but for others, it means using strategies to make students get involved in different kind of classroom activities and engaging the use of authentic materials in teaching.

Authentic materials according to Richards and Rogers(1995)andNunan(1999) are then the concrete documents related to learners' needs which are not purposely written for language teaching but reflects how real communication takes place outside the classroom and all the things that portray what the learners will come across in their real lives . These things could be in spoken or written form. Examples of these materials include articles from newspaper, advertisement, television broadcast, maps, pictures etc. Although, some researchers have a contrary opinion towards the use of authentic materials as argued by Richards (2006) that original materials that are developed for the purpose of the lesson are more interesting and suitable for the lesson

Challenges of Implementing CLT

Since its introduction as basically a British innovation in the early 70s and its expansion in scope over time, communicative language teaching approach is extensively used in language teaching across the world. In spite of its recognition world- wide, English language lecturers faced different challenges in its implementation in different part of the world, as put forward by different research studies.

Lack of communicative competence and inadequate training for the implementation of CLT is one of the challenges identified by lecturers in Korean schools in the previous study done by Li, in 1998 as CLT needs special teaching skills to enable its effective implementation. Similarly, the education system in most part of the world is exams based and this pose a challenge to lecturersin implementing CLT intheir lessons because most of the questions are grammar -based and itmeasure mainly the language structural forms for this reason, lecturers engaged grammar-based activities over communicative activities in the classroom as students prefer to study for their exams rather than improve their communicative skills (Dailey 2010) . And the lecturers' priority in teaching is to assist the learners to get high scores, especially in their external examinations. Besides, CLT lacksdefinite and effective assessment tools to measure the performance of the students (Li, 1999).

In addition, lecturers have misconceptions about CLT and they find it difficult to implement it in their lessons Li (1998), observes that the misconception of CLT has been due to the different interpretations given to it since its introduction in the early 70s, the advocates often features the approach based on their own understanding and this might have affected the perception of lecturers in CLT . Andlecturers feel that CLT will hinder the existence of the language process due to the fact that it centers only on the meaning of the language. Another challenge identified byLi in her study done in 1998 islack of administrative support from the management. This, according to her is a major challenge, because the management of a school decides on what shape the class should be and the lecturers must follow strictly the government recommended textbook.

Furthermore, Behrenwald (2010) observed that lack of time and difficulties in coming across authentic materials as another challenge faced by lecturers in implementing CLT in their lessons. Also they lack time to prepare these authentic materials and they have little knowledge in its implementation. Moreover, Lecturers feel reluctant to spend more time on a new and demanding method like CLT due to their tedious curricular and already tight schedule .(Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999). Also, the size of the class is another challenge that makeslecturers opt for other activities over communicative activities as the classes are overpopulated and not spacious enough to accommodate communicative activities like role play, pair group work and group problem solving. Also the students are not motivated towards learning the intended language due to their low proficiency in the target language (Li 1998).

Methodology

The research findings are based on the survey method and quantitative method was used to describe the data collected .A new questionnaire was designed and piloted among my colleagues to test its validity. The participants in the study were twenty English language lecturers from four government run tertiary schools in Northern Nigeria. Questionnaire with the participants' consent form and the participants' information sheet were sent to the four selected schools for data collection and anonymity was ensured to allow full participation of the respondents.

Data Analysis

The data collected was described and determined with the use of frequency counts and tables in order to provide answers to the research questions.

Respondents' gender

50% (n=10) males and 50% (n=10) females took part in this study. The frequency analysis indicated that an equal number of respondents participated in this study.

Age of the respondents

The table above shows that 35% of the respondents are between the ages of 25-29, While 65% of them fall between the ages of 30 years and above. And other age groups are not represented.

Respondents' highest level of Education

In terms of respondents, highest level of education 40% (n=8) of the samples have their first degree in English in education, 30% (n=6) of them are teaching with a degree in English without training in education while the other 30% (n=6) has master degrees in English language with education. Therefore, the result shows that the majority of the respondents are trained English language lecturers.

Respondents' years of experience

The result indicate that the great majority of the surveyed samples, 55% (n=11) of them have been teaching for 11 years and above while 30% (n=6) of the respondents have been in service since 6-10 years and only 15 (n=3) % are new in service. E.g. 0-5 years. This figure indicates that the most of the lecturers are experienced English language experts.

10% of lecturers have 21-30 students in their classes, while 30% of the respondents deal with 31-40 students in their class and majority of the respondents e.g. 60% teach 40 students and above in their classes. The result of this findings shows that most of the schools are over populated and this may be due to the fact that all the four universities are public schools or government run schools.

Respondents' understanding of CLT

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
Enhancing Communicative skill	7	35%
Learning through interaction	5	25%
Contextual learning	2	10%
Using real materials in learning	3	15%
Focusing on the Learners' fluency	3	15%
Total	20	100%

The above table shows that 35% of the respondents understand CLT as an approach that enhances communicative skills, this indicates that few of the respondents see CLT as an approach that promotes communicative competence which is the major goal of CLT agreeing with Larsen-Freeman (2000). Equally, 25% of the respondents understands CLT as learning through interaction, this is in-line with the literature as CLT includes learning through interaction.

In adding up, 10% of the respondents understands CLT as contextual learning, this indicates that the respondents see CLT as an approach that place significance meaning in contextualizing language, this is also according to Littlewood's (1981) one of the goals of CLT. Similar to the study done by Richards and Rogers in 1995, 15% of the respondents understand CLT as an

approach that uses real materials in teaching this may be due to the fact that authentic materials relate to students' interest.

Subsequently, 15% of the lecturers also perceive CLT as an approach that focuses on the learners' fluency. This implies that a few respondents relate CLT to one of its principles which is also an important parameter of communication according to Richards and Roger (1995).

Answers	SD		D		UN		A		SA		Total	
	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F
Statements												
Lecturers' lack communicative competence in English language	10	2	65	13	5	1	20	4	0	0	100	20
The school management is against the implementation of CLT	0	0	20	4	0	0	60	12	20	4	100	20
Authentic materials such as newspapers articles, maps are made available by the school authorities	15	3	60	12	10	2	15	3	0	0	100	20
Materials for CLT lessons are time consuming	0	0	20	4	0	0	65	13	15	3	100	20
Lecturers have different misconceptions about CLT	25	5	45	9	0	0	10	2	20	4	100	20
The students aim at passing their exams rather than improve communicative competence	0	0	20	4	5	1	75	15	0	0	100	20
Students English proficiency is low	0	0	10	2	5	1	70	14	15	3	100	20
Students are not motivated towards learning the target language	10	2	0	0	5	1	65	13	20	4	100	20
Lecturers are not trained to use CLT in their lessons	0	0	70	14	0	0	30	6	0	0	100	20
The large size of the class is a challenge for effective use of CLT	0	0	0	0	10	2	80	16	10	2	100	20
Grammar-based examinations make the use of CLT is difficult to implement	0	0	10	2	0	0	65	13	25	5	100	20

20% (n=4) of the respondents agreed that lecturers lack communicative competence to make use of CLT, however, 65% (n= 13) of the respondents disagreed and 10% (n=2) strongly disagreed with the statement . Although, 5% (n=1) were undecided. This shows that lecturers

didn't see their lack of communicative competence as a challenge. This is in contrary to the report identified by Li (1998) that Korean lecturers' lack of communicative competence poses a great challenge for them in implementing CLT in their classes.

Most of the respondents admitted that there is no administrative support from the management towards the implementation of CLT of the English language lessons, 60% agreed and 20% strongly agreed with the statement and only 20% disagreed with this statement. This may imply that the school management does not co-operate with lecturers towards the implementation of CLT since believe of the school management and the parents may be for the learners to excel in examinations. According to Barnaby and Sun (1989), the school management recognizes an excellent teacher as a teacher who can make the students have good grades and these lecturers would love to impress the management in order to ensure the security of their jobs.

A great majority of the respondents 60% (n=12) disagrees with the statement, 15% (n=3) with strong disagreement that authentic materials such as newspapers, articles, movie advertisement, maps are made available by the school to implement CLT. However, 15% (n=3) agreed and 10% (n=2) were undecided. This shows that even if the lecturers want to implement CLT in their lessons, there is the unavailability of the materials to carry out the activities. This is similar to the study done by Behrenwald (2010).

Similarly, lack of time for material development in CLT is another challenge indicated by a great number of respondents e.g. 65% (n=13) agreed to the statement, with 15% (n=3) strong agreement that the time is not enough to develop authentic materials and only 20% (n=4) disagreed to this statement. Related to the study done by Sato and Kleinsasser in 1999, was lack of time identified as a challenge. And this may indicate that even if the lecturers have the aim of creating authentic materials, they do not have enough time left from their tight schedule for them to go beyond the government recommended textbooks.

Similarly, 45% of the respondents disagreed that lecturers have misconceptions about CLT and 25% strongly disagreed. However, 20% of lecturers indicate a strong agreement with 10% undecided unlike Cai (2009). The result of the findings shows that lecturers' misconception of CLT is not a challenge for most of the sampled lecturers in Nigerian universities.

The students aim at passing their exams rather than improve their communicative skills pose as a challenge, to the majority of the respondents, 75% (n=15) agreed with this statement, 20% (n=4) disagreed with 5% (n=1) undecided. This may imply that they aim at passing their exams because only good grades ensure the promotion of the learners to the next class and for the CLT lesson to be effective, the students must indicate their interest to participate in the classroom activities. This study matches with the one done previously by Liu (2005) among the Taiwan lecturers who also indicated this as a major challenge.

A vast number of lecturers 70% (n=14) agreed and 15% (n=3) strongly agreed that students' low English proficiency is a great challenge towards implementing CLT since the learners have to have communicative competence to be able to confidently participate in CLT class activities. However, 10% (n=2) of the respondents could not see it as a challenge and 5% (n=1) undecided. The result of this finding is related to Li (1998) who reported students with low proficiency in English and lack of students' motivation to learn the target language as a major problem towards the implementation of CLT.

Also most of the respondents agreed e.g. 65% (n=13) with 20% (n=4) strong agreement that students are not motivated towards learning the target language. While 10% (n=2) strongly disagreed, 5% (n=1) were undecided. This implies that the students might be interested in learning the target language when motivated.

30% agreed that lack of training makes CLT difficult to implement in the English classroom. However, 70% of the lecturers disagreed with this notion. Contrary to Li (1998) and Daley (2010), the result of this finding indicates that lecturers did not see lack of training as a challenge to implement CLT in the English classroom, this may be because the majority of the participants are trained English language lecturers.

Related to Li's study in (1998), quite a large number of the respondents e.g. 80% (n=16) , agreed and 10% (n=2) strongly agreed that the large size of the class is a challenge for effective use of CLT and only 10% (n=2) were undecided. This may indicate that the classrooms are not spacious enough for the learners to practice the target language with ease and this may be due to the fact that the sample schools are government run schools. This also implies that the implementation of CLT can only be done effectively under conducive environment. Besides, lecturers cannot pay attention to all the students during lessons if the classroom is overcrowded.

One of the major problems to include CLT in teaching the target language is grammar-centred examinations. As a 65 % (n=13) of the respondents agreed that grammar-centred examinations make the case of CLT difficult to implement with 25% (n=5) strong agreement and only 10% (n=2) disagreed with the statement.

This may be because the questions for the exams only assess the structural forms of the target language .This is equally allied to Liu's study in 2005. Similarly, a study was done by Dailey in 2010 to examine the lecturers in Korean schools. Most of the lecturers in Korea also indicated this as a major challenge. Besides, students focus mainly on passing exams rather than learning to develop their communicative skills or competence.

Conclusion

It is found in the study that lecturers in the Nigerian tertiary schools though have resilient perception towards this well-known method and if given the opportunity and proper support, they would effectively implement it in their classes. However, they face some challenges

towards its implementation. The challenges they face towards effecting CLT in their courses consist of students' English low proficiency, students' avoidance to participate in CLT class activities, size of the class, grammar -centred examinations, lack of positive reinforcements to motivate learners among others.

As English language is refers to a language of survival in an ESL context like Nigeria and since the sampled lecturers have clear understanding of CLT, Nigerian Government Should make it mandatory for all the English language lecturers in the country to use an approach like the communicative language teaching approach in their lessons because it encompasses all other methods. It is then important for the government and stakeholders to look into these challenges and try to proffer possible solutions to it for the effective use of CLT in the Nigerian tertiary schools. Thus the following recommendations are given. Training and re-training exercise should be made available to the ESL tutors by the school management and government in order for them to be skilful in using it effectively in the classrooms. Most importantly, the management needs to be aware of the usefulness of CLT.

Also the school management should reduce the lecturers' assignment,so that they will have more time to develop materials and plan the activities for CLT .The lecturers should as well be given incentives and good salary so that they would be motivated. Furthermore, authentic materials such as movie clips, newspaper articles, maps T.V advertisement etc. Should be provided for the lecturers to practice CLT in their teaching. Large size classes are another difficulty indicated by lecturers in Nigerian schools. This is due to the fact that if the class is over-populated and not spacious enough to carry out CLT activities, it will be difficult for the lecturersto engage all the students in the classroom activities.

Moreover, the government should ensure that less emphasis is given to grammar based examinations and the exam questions should not assess only the structural form of the English language, rather, it should be more flexible and it should be designed to assess students' creativity. Finally, effective tools should be constructed by the examining bodies in partnership with the FederalMinistry of Education and Nigerian Universities Commission (NUC) to assessESL students on communicative language teaching so that they will not aim at passing their exams alone butalso know the effectiveness of CLT and appreciate the opportunities it can offer them to develop their low English proficiency and communicative competence.

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