

The appropriate policy for the adopting of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) in Iraq

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is considered as one of the important teaching methods by language teachers due to its critical role on developing learners' communicative competenc. This paper goes through the existing English teaching system in Iraq with a view of finding reasons for change. The paper also examines the procedures and difficulties of adopting a CLT based approach to learning. An examination of the likely challenges is put into perspective and finally, a proposal is made regarding the adoption of a CLT based approach to English teaching in Iraq.

الخلاصة

تعتبر الطريقة التفاعلية لتعليم اللغة الإنكليزية احدى الاساليب المهمة لمعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية، نظرًا لأهميتها واعتمادها في البلدان ذات الواقع التعليمي المتطور ولدورها الحاسم في تطوير الكفاءة لدى المتعلمين تناول هذا البحث طريقة تدريس اللغة الإنكليزية المتبعة في النظام التعليمي العراقي الحالي، مع رؤية لبيان أسباب اعتماد الطريقة التفاعلية. كذلك يتناول البحث الوسائل المقترحة والصعوبات لاعتماد هذه الطريقة التعليمية في الواقع التعليمي في العراق

١. Introduction

Today's world, English language plays a critical role in lives of people especially when it comes to international relations. As a mode of communication, the value of the English language cannot be overstated. The history of the English language is traceable to the imperialist activities of the British Empire way back to the 19th century. When the British colonialism started in Iraq , the Turkish language which was in use as a sidelined in favour of the English language. The English language was later passed as the country's official language and consequently introduced in the Iraq schools.

Adopting CLT approach in the Iraq case holds the potential of bringing gains to the country. As the paper progresses, it emerges that the Iraq traditional teaching modes do not adequately prepare students to face the

practical part of the English language. They primarily focus on what does not hold value in reference to the intended outcome of communication development. As a result, adopting a CLT approach in Iraq stands to avail a good opportunity to learners as it shifts focus from a focus on vocabulary mastery to real life usage of the language, the approach also promises to change the classroom relations from teacher based to student based and in the process improve on the learning of the language. As an Islamic country which adheres to cultural awareness, a CLT approach should be tailored to fit into the country in a manner that distances the policy from activities which portray foreign orientations.

٢. The spread of English language

The history of the British Empire in colonial expeditions highlights the turning point of the spread of the language (Zutter, ٢٠٠٩; ٧). Wherever they went, the British colonisers had the habit of altering or creating laws to facilitate the use of the English language as the official state language. This is especially captured by the Iraq case. In Iraq, the English language was made a compulsory study subject in Iraqi schools.

The spread of the English language during the initial stages has been attributed to the role played by the British council in trying to establish English as a universal language (Gaffey, ٢٠٠٥; ١٣). In this regard, the English language was useful in furthering the aspirations of the British Empire. According to Le Ha Phan (٢٠٠٨; ٧٢), the English language was use in fostering the English empire's mission. Phan, L.H, (٢٠٠٨; ٧٢) finds that the language served to introduce superior-inferior relations as a differential between the powerful and the powerless.

٣,٠. Theoretical background

Theoretically, implementing a CLT based teaching system in reference to studying foreign languages serves as an innovation in the learning field as it requires marked improvement in syllabus refocusing and the development of new teaching methods.

In theory the mastery of languages especially internationally acclaimed ones like the English language hold a crucial value to a society. Language is socially shaped and it equally shapes the socialisation of people. In this line of thinking, language plays a critical role in shaping individual and

group identities. In simple terms, language learning holds the potential of availing opportunities to individuals by placing such people in good positions. It is also thought that though the system has served other parts, it may not necessarily be the case in Iraq due to structural and cultural differences.

٣,١. CLT in recent studies

The theory of pedagogical incompatibilities as raised by Chowdhury (٢٠٠٣) purports that the methodologies adopted in the West may not be appropriate in other localities. As Ramathan (١٩٩٩, cited in Chowdhury, ٢٠٠٣) affirms, the Western approaches fail to apply in local settings due to culture clash. The textbook and cultures may fail to be in synchrony. The methods presented by new approaches like CLT are thus alien to local demands. This gets even worse if the teacher does not endorse the new system.

While I appreciate the view of the author arising from cultural incompatibility, I would argue that language is learnt. Even the native language was learned, as a result, the English language and the proposed CLT approach can be introduced in a structured manner which allows it to fit into the local setting. However, some elements may take time to fully work as expected. The neo-colonisation theory has also been used to campaign against the adoption of CLT in Iraq. Behind the theory is that the approach is geared towards the promotion of the imperial activities of the West as observed by (Phan, L.H, ٢٠٠٨: ٧١-١٠٢). It is also thought that the approach will aid the spread of the English language and in the process democratise an elite resource. The English language may be used as a tool of economic exploitation as it facilitates the introduction of economies into the world capitalist system. Finally, it is held that the spread of the English language would imply a displacement of local cultural identities (Tollefson and Tsui, ٢٠٠٥: ٢-٣).

The pretence that the English language will be used as a colonisation tool should never arise. As Conrad (١٩٩٦, cited in Tollefson and Tsui, ٢٠٠٥: ٢-٣) finds, Africa is an example where the language is used and yet there has not been reported culture loss in the region. However, questions over economic exploitation in the region remain unanswered.

٣,٢. Appropriate use of language

In the EFL mode of study the focus is on vocabulary and grammar (Chowdhury, ٢٠٠٣; ٢٨٤). This is not adequate in the development of communicative skills of the students as the learning only exposes them to words and not the usage in real life circumstances. Equally important is the fact that there is less focus on language use outside the classroom. The reduced focus on what actually takes place serves to deny the students the practical aspect of studying which is useful in any area under review. It is thus held that the CLT program is the only approach which can mitigate the effects created by the traditional approach to studying of the English in Iraq.

The various uses of the English language as explored above necessitates the need to study in a more advanced role which allows for an expansion of the practical learning aspect of the language. On this line of thinking, the different uses of the English language are put into perspective.

According to Pennycook, ١٩٩٥, (cited in Phan, L.H, ٢٠٠٨; ٧٢), the English language was critical in Iraq as it functioned as a mode of communication. This was useful in outer and inland communication. It was also necessary in the transfer of technology from the colonisers to the country. The English language later played a role in the decolonisation process as the Iraq natives learned the language and eventually put it into perspective in the pursuit of their independence.

On a global scale, the learning of the English language plays a critical role towards availing opportunities to individuals (Zutter, ٢٠٠٩; ٧). To cite an example, in India, the British stay in the country over a period of two decades presented a good opportunity to learn English for the Indian people. Those Indians who took the opportunity and studied the language stood on vantage positions. The innumerable opportunities advanced to the Indian populace were in reference to science and technological learning. Learning the English language also holds the potential of presenting winning opportunities to the people. This is captured in global competitions which are held in creative arts like literature. In this line of thought, the nomination of Indian films like 'the film Elizabeth' by Shekhar Kapoor for Oscar awards serves to augment this claim.

The world is currently a global village thanks to globalisation and its effects (Farrell, ٢٠٠٠; ١). The business world is more interconnected than ever before. As thus, there is need for a unifying element, this element is ably

provided by the English language. Globalisation is more pronounced in the business world. In the business world, commercial entities across national borders transact business at different levels for various reasons. As a result, there is equally a need to have a communicating tool which links such people. The English language offers this element in the commercial engagements. Towards this end, business managers get to learn a variety of new and reliable management elements and thus play a great role in aiding the developmental needs of states and people.

English is highly interlinked with the dominant status it holds in the globe. ELT is closely tied with status the English language enjoys. On the basis of Philipson (١٩٩٢), cited in Le Ha Phan, (٢٠٠٨; ٧٢), the domineering nature of ELT and the English language is testament to this aspect. In this line of thinking, ELT may be viewed alongside the imperialistic tendencies attributable to the English language. Thus, ELT in Iraq may be viewed as an imperialistic model of learning. In this regard, ELT may be seen as a way useful by English speaking countries especially the United States and the UK in having their way in the country. As Murray, (٢٠٠٣, (cited in Edge, ٢٠٠٣; ٧٠٣) points out, ELT in Iraq basically captures the element of linguistic imperialism.

The role of the English language has been critically examined in this paper. This perhaps offers an explanation as to why ELT ranks among the world's fastest growing industries in the world today, a fact observed by Gaffey (٢٠٠٥; ١٣). A big number of people in the range of millions currently study the English language across the globe. Though the reasons for undertaking English studies widely vary, there is always a contextual difference as reflected in the discrepancy in the functioning of the language.

٤.١. English status in Iraq

The current traditional teaching approach is not commendable for various reasons. The reasons concern its unresponsive nature to the current needs of learning the English language. The focus is primarily on the grammatical aspect and mastery of vocabulary. It is thus ideal to adopt the CLT approach as it imparts into students the real life usage skills of the speaking aspect and thus enable them to benefit by comprehending and being able to put it into use.

٤.١. The local teacher (Iraqi teacher)

Culture plays a significant part in shaping various roles played by societal members. In the case of Iraq, this is clearly reflected through the teacher-student relations. Students are expected to show respect to the teachers. As an illustration, the students are required to address the teachers while standing as a show of respect. Any other activity going on in the precincts of the classroom must also be sanctioned by the teacher. Based on my own experience, Teachers in Iraq are power centred and do not wish to compromise on their control. While studying in secondary school, I had an encounter with the literature teacher as we studied a play by Shakespeare. I sought to raise an opinion which turned out to irritate the teacher. Angry with my views, the teacher demanded that I vacate the class. So our culture had affected the teacher into believing that students were to only raise those views which tally to their opinion. On such evidence, an adoption of a different approach is necessary.

٤.٢. Time management

As Le Ha Phan, (٢٠٠٨; ٩٢) puts it, CLT is a bit time consuming. It is a fact that time is one of the most limited resources and it needs good planning to facilitate productive learning in schools. The classes or schools in Iraq are not an exception and would need to critically consider the time aspect while introducing CLT. On average, a class runs for forty-five minutes. This time is highly limited and needs an expert teacher to effectively plan on how to get across the learning activities within the specified time. The employed teachers may lack in fluency and the capability to last the forty five minutes. A good

number of Iraq students are even poorer in the English language and there may be no point of holding lengthy classes. On the basis of this paper, it was remarked that English is viewed as a product of colonialism; consequently difficulties arise in attempting to draw students into accepting the language as worthy undertaking. The limited time of using the language does not allow students to master it; as a result, it is not used outside the classrooms. This also calls for a shift in the allocation of time to lessons.

٥. Why CLT is suitable for Iraqi schools

Many teaching materials and ESL learning lays emphasis on the development of language with the view of aiding communicative

competence (Santoro, ٢٠٠٠; ٤٦). This is attained through the provision of genuine and useful discourse which aids the goal of learning languages. The current situation in Iraq teaching which primarily focuses on classroom engagement does not offer the requisite opportunity of using the language in the outside world. Thus the needs for simulated language use contexts become necessary. This basically calls for an introduction of interactive classes which facilitate the learning of the English language in a more advanced manner which allows the students to develop their communicative abilities (Santoro, ٢٠٠٠; ٤٦). The above point also underscores the need why the teachers in Iraq need to put in practice a teaching mode which allows students to learn the language while practicing its spoken part. This also indicates that the mode of learning in Iraq needs to be altered to introduce into it the real communicative agenda it serves (Santoro, ٢٠٠٠; ٤٦). In doing this, the real benefits attributable to studying foreign languages will be witnessed.

The interactive aspect is also useful as it puts learners in familiar positions to where they are likely to find themselves later in real life scenarios (Santoro, ٢٠٠٠; ٤٧). As Santoro (٢٠٠٠; ٤٧) indicates, there is more associated to language than just the aspect of passing messages. Santoro (٢٠٠٠; ٤٧) perceives language as an act of social practice as it presents an act of connecting reality and the changes affecting reality. Language is thus viewed in reference to the real effects it has on the world. This presents the other reason while Iraq should shift to a CLT oriented approach to teaching as it guarantees a better learning approach to the English language as opposed to EFL/ESL.

٦. Constraints/challenges in the Iraq case

Language as a foreign language is faced with a host of changes when it comes to implementing a different learning mode (Chowdhury, ٢٠٠٣; ٢٨٣). The first aspect relates to cultural discrepancies due the inherent deviations in contexts. A western based methodology of teaching however well it works, it stands to face even bigger challenges. Such include a false perception which emanates from the local populace. The Iraq people were colonised by the British Empire which introduced the queen's language in the land. As such, the English language is closely interlinked with colonial activities. The learning of the language has often been carried out using the traditional approaches, an attempt to introduce a foreign based

approach which offers support to the CLT perspective may fail on this account.

The availability of teaching materials is a concern in the Iraq case. To begin with, there are often more than forty-five students in each class s realised above, thus, teachers are required to work extra hard if they are to roll the CLT based approach as each student is supposed to get a chance to interact as the classes go on. Other learning materials such as computers, labs, visual aids, etc are in an inadequate supply further complicating the learning activities of such programs.

The learner centred approach presented by CLT may present a difficult task. This view is taken in reference to the fact that ELT in Iraq is basically teacher centred. Having realised this, it is difficult to strike a balance between the new CLT focused approach and the ELT model. The traditional Iraq teaching system is teacher centred meaning an approach which de-empowers the teacher may be difficult to put into operation.

The setting of an international teacher differs from place to place (Chowdhury, ٢٠٠٣; ٢٨٤). As a result, it is wrong to presume that the ELT approach will achieve the same results in different places. This implies that the setting determines the applicability and success attained by the adoption of a new teaching approach which seeks to introduce the element of communicative approach to teaching.

The initial levels of teaching at primary and secondary schools primarily expose students to the structural part of language learning. It is only when students get to the university level when the new study approaches are introduced with a focus on the communicative aspect. This introduces a new dimension to the students which they may find untenable. This illustrates another challenge of attempting to introduce a new element of teaching to students already used to a certain approach. It serves to disorient them. As a result of this, such individuals may feel persuaded to reject a new system however good it may be.

V. Appropriate policy to establish successful CLT practice in Iraq

The Iraq culture is deeply rooted in Islam and as a result the implementation of an approach to foster a communicative approach to teaching the English language should be doe carefully in a way which does not undermine the religious orientation. An approach which

empowers the student is likely to run against certain Islamic requirements such as those which demand that the male segment of society be in control. The communicative learning training programs support students to take control; as a result, a female student may challenge a male teacher, a scenario which puts the Islamic culture on the spot. In such instances, there is bound to be difficult in making the program a success since the teaching fraternity may feel threatened by the new approach. It was equally realized that the student-teacher relations in the control are clearly defined in reference to power relations; it is the teacher who wield control over the student. Simply put, it is a teacher based model of teaching. Consequently, the introduction of a CLT oriented approach is likely to raise a number of aspects which challenge the status quo. It is given that some teachers may reject change proposal as it means surrendering control to students. This is a serious cause for alarm which the new teaching approach must address if success is to be attained. As discussed in the paper, language helps in the construction of identity. The communicative based teaching mode is bound to give rise to a new class of English language users. This class will form its own identity based on commonality of language use. Such a group may perceive itself better from the other individuals while those who do not know the new language may perceive the other parties as colonial moles. It is thus viewed in reference to its potential of creating a division in the Iraq society. However, this is a hypothetical position whose veracity stands to be verified. The CLT approach presents one of the best models of teaching the English language. Its focus is on the learning is highly desirable since it is the learners who ideally study and not the teachers. Though teachers play a useful role, the focus remains on the child or the student. The context within which such programs run hold a huge influence on their success, as a result, the contextual challenges facing a CLT approach in Iraq is put into perspective (Kramsch, ١٩٩٨; ١).

In almost all countries, teachers require to be given some level of respect if learning is to take place without hitches. In Iraq, the teacher based mode typically captures this aspect as the teachers must be respected. In the system of learning, the students look up to the teachers as models. The teacher holds complete control in the classroom. This contrasts ELT approach in which case the learning process is learner based. This

presents a clash between teacher based and learner based approaches (Hedge, ٢٠٠٠; ٦٧). What this presents is a disincentive to the teachers; only few teachers will agree to have their authority reduced. It thus requires a mastery approach to convince the teaching fraternity on how to implement ELT without compromising on their powers. If necessary as required by ELT, then a compromise must be struck. As I realised while studying in a secondary school in Iraq, the teachers do not welcome or encourage student novelty as they want to be in control.

As Kramsch (١٩٩٨; ١) argues, culture is a crucial aspect which affects the learning of any language especially as a second language. Cultural clash presents a serious challenge towards any bid of implementing ELT in Iraq. The authenticity of the sources of information must be verifiable. This implies that the sources remain genuine and up to the task at hand. It emerges that the materials which are used in teaching the English language remain mainly products from the West. If the West chose to posit a different view on issues, it will consequently influence the direction of learning in Iraq. As a result, there is need to establish that the materials used are authentic so as to ensure a neutral learning environment. The differences in the culture of Iraq and the west are so wide such that an attempt to use western authored materials may in the end undermine the success of CLT. It is thus proposed that alternatives materials authored by individuals who share a culture close to Iraq's be sought Hedge (٢٠٠٠; ٦٧). CLT is seen as a product of colonialism and may fail to get acceptance in the country. English, as observed by Le Ha Phan (٢٠٠٨; ٧٢) shapes the identities of students. If such is the case, then obviously, a clash will take place as students wriggle to make a choice.

٨. Solutions to the challenges

The Iraq culture has been founded as the biggest obstacle towards a bid to introduce a successful CLT approach in the country. The first assault on the process comes from the centrality of power on the teachers. To address this concern, it is ideally to strike a working formula which incorporates the concerns of the Iraqi teachers. The implementers of the process need to outline how they intend to address these concerns by assisting the teachers to shift the orientations to the current mode of teaching based on CLT. On the basis of (Wenjie, ٢٠٠٩; v), the importance which a CLT approach avails should be used to persuade teachers to

accept a shift in the teaching approach. To address this concern, a progressive approach which transfers power from the teacher over a period of six months is proposed. The teachers should undergo a training programme to facilitate this. According to (Tollefson and Tsui, ٢٠٠٧), the globalisation aspect has reduced the world into a single entity. As a result, the Iraq perspective which views the adoption of the CLT approach as an imperialistic act should be discarded. The move towards globalisation currently shaping the world should be used as a persuading tool to help disgruntled elements accept the CLT approach. The culture of Iraq requires that the local or traditional languages remain preserved. In this sense, it may appear to some that a CLT approach stands to compromise the future of local languages. This notion should be discarded as languages can be used alongside others. This is said in reference to the perception that language shapes identities. As Tollesfson and Tsui) indicates, learning the English or any other language does not lead to the displacement of identities. Conferences should be held to present the importance of diversity to the protagonists of the approach.

٩. Conclusion

There is need for an illustrative approach to teaching the language in Iraq by adopting a CLT oriented mechanism. However, this as realised in the essay may present obstacles which must be overcome. Such obstacles lie in the culture of Iraq. As found in the paper, the Iraq teaching mode is teacher centred while the proposed CLT based learning is student based. This is likely to attract a conflict which should be dealt with. In dealing with this concern, the Iraqis should be made to realise the importance of diversity and democracy towards achieving what other parts have done by adopting the approach. As also established, the Iraq country was colonised by the Europeans, an introduction of a foreign based approach to local studies may elicit rumblings on the pretext of neo-colonialism. As a result, this challenge must also be addressed. The neo-colonialism case is supported by the fact that language gives a people an identity. If English goes ahead to give a section of Iraqis an identity, then it follows that an identity similar to what it gives other people elsewhere is extended to Iraq. However, the benefits attributable to such a program make a strong case for its adoption.

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