



CULTURAL FACTORS IN IMPLEMENTING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING METHODS IN ISLAMIC INSTITUTES IN PAKISTAN

Muhammad Asad Habib

PhD Scholar (Applied Linguistics)

University of Management and Technology, Lahore.

Email: masadlhr29@gmail.com

Zafar Iqbal Bhatti

Assistant Professor, University of Management and Technology, Lahore

Email: ravianz902@gmail.com

Anila Akbar

DLC, University of Management & Technology, Lahore

anila.akbar@umt.edu.pk

Zarmeena Khan

University of Central Punjab, FASS, Lahore

Zarmeena.khan@ucp.edu.pk

Kulsoom Najam

Department of Sport Sciences and Physical Education, PU.

meerub27@gmail.com

Abstract

The aim of this study is to conduct action research in the ESL classroom in Islamic institutions in Lahore, Pakistan. This research is conducted to find out the usefulness of the Communicative Language Teaching method to teach English by taking into consideration their cultural values and norms. Culture plays a vital role in implementing the CLT methodology. For this purpose 8 male and 7 female students were selected purposefully. The results show that CLT proves to be a good source of learning as the students showed that it is increasingly interesting and effective for building language skills. However, a lack of skilled teachers is hampering the process. Although it was a new thing for the students still they took part in all the activities and seems to enjoy it. This reduced their shyness and make them feel that they are equal stakeholders in the classroom. Students also showed a preference for those things which are culturally close to them.

Introduction

The communicative approach to language teaching (CLT) is a recent development in the field of second language learning. The approach necessitates that the culture should be inculcated in the curriculum and an important part of teaching and learning. Omission of culture from the teaching process makes it imprecise and incomplete. Thus, the understanding of the cultural context in the teaching of language plays a vital role in both the learning and teaching process (Lado, 1964). Thus, many researchers have tried to explore the relationship between culture and language teaching. Their work is mainly focused on developing an all-inclusive framework for the learning culture within the context of learner's outcomes. However, their focus of research is mainly on the levels of learners output in learning culture in a perfunctory way (Chen, 2013; Georgiou, 2011; Salem, 2013).

Furthermore, the importance of culture in the understanding of the language can never be denied. Research on the learning of language shows that language and culture are embedded in each other and present a reflection of each other. Therefore, the ability to speak and interact in a given culture is a must in communicative competence. It entails that the teaching of the culture can make students understand, comprehend and communicate the target language in a better way. The interplay of language and culture in the teaching and learning process is thus, almost inevitable for better performance of the students.

The present study endeavours to work on the related literature to make some suggestions on this issue of the learning of students in Islamic institutes (madrasas) with reference to their cultural values. The participants in this study are students of these madrasas studying English as a compulsory subject. It was observed that the students in these institutions felt that their cultural values are suppressed in English language classes. The course books provided also did not aid the transmission of culture into the teaching and learning process. This scenario creates a vacuum for the students in which they feel their values missing instead they think that a foreign language is imposed on them.

Back Ground of the Study

Traditional Islamic institutions (Madaras) possess a history in Islamic tradition. These Madaras arose as chief institutes for education, especially higher education. These madaras have taken their shapes according to the cultural and social differences across the world but their principal aim remains the same. Pertaining to their role in the building of the religious authority these madaras have a central place in the conservation and creation of knowledge. Due to the contemporary cult of modernization, these madaras are also subjected to some kind of changes but their basic make-up remains the same. These changes do not pose questions of their role or function in society (Rana, 2009). In Pakistani perspective, a lot more to be done in this respect (Bhatti,2020)

The recent debates on the reformation of these madaras have raised different questions. The process is accentuated after the famous 9:11 incidence in America when these madaras, for the first time, directly alleged for providing resources to terrorism. Thus, a wave of reformation in madaras is generated and it affected Pakistani madaras as well. Therefore, under the international pressure for reformation in madaras, the Perviz Musharraf government took steps and a number of changes are introduced in the curriculum of madaras (Musharraf, 2003). A variety of efforts are done to make the syllabi of madaras according to the need of the contemporary world.

The attempts to change the curriculum has been resisted by some ulmas (religious scholars) but the majority among them agreed on the addition of new courses for the students. These courses not only add value to the education but provide students with chances to compete in the modern world and earn their bread. It also brought these students into the mainstream worldview. Before that, the only option available to the students were to undertake the imamat of the mosque or teach in the madaras. With the addition of new stuff, students are able to view the world in a different way which in a way added value to their lives(Rana, 2009).

Among different changes, the addition of English language learning is a new step taken by the government. It opens the world to the students where they can learn new knowledge and understanding. English being the lingua franca of the world hold the key to knowledge in every field. Thus, it was a good step for the students who not only get a good chance to make his connection with the world but also earn their bread in new fields. In addition to it, it is a good opportunity for the student to tell the world about the true nature of Islam and make them aware of the message of peace.

The introduction of English in the curriculum is not without challenges. The fact of the matter is that the English language was tagged as a language of colonial powers and the language of usurpers since the British colonial period in the sub-continent. Thus, a general hatred is found among people more especially in religious circles. This abhorrence towards the English language restricted the Muslims of the subcontinent in many ways. They were devoid of jobs and they were left behind in the education field as well (Rahman, 2005). It was Sir Sayed Ahmed Khan who took the initiative of educating the Muslims of the subcontinent. He preached to Muslims to learn the English language so that they can get jobs and can study modern-day technology (Hassaan, 1959).

In recent years, English is made mandatory for all the students studying in madaras. It was felt that the students are not taking much interest in the learning of English and instead of focusing they become silent which according to De Certeau (1984) is a kind of resistance. This situation demands a careful look into the matter. This study is an effort to make action research on the problem identified during the lectures in the ESL classroom in madaras in Lahore. The data for this study is collected through the interviews conducted by the students enrolled in English language courses. Classroom observation is also done in order to get first-hand knowledge of the student's behaviour. For this, both participant and non-participant observation is done.

It was observed during these lectures that the reason for the lack of interest of the student is that "tutorial room is decontextualized from the students' point of view when their feelings, beliefs about what is significant, their reasoning and their experience are not part of the assumed context of the teacher's communication" (Young, 1992, p. 59). Their culture is ignored in this process and hence, the students feel decontextualized and dislocated from their cultural affiliations. Therefore, a need is identified to resolve this issue and suggest a framework on this issue.

The objective of the study

The objectives of the study are to:

1. Define the role of culture in the teaching of English in Islamic institutions.
2. To provide an explanation of cultural factors in implementing communicative language teaching methods in Islamic institutes in Pakistan.

Significance of the study

The work done in the area of second language acquisition (SLA) is vast but the implementation of theories of the second language in the Pakistani context especially in religious institutions is scarce. Therefore, this work is an attempt to fill this gap. This study propagates that the communicative language teaching method which is a recent approach in SLA can work better if cultural aspects are taken care of. This study also shows the importance of culture in the learning of a second language.

Methodology

The nature of the study determines the selection of methodological procedures. This study is observational and requires oral material for investigation. The study is qualitative. The

researcher has tried to gather data in its naturalistic setting. The researcher adopted a qualitative approach because it is the best approach for the descriptive research for such phenomena that cannot be instrumentally gauged including behaviour, thoughts, speech and feeling (Morrison, 1989).

Sampling

The researcher used the purposive sampling technique for the collection of data. The sample for this study is 15 students which are enrolled in the English courses in Madaras. The tool for the collection of data is semi-structured and structured interviews along with classroom observations. Classroom observation consists of both participant and non-participant observations. This procedure allows the researcher to get first-hand knowledge of the whole situation.

Data Analysis

In this work, the researcher pursues to perceive the voices of the students studying in religious institutions presently registered in English language courses. All participants are ethnically Punjabi and Pathans. The study examines the attachment of CLT to the cultural values of these students. The rationale for learning English is both academic and functional. On the academic side much has already been written hence, this study seeks to explain the functional side of learning English. The students need functional and practical language in order to get good jobs, express themselves and interact with people all over the world.

Communicative Language Teaching

The Communicative Language Teaching method came in response to Audio- Lingual and Situational Language Teaching methods (Parrish, 2004). The method was devised to cater for the needs of the people living in different cultures so that they can communicate in different circumstances to fulfil different tasks. The main focus of CLT is on the function of the language. This can be achieved by changing the classroom focus from teacher-oriented to student-oriented. Therefore, students are engaged in diverse situations making debates and discussions in different contexts hence, learning to communicate according to different situations (Lee & Vanpatten, 1995). This approach does not recommend a certain method but it consists of a number of teaching techniques and methods encompassing a wide array of functional purposes. It also entails that there is no standard or established authority, therefore, the method perpetuates on the functional aspect of language learning (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Procedures

Three activities were designed and conducted. These activities were carefully designed after a long discussion with the instructors and after observing the classrooms for three weeks. For the designing of each activity, the focus of the week was considered. For the first week, the focus was on the purchasing of different items from the departmental store. The students were given the role of shopkeeper and Byers alternatively. They were asked to provide or get information on different products available in the store. The second activity conducting job interviews. The students were alternatively given the role of interviewer and interviewee. They were given a choice from a number of different professions and they were selected according to

their choice. The third activity is a group activity where the students were divided into groups and asked to perform the role of presenters one by one and the rest of the students being the participants. They were asked to take the role of their favourite anchor and ask the participants different questions about any social issue of their choice.

The students are interviewed after the activities about the experience they get from the activity. Students are provided a relaxed environment so that they can feel comfortable and can answer the questions. Structured and unstructured interviews are conducted to make the student talk about their experiences without any limitations. These interviews are the assessments for the participants of the study. In the first week the assessments provided all the demographic details of the student thus, it was not required afterwards.

The data analysis consists of two main areas. The first area is the part where participants agreed on the responses and thus provided us with the generalizable data of the issues that must be deciphered and addressed. The second part of the replies consisted of the responses with diverse nature of answers. Their idiosyncratic responses showed aspects that were particular to a certain mindset. After the collection of all the data, the challenge was to go through all the responses carefully read all the field notes so that no aspect would be left behind. This approach gave the researcher the entirety of the data and pronounce all the important themes. Once these themes are identified the researcher coded the data according to different themes. Similar themes were gathered in groups and formed a larger group. These themes were focused primarily on this paper.

Assessment

After the completion of every task, the students were assessed for their attitudes and beliefs about the language learning context. Interviews were structured in a way that the first part of the interviews consist of the teaching-learning environment and preferences that are indicative of the basic aspects of CLT. Their mother tongue is preferred so that they can convey their real emotions and believes. This is in line with the Cultural assessment Hypothesis (CAH). It advocates that interviewees can provide the best answers when the language they use is closely related to their culture. Their demographic information is given in table 1.

Table 1. Participant Demographic Information

Participant #	Gender	Age	Previous Education	Months in this class
1	Male	19	Matriculation	3
2	Male	20	Matriculation	3
3	Female	22	Intermediate	3
4	Female	23	Intermediate	3
5	Female	22	Intermediate	3

6	Female	21	Matriculation	3
7	Female	23	Intermediate	3
8	Male	19	Matriculation	3
9	Male	20	Matriculation	3
10	Male	23	Intermediate	3
11	Male	25	Intermediate	3
12	Male	23	Intermediate	3
13	Female	21	Intermediate	3
14	Female	22	Intermediate	3
15	Male	20	Matriculation	3

The first part of the interviews was related to value in the whole mechanism related to language learning. They were asked to value the part which they think is best in their English language learning experience. Then they were asked to provide their judgment on 20 different topics which were related to the functional nature of language learning. These topics included the classroom dynamic, the role of learner and instructor, the use of the material in the classroom for teaching and the correction of mistakes or errors etc. In order to accommodate in their own language and to overcome the communication barriers, their own language was used for the interviews (Harzing, 2003). This assessment is meant to evaluate the value statements underlying CLT. The second part is related to the process of communicative activities. Students are asked to provide their feedback on the activities which are related to these activities. After their feedback, the following important themes were discussed and their results are given below.

1. Collaborative Learning

The main focus of CLT is to have a student-oriented classroom. The role of the instructor is to facilitate. The facilitator should encourage the learner to have a collaborative environment where the discussions among the student can take place. The learner should be given a chance and encouragement to talk to each other in a free environment and to practice their skills. This discussion is an important means of learning a second language. By evaluating the student's responses it is clear that almost all the students agreed that the interaction among them is of great value to them. The participants of the study welcome corporate thinking and learning. They are keen to interact with their classmates and other students. Thus this method seems to have a strong connecting point among them and is very adaptive in nature.

Role of Teacher in Class Room

As mentioned above, CLT propagates a shift from a teacher-oriented classroom to a student-centred classroom. The role of the teacher in this context is minimized and the centre of activity is the student. Thus, the transmission of knowledge from the teacher of students is by taking students as an active stockholder as propounded by Paulo Freire (Collins, 1977). The teacher plays the role of guide through communication in the contextual use and along with the error correction and the instruction of grammar. The students in response to the questions showed a preference for the teacher to take an active leader in the classroom. They also showed a strong inclination towards corrective feedback for the correction of errors. They also showed an expectancy that the role of the teacher in controlling and propelling the communication in the

classroom due to the command over the language. Overall the students believe that teacher should lead the classroom and should have a strong presence in the classroom.

Corrective Feedback on Errors

Another important factor in the implementation of CLT is the teacher's corrective feedback on the errors. The contextual instruction on grammar and error correction is one of the main focuses of CLT. Errors are important in a way that they allow the teacher to understand the problems faced by the students. Errors are thought of as a basic tenant of learning of language and its use in different environments. The responses of the students suggest that students show a strong preference towards the corrective feedback of the errors. They want their work to be analyzed and verified. Unavailability of feedback from the teacher motivates them and they feel more confident. It also allowed them to take care of their shortcomings. The discussion among the students also allows them to discuss these errors and have a sound analysis. On the contrary, the absence of feedback can lead them to confusion. The students also indicated that the error correction regarding pronunciation and writing make them better in terms of using the same thing correct and better in terms of fear for errors which in turn would lead to silence. The students also specified that the uncertainty in the dearth of feedback make them silent. But this issue was not highlighted by the majority of participants which indicated that the majority of the participant was ready to make mistakes despite the fact they were not been provided with the correct answer. Another very important thing to realize is the fact that the teacher's role is to encourage students to make mistakes so that they get the confidence to express themselves even if they were short of vocabulary or correct grammatical structures. Students found it comfortable to work with a teacher who gave them the confidence to commit errors. Students also asserted that they want the teacher to take a central role in the classroom.

An important thing to consider here is that correction of mistakes or errors cannot be linked to the general cultural trend rather it is more idiosyncratic in nature and can be attached to individual personality. Study of error correction more specifically can turn a new genre on.

Course material

An important thing in these classes is a careful selection of course materials. It is challenging in a way that students studying in these Islamic institutes come from different geographical areas and thus, possess distinct identities. Teaching the English language to these students is a sensitive issue as the majority of the students think that their own identities are repressed and they do not have their own voice in the ESL classroom. Therefore it is important to maintain a balance in the sense that the activities designed should consider the learning objectives on one hand and on the other it should project their own identities. The designing of the material should consist of the careful selection of accurate and activity-based non-pedagogical pregnant with the "richness of context and purpose" (Dunnette, 2015, p. 72).

Student feedback showed that student may not able to gauge the authentic material but they showed mild preference towards material that take care of their own voices. The material should also be easy to get to and understandable. Their responses showed that students are unable to comprehend the utility of some of the tenants which include letters and applications etc. the reason they indicated is the use of technology which made it easy for the students to do all these activities. Their inclination is towards the practical and functional part of the course material. They enjoy all those topics which are related to real-life situations which enabled them to understand the usefulness of language learning. Although students were aware of the language

teaching in the real world context yet, they seemed to know little about what inspired them in the classroom.

Students also showed an eagerness to develop certain language skills which could make the learning of language easy. These skills include receptive skills like listening, skimming, scanning and productive skills like correct pronunciation etc. in the end they showed that the classroom instruction should be synchronized with the CLT practices i.e. the connection between learning and real-world situations.

Decisiveness

One of the main tenants of CLT is the shift from the teacher-driven classroom to the student-centred learning environment. Thus, the traditional banking system of education is discouraged and the use of activity-based, real-life relevant context is encouraged (Freire, 1985, 2018). Despite the fact that the students maintained that they feel shy they were willing to actively participate in the activities and communicate. The observations made in the classrooms are showing almost a similar situations where student were feeling shy and lazy during their long lesson routines but when it came to participation they were eager to partake. It is, therefore, important for the teachers to create a balance between lessons and the use of the language in an actual context where students feel at home and can understand the use of the language.

Teaching of grammar

CLT propagates the teaching of language through the use of language in real-life situations. Hence, the learning is heightened by the functional use in textual contexts. This richness and relevance create an ambience for the student to act as an active participant thus, feeling himself the part of the environment (Lado, 1964; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). As per the syllabus is concerned, the functional themes make the majority of it. Even for the teaching of grammar, CLT provides a similar nexus where the teaching takes place in a functional context and its usage in the context.

In response to grammar teaching students, almost all showed a strong preference towards functional and context-based teaching of grammar. The topics which are related to the use of language in their real-life attracted them more than those which are merely taught as a part of their syllabus and did not belong to their own context. During the observations in the classroom, it was seen many times that students were not focusing on the lessons which were out of their interest or real-life contexts. In the interviews, respondents showed a similar sort of inclination. Some of them replied that grammar is not important as it is of no use. They remarked that what is the use of teaching grammar when they can communicate better without learning it. There is no doubt that the participants are eager to master the language which includes a grammar of the language but they were taking the term grammar as the linguistic form of English language, not the terms which are referred to the labels used for these forms. The respondents are of the view that for them grammar is highly practical without being taught as mere the labelling of certain terms, in fact, it is form-focused.

Concluding Remarks on Communicative Language Teaching:

When asked indirectly about the different aspects of communicative language teaching in general, the participants of the study provided valuable data regarding different aspects of CLT. The first is the role of the teacher in the teaching and learning environment. The teacher is the main focus of the classroom and a guide to all the processes (Hughes, 2005). He is the one who has the responsibility of creating a conducive environment for better learning. Participants suggested that the teacher should provide regular feedback on the errors and mistakes of the

students with the remodelling of the answers from the students. They also believe that teacher should initiate the activities which then make the student come out of their shell and take part in the activities in general but they also admitted that the initiative towards learning should be taken by the students so that the teacher can implement his plans and feel comfortable while executing them. The material should also be authenticated by the teacher himself so that the student can get the best material for their learning.

In response to the activities designed for the understanding of different aspects of English language learning, the students acknowledged the activity part more especially activities connected with their own cultural aspects. They also take part in other activities but they did not feel comfortable in activities where their culture is disconnected. Culture seems to be one of their major concerns in learning a foreign language. Another thing connected to CLT values is the classroom size. The students felt uncomfortable in classrooms where they cannot get enough chances to take part in different activities designed for the execution of CLT. The classroom size according to them should be small. Schneider (2002) is of the view that classroom size should be small to incorporate all the facilities available. Thus it affects all the learning outcomes (Mitchell, 1989).

Finally, in response to the question about the suggestions from the student's side to make these activities better, students suggested three things. The first for them is the elaboration of the activities either by the teacher or the teacher assistants. The second is group work in the classroom. They almost all enjoyed group work and wanted to work in groups more often. For them, it creates an easing environment where their peers can guide them and vice versa. Third, in their preference is the continuation and follow up from the teachers. The teacher should follow up in terms of writing assignments or speaking or listening drills which they believe will be good practice for them to learn the targeted skill.

References

- Brumfit, C. J., & Johnson, K. (1979). *The communicative approach to language teaching* (Vol. 308): Oxford University Press Oxford.
- Bhatti, ZI (2020) The English Language Teaching in Religious Institutes of Pakistan *jahan-e-tahqiq*, Vol.3 (1) 1-10 ISSN Online 2709-7617
- Chen, C. (2013). Empathy in Language Learning and Its Inspiration to the Development of Intercultural Communicative Competence. *Theory & Practice in Language Studies*, 3(12).
- Collins, D. E. (1977). Paulo Freire, his life, works, and thought.
- De Certeau, M. (1984). *The practice of everyday life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 117.
- Dunnette, J. R. (2015). Cultural Factors in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching Methods with Karen English Language Learners.
- Freire, P. (1985). *The politics of education: Culture, power, and liberation*: Greenwood Publishing Group.
- Freire, P. (2018). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*: Bloomsbury publishing USA.
- Georgiou, M. (2011). *Intercultural competence in foreign language teaching and learning: action inquiry in a Cypriot tertiary institution*. University of Nottingham,
- Harzing, A.-W. (2003). The use of English questionnaires in cross-national research: Does cultural accommodation obscure national differences?
- Hassaan, R. B. (1959). *The educational movement of Sir Syed Ahmed Khan, 1858-1898*. SOAS University of London,
- Hughes, J. (2005). The role of teacher knowledge and learning experiences in forming technology-integrated pedagogy. *Journal of technology and teacher education*, 13(2), 277-302.
- Lado, R. (1964). LANGUAGE TEACHING, A SCIENTIFIC APPROACH.
- Mitchell, D. (1989). How Changing Class Size Affects Classrooms and Students.



- Morrison, B. (1989). Using news broadcasts for authentic listening comprehension. *ELT journal*, 43(1), 14-18.
- Musharraf, P. (2003). Enlightened Moderation Is the Best Course to Fight Terror. *New Perspectives Quarterly*, 20(4), 46-48.
- Rahman, T. (2005). The Muslim response to English in South Asia: With special reference to inequality, intolerance, and militancy in Pakistan. *Journal of Language, Identity, and Education*, 4(2), 119-135.
- Rana, M. A. (2009). Mapping the madrasa mindset: political attitudes of Pakistani Madaris. *Conflict and peace studies*, 2(1), 1-13.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*: Cambridge university press.
- Salem, L. R. (2013). *Incorporating intercultural competence in English language teaching in a Lebanese university intensive English program context: An action research project*. University of Leicester,
- Schneider, M. (2002). Do School Facilities Affect Academic Outcomes?
- Young, R. (1992). *Critical theory and classroom talk* (Vol. 2): Multilingual Matters.