An Investigation into EFL Teachers’ Conceptions of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Applied to English Language Curriculum in Sudan
(A case study: Secondary Schools - Port Sudan town)

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenographical investigation explores conceptions of the communicative Language Teaching (CLT) held by a sample of Port Sudan Town English teachers in relation to their implementation of English language curriculum in secondary schools. A mixed approach employing quantitative (survey questionnaire) and qualitative (semi-structure interview) research methods were used for data collection during the first phase of this research. The Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) programme was used for analyzing the quantitative data. The researcher found many conceptions and misconceptions of CLT held by the teachers, the difficulties that facing learning/teaching process, in addition to the possibility of implementing such methods in Sudanese context. This study is significant because it adds to the literature new insights about EFL teachers’ conceptions and practices of the CLT as a Western teaching methodology for Teaching EFL in developing countries and challenges the argument of considering this approach inappropriate in these contexts. The findings of this study also have potential implications for school reform, EFL teacher education, training, and developing the role of language inspectors. Research recommendations include providing schools with teaching facilities and learning resources for students’ independent learning as a significant factor for promoting the successful implementation of the CLT, the time that was given to the ELT in Port Sudan secondary schools must be increased, and the use of authentic materials which enable students to interact with the real language and pupils would feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom.
المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق من مدى فهم واستيعاب معلم ومعلمي المدارس الثانوية بمدينة بورتسودان لمفهوم تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية عبر أسلوب الاستخدام المباشر للغة باستخدام طرق معينة كلعب الأدوار والعمل الجماعي والتفاعل داخل فعاليات الدروس فيما يسمى ب (CLT) ، و مدى إمكانية تطبيق هذا الإسلوب خلال المنهج الدراسي الحالي لمادة اللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس الثانوية . قام الباحث بدراسة مستفدياً لكل ما يتعلق بموضوع البحث من موانع اكاديمية مرتبطة ب (CLT) . اتبع الباحث المنهج التحليلي للظواهر (PHENEMENOGRAPHY) وهو يختلف عن موانع التحليلي النوعي أو الكمي بأنه يبحث في مفهوم معين لدى مجموعة من الناس وليس من قبل أفراد ، اتبع الباحث أسلوب مزدوج (كمي و نوعي) بتوجهه استناداً إلى عينة من معلمي ومعلمات اللغة الإنجليزية بالمدارس الثانوية بمدينة بورتسودان في الجزء الأول من البحث إضافة إلى مقابلات اختيارية لزيادة الإيضاح . في الجزء الثاني استخدم الباحث استنباطاً للموجهين التربويين لمعلم ي مادة اللغة الإنجليزية بمدينة بورتسودان . تم تحليل البيانات بواسطة البرنامج الإحصائي (SPSS) .

تم التطرق خلال البحث للعديد من المفاهيم الصحية والأخرى الخاطئة عن (CLT) من قبل المعلمين والمعلمات والمعوقات التي تواجه العملية التعليمية إضافة إلى إمكانية تطبيق هذا الإسلوب في المدارس السودانية . وتانتي أهمية هذه الدراسة كمحاولة جدية في مجال تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية القفز الضوء على فهم ومعاينة إسلوب (CLT) جوبي تحليلي اللغة الإنجليزية واستخدامه في الدول النامية وهل هو ملائم لطبيعة هذه الدول . نتائج هذه الدراسة أكبت على جملة من الإصلاحات الضرورية فيما يتعلق بالمدارس الثانوية بمدينة بورتسودان واساليب التعليم فيها ، إضافة إلى أهمية تأهيل وتدريب المعلمين ، والتاكيد على أهم دور الموجه التربوي في دعم وتطوير العملية التعليمية .

اشتملت أهم التوصيات على تنوير المدارس ال ثانوية بالمساعدة التعليمية والمراجع العلمية كعامل هام لتعزيز التطبيق الصحيح لأسلوب (CLT) علاوة على أهمية زيادة الزمن المخصص لتدريب اللغة الإنجليزية بالإضافة لإستخدام المواد الدراسية والملاحظات ذات المصدر الموثوق مما يمكن التلاميذ من تعلم واستخدام اللغة بكفاءة خارج قاعات الدراسة.
5.3 The recommendations

- The teachers and the inspectors emphasized the importance of conducting in-service training as a part of their preparation for implementing the curriculum innovation. By exposing teachers to continuous training programmes to ensure the continuation of proposed changes.

- The positive views of the majority of the teachers (88%) about this approach and about its appropriateness for teaching the English curriculum in Port Sudan secondary schools may enhance the success of these training programmes. However, it is important to conduct this training through a learner-centred approach of instruction.

- Large numbers of students in classrooms can lead teachers to depend on methods of recitation and memorization. The average number of students in the classrooms of the teachers who participated in this study seems not to be so large to lead them to depend on recitation and memorization or to avoid implementing communicative learner-centred activities.

- A consideration of the benefits of implementing pair and group work activities even in large classes with teacher-led activities may encourage language teachers to engage students in more pair and group work activities. These activities offer valuable opportunities for language practice, for moving the ownership from teachers to students and for developing students’ communication skills. If students want to improve their speaking skills, there’s no substitute for pair and group work.

- As for the time limit, a lot of discussions were made by all groups of the participants. Nearly all of them were unhappy about the time allocated to language teaching in secondary schools and they expressed the view that more time needed to be given to this subject. Concerning the portion of time that should be allocated to language teaching different suggestions have been made by different scholars as well as researchers but it has to be borne in mind that the allocated time has to be compatible with the amount of teaching as well as portion
of textbooks and also what teachers are expected to do. Discussing how much time should be given to this subject in schools is not going to be considered in this research since this would require a deeper study and would involve more research in the field. However, according to both teachers and inspectors the time that was given to the ELT in Port Sudan secondary schools must be increased since according to teachers they had not enough time to even cover textbooks in their entirety and according to the authors more time has to be spent on this subject in order to fulfill the requirements of a communicative curriculum. Although, it has to be kept in mind that nearly all teachers of every subject always think there is not enough time available in order to teach what they have to teach, so this does not mean this is always true.

- CLT also entails the use of authentic materials and the use of English in class. What teachers need, therefore, are texts which students can understand the general meaning of, whether they are truly authentic or not. But texts whether authentic or not must be realistic models of written or spoken English. If teachers can find genuinely authentic materials which their students can cope with that will be advantageous; if not they should be using material which simulates authentic English. In order to justify why using such materials the researcher explains that authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people. So, the researcher has already suggested that these materials may be motivating, but there is another reason for preferring them. The researcher then continued that to pursue the crucial text attack skills, students need texts which exhibit the characteristics of true discourse: having something to say, being coherent and clearly organized. Composed (i.e. specifically written) or simplified texts do not always have these qualities. The striving for simplicity may lead to vacuous texts (merely vehicles for language presentation, conveying little or no real message) or unnatural ones, lacking many of the features expected to be found in normal discourse. So, authentic
materials enable students to interact with the real language and pupils would feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom.

- Having discussed the importance of authenticity, a number of criteria need to be considered in selecting authentic texts for classroom use, the researcher presented the following as the most obvious:
  
  ✓ Relevance (to syllabus, to learners’ needs).
  ✓ Intrinsic interest of topic/theme.
  ✓ Cultural appropriateness.
  ✓ Linguistic demands.
  ✓ Cognitive demands.
  ✓ Logical considerations: e.g. length, legibility/audibility.
  ✓ Quality (as a model of use or as a representative token of a text-type).
  ✓ Exploitability.

- CLT is directed at use, i.e. the ability to use language meaningfully and appropriately in the construction of discourse. Two criteria for evaluating how communicative classroom activities are described here by the researcher as follows:

  ✓ When the students are doing activity, they must be concentrating on what they are saying, not how they say it. They must have some message that they want to communicate.

  ✓ The activity must involve the students in using a variety of language, not just one specific language form. The students should feel free to improvise, using whatever resources they choose.

- Language forms (e.g. structures, vocabulary items, features of stress or intonation) as the other pupils’ needs in relation to the target language. There is attention to meaning and use as well as language form.

- Furthermore, as discussed in earlier chapters, one of the main features of CLT is communicative competence. Communicative competence entails knowing not
only the language code or the form of language, but also what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation. It deals with the social and cultural knowledge that speakers are presumed to have which enables them to use and interpret linguistic forms. Communicative competence also includes knowledge of who may speak or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, how to talk to persons of different statuses and roles. A well-known description of communicative competence has been that it includes knowledge of what to say, when, how, where, and to whom. In effect, it takes in all of the verbal and non-verbal mechanisms which native speakers use unconsciously to communicate with each other. Having said that, it could be argued that both meaning and form are inseparable parts in CLT and therefore, there is a need for a programme that would emphasize both of them.

- Motivation also has a key role within the CLT as well. The second strand of CLT developed from the idea that if students get enough exposure to language and opportunities for its use and if they are motivated then language learning will take care of itself. As discussed in earlier chapters, one of the main principles of CLT is student centredness and motivation plays a vital role within this principle too.

- Also, as discussed earlier, one of the reasons why CLT has become very successful and attractive is because it can provide realistic and motivating language practice. Moreover, it needs to be borne in mind that motivation is one of the reasons why the communication gap, as one of the vital principles of CLT, is important. It must be rather tedious for students constantly to be telling each other things that they already know. But more important is that without the communication gap present, important communicative processes may not get practiced.

- Student-centred programme activates the students’ own way of learning. Instructional strategies such as pair and group work, role-plays, problem-solving and games which promote students’ cooperative learning and foster their
interaction inside classrooms should be a common characteristic of learner-centred language classrooms. These activities are useful for developing students’ communication skills and for directing them towards self-directed learning.