

# **Ineffectiveness of the Communicative Language Teaching approach in language Acquisition in an Arab non-native speaker context**

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## **Abstract**

The CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) approach emerged in the late 1960s as a response to the prevailing discontentment with grammar-based instruction and audiolingualism in EFL (English as a foreign language) classrooms. However, the emphasis on fluency versus accuracy in the CLT approach has shown to fall short of the desired competency among non-native speakers of English. Learners typically express the need to know more vocabulary both for reading comprehension and to enable them to write on topics prescribed for their curriculum.

This paper aims to identify the major components that can be combined with the communicative approach to support the teaching and learning of English in a non-native context at a Saudi university. The paper will also investigate the effectiveness of using non-native or authentic texts in the EFL classroom with reference to studies conducted in the field. The evidence for the qualitative data is collected from a Questionnaire and informally structured interviews with five volunteers who are faculty members at the university where the study was conducted. The research material used is mainly secondary. The paper will present an exploration of other researchers' work on the issue. The research hypothesis is that the CLT approach as it is being implemented at a Saudi university is ineffective in enabling language acquisition. The research findings indicate that for the CLT approach to be effective in non-native contexts, it has to be adapted to suit the needs of the context in which the English language is being taught.

**Keywords:** CLT approach, functional/notional, EFL/non-native, students' performance, language competency

## **Introduction**

The communicative language teaching or CLT approach was first introduced in the late 1960s as an alternative to the grammar-based approaches as it became increasingly clear that a focus on grammatical knowledge alone did not lead to learners' communicative competence of the target language. Situational language teaching (spanning from the 1930s-1960s) with its emphasis on meaning, content and situation (Firth, Halliday) was seriously being questioned by British linguists on its effectiveness in language acquisition (Communicative Approach - Teflpedia, 2015). Some of the main drawbacks of the approach were its underlying views about language learning. Chomsky (Chomsky, 1957 cited in wikipedia) showed that the structural and behaviouristic approach was in error and that learners do not acquire their mother tongue through repetition and habit formation. Instead the notional syllabus was put in place which did not emphasize grammatical structures but focused instead on the communicative meanings the learner needed to understand in order to interact. The notional/functional syllabus designed the content around the notions and functions of time, duration, quantity, location and the language the learner needs to communicate. So language was arranged to suit different speech acts such as that needed to express a request, make an apology, give an invitation, and so on (Communicative Approach, 2016).

Increasingly, the CLT approach began to look like a more practical alternative. Its emphasis on classroom activities such as role play, pair/group work and use of authentic language in learning and acquisition came to replace traditional language teaching and stress on grammar forms. In fact, the CLT approach gained currency as the panacea to all language teaching problems (Morrow & Johnson as cited in Littlewood, 2013). However, in recent years, EFL (English as a Foreign Language) practitioners are beginning to question its effectiveness and recommending that it be complemented with other approaches for a more enriching experience.

## **The study background**

Students in the higher education context in Saudi Arabia have reported difficulties in certain skill areas, particularly, Vocabulary, Reading and Writing. It is in this context that the issue of the CLT approach is being investigated. The CLT approach based on a functional/notional syllabus being used to deliver the curriculum raises certain

questions on its effectiveness and has implications for "students' performance, motivation and perceived self-efficacy" (Bandura as cited in Cheng, 2014). The root of the problem seems to be the precept of the functional/notional syllabus which emphasizes the productive skills of speaking and writing. The lack of attention to the receptive skills (listening and reading) appears to undermine their role in foreign language contexts leading to perceived deficiencies in students' competency in these skill areas.

This study aims to identify which components may be incorporated into the CLT approach to effectively support English Language learning and teaching in an EFL context.

This paper will seek to address but is not limited, to the following questions:

1. Would teaching receptive skills before productive ones be more beneficial for language competency?
2. Should the CLT approach take into account grammatical accuracy and vocabulary lists and make them an essential component of communicative competence?
3. Would EFL learners benefit from the inclusion of authentic texts?

## **Literature Review**

David Nunan ( as cited in Banciu & Jireghie, 2012) defined the CLT context as one where learners learn to communicate through interacting in the second language; use authentic texts; focus not only on the language but also on the learning process itself; where the personal experience of the learner is part of the learning process; and learners attempt to activate language use outside the classroom in real life contexts. Most importantly, learners are assessed on their communicative competence rather than on their knowledge of grammar rules. This concept was welcomed in non-native classrooms particularly in the countries of the 'Expanding Circle' ("Braj Kachru", 2016) where English has no historical or governmental role and where learners have little or no prior experience of the English language. Nonetheless, English is widely used as a foreign language or lingua franca.

"Communicative Language Teaching is best considered as an approach rather than a method"(Al Humaidi, n.d.) and revolves around "communicative competence"

(Communicative Approach - Teflpedia, 2015). This is realized by pair and group work which is thought to create opportunities for optimum practice of the functions and forms of the language with the aim of helping learners take greater responsibility for their learning and develop learner autonomy. Savignon, in her book *Interpreting Communicative Language Teaching: Contexts and concerns in Teacher Education* (cited in Communicative Approach - Teflpedia, 2015) includes the linguist M. Berns' eight characteristics of CLT namely that language is used to communicate for a purpose either orally or in writing; diversity (different varieties of English) is recognized; more than one variety can be used as a model for learning and teaching; and cultural aspects are taken into consideration as an essential part of speakers' communicative competence. The CLT approach is lauded for its flexibility in that no single methodology is prescribed. However, in a teaching context where learners have mainly been used to memorization with little opportunity for critical thinking or opportunities for the application of target language skills in different academic contexts, an approach which "defines learning activities in terms of learning outcomes" (Beaumont & Chang as cited in Littlewood, 2013) can only bring about confusion.

The CLT approach emphasizes that learners engage in communicative acts for a purpose and hinges on the precept that students are motivated to learn because they wish to communicate meaningfully. CLT emphasizes "self-direction of the learners" (Oxford as cited in Communicative Approach - Teflpedia, 2015) where it is prescribed that the learner enters into situations which promote maximum communication to generate communicative proficiency. Teachers no longer expect accuracy in grammatical structures through memorization but require the learners to negotiate meaning and to communicate meaningfully in the target language. It is perhaps this excessive emphasis on fluency rather than on accuracy which is perceived as marginalizing the role of grammar teaching in the EFL classroom. According to Celce-Murcia (as cited in Anderson, 1993): "In spite of the intuitive appeal and the anecdotal evidence supporting proposals for exclusively communicative language teaching, there is equally appealing and anecdotal evidence... that a grammarless approach... can lead to the development of a broken, ungrammatical, pidgenized form of the target language beyond which students rarely

progress", a sentiment shared by CLT practitioners in different contexts and also evident from the volunteers who took part in this study.

Perhaps the biggest advantage of the CLT approach is that it has the potential to increase fluency enabling the learner to be more confident in interacting in the target language. This is supported by a number of second language acquisition theories.

Language teaching has traditionally been seen as moving between two extremes of grammatical versus functional syllabuses. This dichotomy springs from the belief that second language acquisition (SLA) occurs linearly, manifested in the behaviourists' understanding of second language acquisition as a stimulus-response (S-R) theory or cause-effect relationship which sees language as a set of structures and acquisition as habit formation. Behaviourism rested on the theory that language learning is a process where the learner discovers the rules of the language inductively from models provided by the environment which is the sole factor responsible for causing a change in behaviour patterns. (Behaviourism, n.d.)

However, Noam Chomsky, in light of his Universal Grammar, postulated that every individual is born with a built-in capacity to acquire language structures.

"Chomsky's theory proposes that the human brain contains a predefined mechanism (universal grammar) that is the basis for the acquisition of all language" (Tronolone, n.d.).

Krashen (1988) on the other hand, sees acquisition as the basic process involved in developing language proficiency and distinguishes it from mere learning of new language. Krashen believes that learning is a manifestation of the knowledge of grammar acquired consciously through instruction but will not automatically lead to acquisition. Krashen also holds that learning a language is a process which is most successful when language is used communicatively rather than through mere practice of language skills. Krashen's Input Hypothesis states that learners acquire a second language through 'Comprehensible Input' which requires that the learner's linguistic competence at the time of acquiring a new structure is a level higher or as he terms it: "i+1". Thus Krashen's model views acquisition as a linear process where grammar is acquired in a predictable order.

However, this theory has been refuted by Swain (cited in Krashen, 1998) who hypothesized learners must be encouraged to give accurate output in order to move towards more competence in the target language. So, both input and output hypotheses were taken into consideration; the first manifested in providing learners with good models of target language and the second in devising situations where learners would be pushed to produce the appropriate utterances.

But SLA theories which considered learning as a socially mediated process were also considered. Vygotsky for example, "recognizes that learning always occurs and cannot be separated from a social context. Consequently, instructional strategies that promote the distribution of expert knowledge where students collaboratively work together to conduct research, share their results, and perform or produce a final project, help to create a collaborative community of learners" (as cited in Neff, n.d.).

All the above theories formed a strong base for the implementation of the CLT approach in EFL classrooms and curriculum content designed for non-native contexts have increasingly leaned towards more interactive activities with an emphasis on productive skills such as speaking using role play or groups around situations where the desired language is required to be used to realize the communicative act. Teachers typically create materials and stimulate the production of the desired language through modeling the activity, providing prompts and so on.

Despite all these theories, it is still not fully understood how language is learned or acquired. Some of the most prominent approaches are the Grammar/Translation method, Audiolingualism, the Direct/Natural method and the TPR or Total Physical Response which combines information and skills through the kinesthetic sensory system. The Functional/CLT approach is the most favourable as it involves maximum interaction with students. So, while interactive activities are considered the best way to encourage fluency, they do not necessitate accuracy, particularly in a skill area such as writing, specifically academic writing, which requires a high degree of accuracy and complex thinking skills according to Bloom's Taxonomy.

### **Critique of the CLT approach**

During the past few decades the CLT approach has been eagerly welcomed by countries which do not have a history of British or American colonization and therefore no prior experience of the English language. However, there are several

limitations to using the approach. First of all, there is no systematic approach to implementing CLT techniques in EFL classrooms. Most teachers believe that CLT is a way of teaching learners communicatively in the second language with emphasis on listening and speaking skills and little focus on grammar and writing skills. In an interview of ten teachers of Japanese in Australia conducted by Sato and Kleinsasser (cited in Littlewood, 2013, p.2) it was revealed that most of them thought that CLT meant spending a lot of time in preparing materials and getting learners to communicate with each other. But the reality was that they mostly had teacher-led classrooms with few opportunities for learners to interact with them or amongst each other.

### **Challenges of CLT**

Perhaps the biggest challenge is the large number of classes and limited resources. Teachers fear the lack of classroom management and managing pair and group work in classes with large numbers of learners. Although, the ideal number is 10-15 per group, classes typically comprise from 25-30 students at this university. While the CLT approach encourages interaction, foreign language learners do not have enough target language to begin with and often end up using their native language. Syllabi are often taught progressively item by item instead of holistically contrary to the CLT approach. Teachers commonly take it upon themselves to impart knowledge rather than act as a guide or facilitator. And most importantly, exams are based on discrete items rather than on communication alone.

Chow & Mok-Cheung (cited in Littlewood, 2013 p.4) define the change from teacher-led classrooms to the CLT approach as a "quantum leap" which is also the case in Saudi Arabia. Both the teaching and learning context required for CLT is very new and vastly different from what they are used to. Teachers are now faced with the task of adapting and creating materials; change the way they teach, change the way they assess; use technology and shift from teacher-centered to learner-oriented classrooms. Furthermore, they now have to focus on both communicative as well as linguistic competence.

### **Methodology**

The theoretical framework for this study arose from the premise that the CLT approach as it is being implemented at a Saudi university is ineffective. Students report problems with understanding reading passages, particularly the vocabulary

contained therein and problems with writing. Considering that the semester exams are based on testing discrete grammar and vocabulary items, and assessing comprehension through reading and listening passages, the CLT approach which is more process than product oriented is clearly not helping in this regard. Learners are also assessed on paragraph writing which requires complex skills and learners generally often fail to produce coherent and cohesive paragraphs with multiple spelling errors, sentence construction and general communication.

The evidence used is based on a Questionnaire (See Appendix) and semi-structured interviews on various aspects of the approach namely its effectiveness, emphasis on vocabulary lists and grammar forms, whether receptive skills should be taught before productive ones, if authentic materials increase motivational levels to learn English, if role play, etc. are sufficient to achieve language competency and whether combining the CLT approach with academic reading and writing skills would help achieve learner autonomy. The study was conducted with the help of five participants who are members of the faculty and have been teaching English as a Foreign Language for several years. The qualitative data thus gathered has certain implications for the implementation of the CLT approach in combination with other components specific to this context.

## **Findings**

Regarding the overall effectiveness of the CLT approach, it is thought that a couple of exchanges in the target language are insufficient to achieve language competency. The main criticism voiced was that it was impossible to attain competency without knowledge of the language system as a whole. Another view is that the CLT approach is not entirely to blame and instead the system of delivering the curriculum was brought into focus. It is thought that the current modular system imposes reduced instruction time over the course of a couple of weeks only which is insufficient for learners to assimilate the taught material and be tested on it. The use of authentic materials was pointed out as being more effective in this context as opposed to the modified content found in the curriculum. It was also thought that the CLT approach worked better as the modules progressed with more engaged students. It was presumed that learners got used to the new approach and tried to adjust accordingly. There was also a feeling that more teachers' training was needed for the CLT to be

appropriately implemented and to know how and when to use it. There was also an indication that the themes and topics in the current books needed to be more relevant to learners' cultural context.

The use of vocabulary lists and a focus on grammar skills were considered helpful but it was felt that stand-alone grammar forms and vocabulary lists out of context were ineffective. It was thought that although learners may rote-learn grammar forms and vocabulary lists for the exam, they would not retain them in the long term. The understanding was that if students cannot relate what they are learning in English class to the rest of their university studies, they will not be motivated to use or internalize the new words and structures.

It was felt that teachers should encourage learners to read widely, ensure that students have exposure to good models of spoken English and help them to be aware of words. They should also be taught words and grammatical rules explicitly and be helped to form strategies to learn words independently. Moreover, grammar and vocabulary could be taught separately if it was geared towards the exams. However, in order to achieve some language competency, it was necessary to conduct a needs analysis for learners to determine which skills they needed to work on most.

There was general agreement that receptive skills should be taught before the productive ones. It is believed that this is the way learners normally acquire language as one needs comprehensible input before they can produce something. However, they were seen as interdependent and therefore best taught as integrated skills. It was pointed out that learners need to listen to a word first before they can pronounce it. However, one also needs to take into account the exception to this perceived rule as although learners may produce a lot of spoken language they may encounter difficulties in comprehending a native speaker. It was also thought that receptive skills cannot be taught independent of each other but that they were interrelated and that reading skills can contribute to the development of writing.

Authentic materials were thought to increase motivation to learn the target language, develop oral skills and fluency but the materials need to address students' needs, take into account their previous knowledge and how proficient they are. They were also thought to expose learners to the world outside the classroom thus having an educational value. Authentic materials also worked better with learners who had

relatively higher proficiency in the target language. Conversely, authentic materials might create problems for low level classes as they may contain vocabulary items which are not useful and mixed language structures making the reading texts difficult to comprehend. There were also perceived difficulties in finding authentic materials suitable to our context. Since the curriculum focuses on general English, authentic materials would have to be adapted to an extent.

It was thought that interactive activities such as role play, etc. were generally insufficient to realize language competency outside the classroom. Moreover, although they were deemed effective tools, they were not found sufficient to help learners communicate in an academic setting. Different teaching strategies and an integrated approach to teaching were advocated. But it was felt that interactive activities generally had a positive influence on learners. There was also a need to help students to communicate thoughts and ideas, but role play and other interactive activities done in a controlled environment like the classroom were too formal and dull.

The CLT approach was not thought to help academic writing skills as the approach tolerates inaccuracies, and was therefore regarded as ineffective. It was also thought that a more academic focus was needed in all four skills and not just writing. A think-pair-share approach was advocated where learners were facilitated by prompts to produce a piece of writing following a pair work activity.

### **Data analysis**

Learners at this university are taught English as a Foreign Language in the Foundation Year before they progress to their major. The course teaches them basic communication skills which does not help them in academic English skills, especially writing academic essays.

It is clear from the findings above that while the merits of the CLT approach cannot be denied there is a need to combine it with academic skills suitable to our context. This is in keeping with Littlewood's analysis (2013) which states that there is a need to *adapt* and not to *adopt* CLT techniques according to the context in which they are being applied. In his paper, 'Developing a Context-Sensitive Pedagogy for Communication-Oriented Language Teaching' (2013 p.11 & 12) Littlewood claims

that "we have entered a 'post-method' era" (e.g. Allwright & Hanks, 2009; Kumaravadivelu, 2003, 2006 and elsewhere; Littlewood, 2011 as cited in Littlewood, 2013 p.9) where teachers do not search for a single method or approach but "clarify principles to develop an approach" which is suitable for their context. There is also an emphasis on learners having some knowledge of the language system as opposed to using only sentences to communicate a purpose. Considering the difficulties learners are having with retaining vocabulary and grammar forms to use in different contexts and for different skills such as Reading comprehension and Writing, the necessity of helping learners with strategies to 'memorize' vocabulary and grammatical structures was also iterated. There are echoes of audiolingualism which focus on explicit teaching of these components. These strategies or scaffolding as it is known would provide learners with the support they need to learn new vocabulary and structures. There was also a need to help learners revisit the vocabulary and grammar items in different but related academic subjects or relating it to "other subject content" (Wesche & Skehan cited in Littlewood, 2013 p.15).

Interestingly, the CLT approach was not entirely laid to blame for the generally low performance of students in exams. Instead, the issue highlighted was the modular system currently being implemented which is serving as a crash course for learners and not giving them enough time to assimilate the content. Time constraints and a strictly controlled curriculum pacing guide were seen as the main obstacles to having an ideal communicative teaching/learning environment.

However, there are indications that the CLT approach also needs getting used to considering that learners are mainly brought up on rote-learning with teacher-led classrooms in school and therefore have little or no experience with learning through games and other interactive activities. Consequently, they are also unfamiliar with the kinds of strategies which would help them learn, and most importantly, pass their exam. There is evidence of some success though, as the modules progress with learners reporting improved academic performance in the last two modules. There were also some positive reviews for CLT and instead it was advocated that teachers needed to be better trained to use the approach effectively.

Learners would certainly benefit from receptive skills being taught before productive ones as this is considered the natural way of learning. Role play and other interactive

activities are also not sufficient to achieve language competence as learners are unable to transfer this language to real life situations outside the classroom. Learners need to be taught strategies for critical thinking and metacognition (Bloom's Taxonomy) in order to encourage an academic approach to learning.

## **Discussion**

In light of the above, it is fair to draw the conclusion that learners in non-native contexts would benefit from the *adaption* and not *adoption* of western CLT techniques. There were fears earlier that the approach may be rejected altogether but Hiep (as cited in Littlewood, 2013 p.6) notes that there is a generally "positive spirit" towards the approach and that if CLT practices are adapted to specific contexts, the goal to enable learners to use the English language for their communicative needs will be achieved. Such a perspective has implications for the use or specifically non-use of authentic texts which may be replaced instead by non-native texts which learners are familiar with and can relate to.

Carless (cited in Littlewood, 2013 p.7) argues for "situated task-based approaches, in which culture, setting and teachers' existing beliefs, values and practices interact with the principles of task-based teaching". The Hong Kong experience on which Carless based his observations is similar to the Saudi context in that there is a need to "integrate task-based teaching better with the requirements of examinations and find an appropriate balance between oral tasks and other modes such as narrative writing and extensive reading."

The current scenario necessitates a change to a more flexible view of CLT.

Littlewood (cited in Littlewood 2013, p.8) has proposed his version of the approach which he has named COLT or 'communicative-oriented language teaching'. COLT seeks to adapt the western practices of CLT where the goals of the approach remain the same but the means vary according to the contexts in which the English language is being taught. COLT may be traced along a 'communicative continuum' which ranges from 'analytic learning' or a focus on separate aspects of language use to 'experiential learning' or a holistic view of the use of language to communicate. The continuum relates five categories of activities (adopted from Littlewood 2013, p.12) to their communicative goals as shown below:

Analytic Strategies		←	→	Experiential Strategies	
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication	
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, inductive 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practising language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g. describing visuals or situational language practice ('questions and answers')	Practising pre-taught language but in a context where it communicates new information, e.g. information gap activities or 'personalised' questions	Using language to communicate in situations which elicit pre-learnt language but with some degree of unpredictability, e.g. structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g. creative role-play, more complex problem-solving and discussion	
Focus on forms and meanings		←	→	Focus on meanings and messages	

*Fig 1 (COLT Communicative Continuum retrieved from Littlewood, 2013 p.12)*

Traditional teaching based on structures and forms can be taught in the first two categories and then expanded to the three higher categories later giving teachers a sense of security and a base from which to shift to the more experiential tasks. The continuum also takes learners' involvement into consideration with the premise that more involvement will increase learners' motivation to learn the target language. Moving along the continuum from the analytic to the experiential COLT via task based learning results in an integrated approach which is much favoured as evidenced in the Data analysis in Section 6 of this paper.

The CUP (Cambridge University Press) Unlimited Edition in current use has a strong CLT orientation but also uses the integrated skills approach. Predictably, the grammar focus and reading and writing skills are not as emphasized as the speaking and listening areas naturally tending to prioritize fluency over accuracy. This deficiency is reflected in learners' difficulties in all four areas of grammar, vocabulary, reading and writing while they do reasonably well in speaking and listening. This is surprising as the only contact learners have with native speakers is inside the classroom, through the listening tapes accompanying the student's book and interactive activities devised by the teacher such as role play, group work and so on. However, the general response

to writing is that they struggle with constructing meaningful sentences to make cohesive and coherent paragraphs. They also report difficulties with finding and using vocabulary and multiple spelling errors are in evidence.

This is because while real life situations can be replicated in the classroom and some set phrases drilled for the purpose, learners do not have enough recourse to vocabulary which can help them outside those situations or for practicing writing.

In order to retain language, vocabulary or grammatical structures, it is important for the learner to see their usefulness and the need to use them. However, simple phrases which may be helpful to some extent in real life situations, do not help learners in the academic discipline they choose to take after the completion of their foundation year/preparatory year. As there is no motivation to keep using the functional language thus learnt through a CLT approach, learners find it difficult to retain any of the language they have learnt in the small window of opportunity provided by the modular system currently being implemented.

Several researchers in the field recognize the usefulness of authentic materials in non-native speaking contexts such as Saudi Arabia. Generally, authentic materials are not meant for pedagogical purposes (Bacon & Finnemann as cited in Akbari & Razavi, 2016 p.106) and when they have been used, the materials are typically modified to suit the classes in which they are being used. EFL books in current use have incorporated authentic language in the form of telephone conversations for job interviews or spoken dialogue with the dysfluency which typically occurs in such modes but even then they cannot be classified as strictly authentic. Perhaps the biggest drawback of using authentic materials is their isolation from the cultural context in which they originally occur. For the most part, learners in non-native contexts are unfamiliar with the culture in which the language occurs leaving them to deal with a skeletal framework which they must struggle to comprehend using only their experiential knowledge which does not help them to relate to a foreign culture so vastly different from theirs.

Authentic texts are also "random with respect to vocabulary, structures, functions, content and length", (Kilickaya as cited in Akbari & Razavi, 2016 p.107). According to Martinez (as cited in Akbari & Razavi, 2016 p.108), authentic texts can be culturally biased which has implications for the use of non-native texts instead.

Most importantly, it is very difficult to find appropriate materials to suit specific classes. There is also a certain disconnect with using authentic language in the classroom and not really finding any opportunities for its practical use outside the formal environment.

### **Reflections and recommendations**

This study had several limitations. Firstly, it does not take into account the male population (faculty and students) at the university. Secondly, the study is mainly descriptive in nature with the qualitative data gathered in the form of evidence from faculty members who have a number of years of experience teaching EFL through a CLT oriented curriculum.

While the merits of the CLT cannot be denied, there is clearly a need to adapt it to the teaching context. In this case, firstly, the process oriented curriculum via the CLT approach requires a longer semester for learners to benefit from it. The current 7-week module should be extended to a 12-week semester system for longer exposure to the target language. Secondly, although the CLT approach emphasizes the communicative function of grammar structures used to express a purpose, it is worthwhile to have a look at teaching grammar forms, reading skills and vocabulary keeping the Situational or Oral approach in mind (Firth & Halliday as cited in Al Humaidi, n.d.). Mastery of an inventory of some 2000 words or so could help towards better reading skills which could be facilitated by a series of graded readers ranging from the simple to the more complex. The natural method of language acquisition with receptive skills learnt first and productive ones later, leans towards the behaviourist theory of language acquired as a process through knowledge of the material, repetition and then actually using it in situations in order to internalize it. While it is a given that language learning develops from habit formation, it can be dissentious to suggest that vocabulary can only be learnt in a linguistic and cultural context. That said, learning words with a view to their form and cultural context would certainly make them more meaningful. Thirdly, authentic texts are useful to learners if they can relate to them. The use of non-native culture friendly texts could prove more beneficial in the long term. Fourthly, while role play, etc. are very useful to promote communication, academic skills need to be introduced to complement the CLT oriented curriculum.

A pertinent solution to the deficiencies of CLT or COLT posed by Littlewood (2013) is the interaction of classroom teaching practice with theory and research where teachers are encouraged to actively research on what teaching method or approach is suited to their context backed by established theories of second language learning.

### **Conclusion**

The above study has implications for a change in the current implementation of the curriculum with a scope for academic skills to complement the CLT approach. A longer semester would also give learners more time to acquaint themselves with the target language. Furthermore, there should be more emphasis on vocabulary acquisition and grammatical structures through graded readers. Suitable authentic texts may be used for learners to experience 'real language'. Alternatively, suitable non-native texts could also be selected which would fulfill the communicative needs of learners in this context.

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## Appendix 1

### **Questionnaire on CLT approach**

**Please give appropriate responses to the following with reference to our context.**

1. The CLT approach as it is being implemented at the ELI is ineffective at helping learners acquire language competency. What do you think?
2. Do you think that more focus on providing vocabulary lists and grammar forms would help learners improve language competency? Please give three reasons.
3. It is better for receptive skills (reading and listening) to be taught before productive ones (speaking and writing)? Please explain .
4. Do you think that using authentic materials in our context increase learners' motivational levels to learn English?
5. Are role play, group work, real life contexts and functional language (language used for a purpose like making a reservation, booking a flight, making an order at a restaurant) sufficient for learners to achieve language competency?
6. Would learners benefit from the CLT being combined with academic writing skills? Please give three reasons.

## Appendix 2

*Fig 1 (COLT Communicative Continuum retrieved from Littlewood, 2013 p.12*