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COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN YEMENI EFL
CLASSROOM FROM THE TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Yemeni EFL classrooms from the teacher's perspectives. Yemeni instructors have been using traditional methods to teach English. Their students achieve higher educational levels, but still are not capable of communicating effectively. For this reason, CLT was first introduced in 1993 in the pre-service training for teachers. After that, everything changed starting from the official guidelines, including textbook designs, but not the teaching methods of the teachers. They faced a dilemma of how to shift from a structure based approach to a communicative based approach. Within the same vein, this paper aims at finding: (1) to what extent Yemeni teachers are knowledgeable of CLT, (2) the application of CLT in Yemeni classrooms (3) learners' attitudes towards CLT use in the classroom. To answer the above mentioned questions, the researchers opted for a questionnaire which was answered by 40 Yemeni teachers. The results obtained show that teachers in Yemen have some knowledge about CLT, although they do not tend to use it in their classrooms. As for the implementation of CLT, Yemeni teachers said that its use is related to other variables such as visual aids, training, etc. for these reasons, CLT is not used in Yemeni classrooms. Yemeni students, on the other side, get motivated when they were taught using CLT. They feel at ease in the classroom for one simple reason, that is CLT encourages low proficiency learners to participate in activities. This paper ends up by presenting some limitations of the study.

KEYWORDS: CLT(Communicative Language Teaching), EFL (English Language Teaching), Education, English in Yemen

INTRODUCTION

Tallying with the major views of CLT (communicative language teaching) approach, in the Yemeni context of the applied linguistics agenda, became a conceptual necessity for any work conducted within these boundaries. It subsumes laying a ground for a thorough theoretical understanding of how language mechanisms work at the level of learning/teaching, due to the dominance of CLT. Our study is an attempt to fall within this rubric and examine how the CLT is applied by the high school Yemeni teachers in classrooms. As part of our findings, we will come to a point in this study where we argue that, however the theoretical background regarding CLT that teachers come up with during their pre-service training, they are still seen as being keen on the use of structure-based methods and techniques.

To put the reader in a historical context, Yemen's ELT of 1990 has been basically resorting to structure-based approaches. Here, the form was a peak of any knowledgeable teaching context, and communication with a meaningful usage of language was marginalized. But this idea was reformed in 1993, when the CLT was put into pre-service establishments and when the ministry of education made sure that its principles, i.e. of CLT, should also reflect textbooks design. The Yemeni teacher at that time, being exposed to years of structure over communication agenda, faced a dilemma of how to make this conceptual and practical shift into real work practice in the classroom. This critical point, when was investigated (cf., for example, Al-Shamiry,1991; Bataineh, Thabet&Bataineh,2008; Thabet,2002) revealed that the 1993's reform was restricted to curricula. They also emphasize that an accurate introduction of CLT principles has never seen the light. That is why a significant number of teachers kept on using the structure- based approaches.

This last point, and in accordance with a quantitative method based on questionnaires and statistical analyses, we investigated the way CLT is implemented in the classroom, presupposing that teachers come up with a thorough understanding of this approach at the level of pre-service training; at least if not in this way, in a comparative way where traditional methods are made explicit by their weak version of worshiping the form over meaning. Here, Yemeni teachers consent that CLT is preferable, but whether to put it in use in classroom or no, is the major rationale this study revolves around. By this token, we will be aware by the end of this study whether our teachers are aware of the importance of CLT, or they are equipped with a theoretical background regarding it and keep on using traditional methods.

LITERATURE REVIEW

There had been a clear consent of many studies in the field EFL regarding the unawareness of those involved in teaching contexts, especially teachers. Not only this, studies like Al-Shamiry (2000) and Thabet (2002) went farther assuming that even CLT principles are not yet made explicit in the minds of teachers. For them, teachers are not sufficiently given any pre-serviced education that would lay the ground for an accurate understanding of CLT, and how its principles are concretely made in contrast with those of structure -based approaches.

Al-Shamiry (2000) maintains that these traditional based approaches are dominant in the Yemeni schooling system to an extent that it is even preferred in tertiary education level. To draw a rigid line, CLT does not assume those traditional practices like drilling and the use of mother tongue, but it makes sure that the dimension of communication is always mandatory in classrooms. Of course, in some cases, drilling and resorting to L1 are granted when seen by the teacher as a solid assessment to push up the learning advancement of the learner. Yemen, among other countries that have seen this shift, suffered from a conflict of society, culture, and the physical conditions gap in relation to western English-based countries whose CLT canvas differs. This is what Holliday (1994) and Penny cook (1989) remark. This study is aware that teachers, as being the center of the learning process in Yemen, also that they are always thirsty to learn more advanced and renovated pedagogical tools, but whether these are put into use in the classrooms is not a sure thing. This question will be answered by the end of this study as part of its results and findings.

THE PRESENT STUDY

The Statement of the Problem

Textbooks in Yemeni public schools are, somehow, communicatively oriented and students in these schools (six years)are mostly unable to use the oral communication properly for communicative purposes, even after graduating from secondary school. Due to the various inactive language teaching methods and the interference of the mother tongue

on the student, when learning the English language result in acquiring low level communication skills (Al-Shamiry, 2000; Thabet, 2011).Al-Qahtani (2009) observes that language activities and listening are neglected in the classroom. In this regard, exploring what CLT method is applied in the teaching of English in Yemeni schools is necessary. Thus, an attemptis made to investigate to what extent CLT is applicable from the teachers' perspective so that the findings of this study may enlighten and provoke the ministry of education represented by supervisors, trainers and so on, in order to rethink this method.

Research Questions

The paper attempts to find answers to the following research questions:

- To what extent Yemeni teachers are knowledgeable of the CLT?

- How is the application of CLT in classroom achieved concretely?

- What are the learners' attitudes when using CLT from the teachers' perspective?

THE METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants who took part in this study were forty teachers majoring in the English language from different schools in Yemen. They were chosen randomly. All of them are experienced in the field of teaching and most of them received several of workshops concerning ELT by the Ministry of Education and British Council.

Instruments

The participants were provided with a questionnaire containing 30 items tackling three aspects which are related to teachers' knowledge of CLT principle, learners' attitudes when using CLT, and teachers' CLT-related practices.

Data Analysis

As for the data analysis of the questionnaires, content analysis was applied, with similarities and differences in teachers' answers being found in order to explore Yemeni teachers' knowledge of CLT and their classroom use of its principles. Data analysis began as soon as the questionnaire was returned. Due to the relatively large amounts of data collected, data were grouped according to the collection instruments used. The percentages were used to present the data gathered from 40 teachers' answers to quantify the data guided by five-point scale (strongly agree, agree, don't know, disagree and strongly disagree).

The patterns which emerged from the questionnaire and document analysis made it possible for the researchers to establish the prevailing approach to English Language teaching in secondary and primary Yemeni schools

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

Data Presentation

According to the statistics of the questionnaire, data can be summarized into the following aspects: the teacher knowledge of the CLT, the learners' attitudes and the application of CLT in the classroom.

To judge the level in the result, the Mean was divided into three periods as follows:

1 - 2.33 = Poor

2.34 – 3.66 = Medium

3.67– 5 = High

1-The Teacher knowledgeable of CLT.

Table 1

No.	Items	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Results
1	I am interested in CLT	4.58	40	0.50	High
2	CLT is very important to my students	4.45	40	0.55	High
3	The teacher as "authority" and "instructor" is no longer adequate to describe the teacher's role in the language classroom	3.35	40	1.12	Medium
4	Teachers have few chances to get CLT training	3.70	40	1.09	High
5	Teachers have little time to develop materials for communicative activities	3.38	40	1.05	Medium
6	Some teachers don't have any idea about CLT	3.88	40	0.88	High
7	It's difficult for teachers to manage class if they use communicative activities	2.33	40	0.86	Poor
8	Teachers are knowledgeable of CLT but they don't apply it in their classes	3.23	40	0.89	Medium
	q1	**4.81**	**40**	**1.98**	**High**

As seen as in the Table 1, one can say that Yemeni teachers of English have good knowledge of CLT.

The applications of CLT in classrooms

Table 2

No.	Items	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Results
16	Availability of audio-visual aids in classes helps in implementing CLT	3.95	40	1.13	High
17	Classroom activities should always be meaningful and involve real communication	4.38	40	0.93	High
18	Learning styles can influence the successful implementation of CLT either positively or negatively	3.90	40	0.63	High
19	Classes are too large for the effective use of CLT	3.58	40	0.96	Medium
20	There is a lack of effective and efficient instruments to assess communicative competence	3.98	40	0.80	High
21	CLT is the method on which the Yemeni English textbooks are based	3.00	40	1.01	Medium
22	CLT method is not compatible with the university entrance exam	3.33	40	0.86	Medium
23	CLT lacks clear cut assessment procedures	3.38	40	0.77	Medium
24	CLT principles are not always compatible with EFL home Yemeni culture	3.20	40	1.04	Medium
25	CLT allows teachers to act as facilitators, initiators, guiders, mentors to assist students in their learning process	4.33	40	0.57	Medium
26	CLT is a student-centered approach	3.88	40	0.99	High
27	CLT emphasizes fluency over accuracy	3.85	40	0.98	High
28	CLT relies heavily on speaking and listening skills	4.13	40	0.52	High
29	CLT requires teachers to be highly proficient in English	4.20	40	0.72	High
30	CLT involves no grammar teaching	2.85	40	0.95	Medium
	q3	**3.72**	**40**	**4.41**	**High**

Q3: The learners' attitudes when using CLT from the teachers' perspective.

Table 3

No.	Items	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Results
9	Students get motivated if the teachers apply the principles of CLT	4.23	40	0.70	High
10	Learners generally have low-level English proficiency	3.73	40	0.93	High
11	Learners lack motivation for developing communicative competence	3.98	40	0.58	High
12	CLT neglects writing and reading	2.90	40	1.10	Medium
13	CLT encourages low proficiency students to participate in the activities	3.78	40	0.97	High
14	As it is the trend in the Middle East, and particularly in Yemen, most of the students use knowledge as something to be transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners	4.05	40	0.75	High
15	Learners of different cultures also have different learning styles	3.88	40	0.85	High
	q2	**3.79**	**40**	**2.22**	**High**

DATA ANALYSIS

The Extent to which Yemeni Teachers are Knowledgeable of CLT

Browsing through the data obtained, it is clear that Yemeni teachers are knowledgeable about CLT. They have highly shown an interest in the use of CLT in their classrooms; this is based on the answers of the first question on the questionnaire. Most of Yemeni teachers do not use CLT in their classrooms due to two main reasons. One, they believe that they do not undergo enough training on how to use CLT in the classroom. Two, since they do not take any training, they are not going to be able to design, communicative activities and develop appropriate materials to use with their students. (To understand more the graphs that will follow in this analysis, refer back to the explanation provided in the data presentation about how the means were divided).
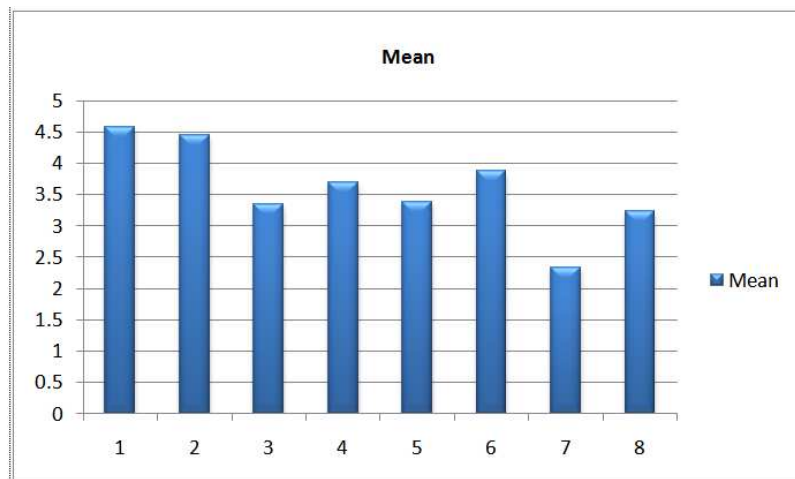

Graph 1: Knowledge of the Yemeni Teachers of CLT

Furthermore, few teachers believe that some of their colleagues do not know what CLT is or what it does. It could be assumed that these teachers who do not have an idea about CLT belong to the traditional era where grammar instruction is the essence of teaching English. Nonetheless, it does not mean that Yemeni teachers aren't shifting to the communicative

approach (CLT), in fact, if they know about it, they must be using one way or another although not as much as it should be.

The Application of CLT in Classroom

To answer this question, Yemeni teachers were asked a series of questions about what could make the applicability of the CLT in the classroom easier. First, most of them agreed on the fact that audio visual aids are a crucial element to be present in a CLT classroom. As it gives to the students an impression about how the class is going to be like. Another thing that Yemeni teachers could not agree more about is the type of activities that their students need. They think that CLT activities should involve real communication and meaningful messages to their students so they can be easily grasped and retained in their memories. This leads to a student centered classroom, which will result in a focus on fluency rather than accuracy.
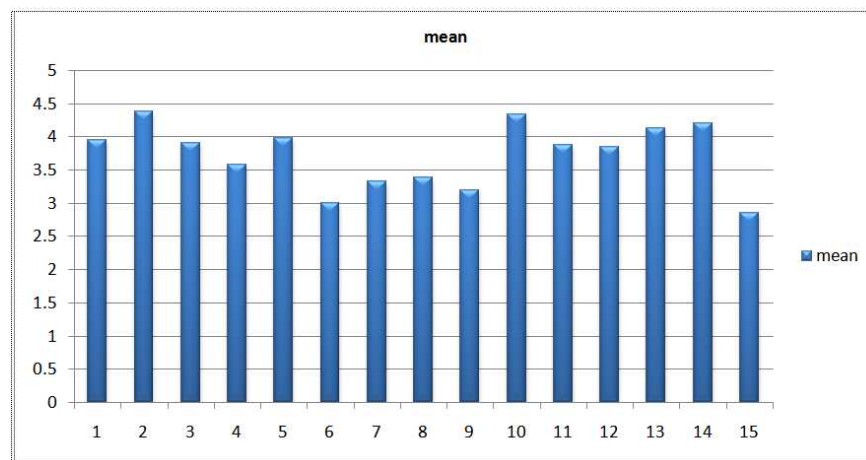

Graph 2: Shows the Application of CLT in Yemeni Classrooms

On the other hand, however, Yemeni instructors believe that in spite of being easy to be applied in the classroom, CLT lacks effective and efficient instruments to assess communicative competencies of the students. The teacher will be forced to go back to the traditional method to test his students' knowledge. Another issue that was pointed out while answering the questionnaire is the different learning styles Yemeni students have. It is somehow impossible for the teacher to use communicative tasks which will target the kinesthetic, auditory, and the visual learners at once.

Learner's Attitudes Towards CLT Use in Classroom

Learners' attitudes are one of the most difficult variables to control when teaching. Not just the way students react to what you teach them, but also to the way you teach them. In this regard, when Yemeni teachers were questioned about students' attitudes towards the use of the CLT, they answered by saying that their students get rapidly motivated. It is clear that this happens because of three basic reasons. Firstly, CLT neglects two skills that are not less important than the others but seem to be unaccepted by the students (Reading and Writing). Secondly, when applying CLT in the classroom everyone participates in the discussions and activities. There is no difference between a high and low performing student. Thirdly, in the Arabic mindset, it is believed that knowledge is transmitted by the teacher rather than discovered by the learners themselves.
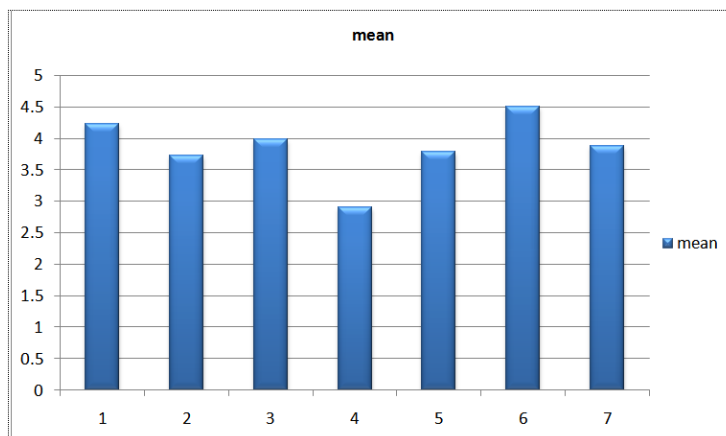
Graph 3: Shows the Students' Attitudes Towards CLT Use

All in all, it could be argued that the assumption upon which this research paper relied is supported in the results obtained. Looking back to the answers of the Yemeni teachers, it is simple to conclude that CLT is well known within the academia of Yemen. Moreover, it is greatly accepted by the teachers and their students. However, the problem is in its implementation. Yemeni teachers still believe that the use of CLT in their classrooms should be supported by the presence of visual aids, communicative materials, communication activities, pre-service training and in service training about CLT.

CONCLUSIONS

As the language theories underlying the Audio-lingual method and the Situational Language Teaching method were questioned by prominent linguists like Chomsky (1957) during the 1960s, a new trend of language teaching paved its way into classrooms. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages, emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Historically, CLT has been seen as a response to the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), and as an extension or development of the Notional-Functional Syllabus. Task-based language learning, a more recent refinement of CLT, has gained considerably in popularity.

A number of countries in which English is taught as a second or foreign language have adopted CLT as the main teaching approach in their official guidelines provided by their ministries of education. In our case, Yemen has shifted from a structure based on a communicative approach in 1993. This came as a response to problems encountered by Yemeni students in terms of communicating in English. Since 1993 many researchers have investigated the implementation of CLT in Yemeni schools. In the same realm, this piece of paper investigated the knowledge of Yemeni teachers about CLT, the extent to which CLT is applied in the classroom, and if CLT is applied how do students react to it.

One of the limitations of the study was the number of teachers who participated. The researchers were expecting more teachers to participate. Another limitation is related to the teachers' honesty while answering the questions, even though we assume that they are professional and they would respond to the questions appropriately knowing their names will remain confidential.

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