

The Effect of Using CLT on Developing Student-teachers' Oral Proficiency in English at Albaydha University

Mohammed Hussein Mohammed Al-Anisi

Department of English, Faculty of Education , Albaydha University, Yemen

mohammedalanis@baydaauniv.net

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.56807/buj.v2i2.69>

Abstract

This study is in response to the immense need for fluent and proficient English teachers in Yemen. It is observed that a majority of Yemeni teachers in various schools tend to use a generous amount of Arabic in teaching English. This in turn affects their students who, after studying English at school level and college level, cannot speak English properly and communicate effectively in real-life situations. This observation led to the assumption that something is inadequate in the course of preparing Yemen student-teachers at Colleges of Education, i.e. use of traditional methods in teaching. To check the validity of the assumption, a modern method of teaching (CLT) was used in teaching the experimental group whereas the control group was taught using traditional methods. Pre/post-tests were used to identify the 'entry level' and 'exit level' of the learners before and after experiment to see the effectiveness of intervention. Speaking Test in Cambridge FCE (First Certificate of English) was adopted for both the pre-test and post-test. It emerges from the study that the performance of experimental group has significantly changed because of the use of CLT whereas no significant change has been found in the performance of the other group.

Key words: Oral proficiency, CLT, Student-teachers, Faculty of, southern Yemen.

Introduction

Yemen is a monolingual country in which Arabic is the medium of study and communication. People in Yemen look at English language from different perspectives. The overwhelming part of society looks at English as a foreign language that should be learnt just for specific purposes (ESP). As a result, it should be spoken only in the contexts of those purposes. Some people have hostile attitude towards languages of the West in general and English language in particular as a reflection of their political and religious beliefs. For them, such languages should be neither learnt nor spoken. It could be assumed that a few number of Yemeni people learn English for its sake, i.e. for advancement or to know the culture of other societies. Though Yemeni students learn English for six years at school level and for four years at university level, in case of those who join English departments, a

majority of them cannot speak properly and communicate effectively. It is observed that a majority of the Yemeni student-teachers, though having a good knowledge of grammar and a wide vocabulary, find it difficult to speak English. One assumption is that in the course of preparing Yemeni student-teachers to become teachers of English, little attention is paid to speaking skill. As a result, when they become teachers they start using a generous amount of Arabic in teaching English and spend most of the class time on teaching grammar, vocabulary, reading and almost ignoring speaking skills. It is also hypothesized that the failure of the Yemeni student-teachers in speaking English is due to inefficient methods of teaching in colleges of education and textbooks used in teaching speaking in the pre-service teacher preparation courses.

In learning a foreign language, the ability to speak in that language is of crucial importance.

It reflects our knowledge of the language and our ability to use that language to express feelings, ideas, thoughts, and knowledge of the world. The main aim of many of the target language learners is to be able to speak to friends, teachers, and visitors in that language. Many language learners and educators regard speaking as the measure of knowing a language. Nunan (1991) wrote "success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the (target) language". In addition, it is clearly observed that students who do not learn how to speak or do not get any opportunity to speak in classroom may soon get de-motivated and lose interest in learning. More important than that is the fact that speaking is fundamental to human communication. In our daily lives, we speak more than we read or write. Rankin (1928 cited in Mohanraj, J. 1995) found that the amount of time devoted to the language art is inversely related to its social utility in human affairs. His study revealed that in course of our daily communication with people 70% of our working day is spent in verbal communication. Of this communication time, 45% is spent in listening, 30% in speaking, 16% in reading, and 9% writing.

In the Republic of Yemen, Grammar Translation Method has been and still extensively practiced by teachers in schools and institutes. As a result, it could make no significant contribution in relation to the ability of developing Yemeni students' communicative competence. For many years, English language teachers have continued to teach speaking just as a repetition of drills or memorization of dialogues. However, today's world requires that the goal of teaching speaking should improve students' communicative skills because only in that way students can express themselves and learn how to follow the social and cultural rules appropriate in each communicative circumstance. It is seen that classroom practice of language does not suffice the learners in expressing their needs, feelings, and thoughts in English in the present context of Yemeni student-teachers. In contrast, the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) is proved to be the most ideal method for

enhancing and promoting communicative competence as it makes the class more interesting and more interactive.

In the literature, there is some overlap between the terms 'speaking' and 'speaking proficiency'. This overlap springs from the lack of operational definitions which determine the distinction between the two terms obviously. The term 'speaking' is used to mean different things. It means oral production if speaking is listed as one of the four language skills. Learners of foreign languages as well as a big number of teachers if asked to give the meaning of speaking would probably say 'producing speech'. The other meaning of the word is 'oral communication' which implies both production and reception. In language testing, 'speaking' is labeled as productive and receptive but the focus is on oral production. According to Chaney & Burk (1998), speaking is "the process of building and sharing meaning through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, in a variety of contexts". The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English (2008) defines 'speaking' as "the action of conveying information or expressing one's thoughts and feelings in spoken language". Thus, it cannot be assumed that any vocalizing is speaking and any silent passive behaviour is listening. The Speech Communication Association's (SCA) standards document clarifies the boundaries of what 'speaking' and 'listening' include as the terms are used by the speech communication discipline. Based on the SCA guidelines, 'speaking' includes both spontaneous informal speech (e.g., talking in work groups, responding in class discussion, participating in interviews) and prepared formal speeches. Speaking instruction focuses on expected behaviours (responses, delivery) in both formal and informal settings and the process of composing speech text. So, the problem here is that a precise definition of the term 'speaking' is lacking.

The definition of the term 'speaking proficiency' has the same problem. As a result of this confusion, alternative terms for 'speaking proficiency' have been used. One of those terms

is 'fluency' which has two senses in the literature ... "a narrow sense" and "a broad sense". The narrow sense refers to 'fluency' as a criteria of 'oral proficiency' and the broad sense is 'oral proficiency' itself (Lennon, 1990). If 'speaking proficiency' means how well language is used in communication, the question that arises here is how can ESL/EFL learners arrive at this stage. In answering this question, Nunan (2003) states that ESL/EFL learners should be taught to:

- produce the English speech sounds and sound patterns
- select appropriate words and sentences according to the proper social setting, audience, situation and subject matter.
- organize their thoughts in a meaningful and logical sequence.
- use language as a means of expressing values and judgments.
- use the language quickly and confidently with few unnatural pauses.

Another important question that arises here relates to how teachers and testers measure speaking (oral) proficiency of the learners. The American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) has published The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines (1986) which contains descriptions of different levels of language proficiency. It provides a detailed description of the kinds of communication functions, range of vocabulary, degree of accuracy and flexibility that learners of a language are able to control at different levels in each of the four major language skills. These descriptions can be helpful in setting language learning goals, in planning learning activities and in evaluating proficiency. These guidelines identify stages of proficiency, as opposed to achievement. They do not measure what individuals achieve through specific classroom instruction, but assess what individuals can and cannot do. This is regardless of where, when, or how the language was learned or acquired; thus the

words "learned" and "acquired" are used in the broadest sense. These guidelines are not based on a particular linguistic theory or pedagogical method, and are intended for global assessment.

The other speaking scales include:

- a) The Test of Spoken English Scale (EST, 2001b)
- b) The Common European Framework Scale (CEF)
- c) The National Certificate Scale
- d) The Australian Second Language Proficiency Ratings (ASLPR)

In addition, teachers in Yemen need to know some well-known speaking tests so that they could adopt or modify them in the process of assessing their students' performance in speaking instead of evaluating them through the modality of writing. Hence, these are the most popular speaking tests worldwide:

- a) Speaking Test in IELTS
- b) Speaking Test in TOEFL
- c) Speaking Test in Cambridge FCE (First Certificate of English)
- d) Speaking Test in ACTFL

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. Communicative Language Teaching began in Britain in the 1960s as a replacement to the earlier structural method, called Situational Language Teaching. This was partly in response to Chomsky's criticism of structural theory of language learning and partly based on the theories of British functional linguistics, such as Firth and Halliday, as well as American sociolinguists, such as Hymes, Gumperz and Labov and the writings of Austin and Searle on speech acts (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Communicative Language Teaching makes use of real-life situations that necessitate communication. The teacher sets up a situation

that students are likely to encounter in real life bearing in mind that real-life simulations change from day to day. Learners' motivation to learn comes from their desire to communicate in meaningful ways about meaningful topics.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The central theoretical concept in Communicative Language Teaching is 'communicative competence', a term introduced into discussions of language use and second or foreign language learning in the early 1970s. Hymes coined this term in order to contrast a communicative view of language and Chomsky's theory of competence. Hymes's theory of communicative competence was a definition of what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community. Brown (1994) aptly states that the Communicative Approach does a lot to expand on the goal of creating communicative competence compared to earlier methods that professed the same objective. Teaching students how to use the language is considered to be at least as important as learning the language itself.

The characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching Approach are summarized as follows:

- Emphasis is on language use rather than language rules.
- More attention is given to fluency and appropriacy than to structural correctness.
- Classroom exercises depend upon spontaneity and trial and error by learners.
- Promotes interpersonal rather than intrapersonal interactions.
- Group and pair work are effective learning modes. These modes are most effectively rendered in small classes.
- It uses authentic materials.

- For the development of communicative ability there needs to be an integration of form-focused exercises with meaning-focused experience.

- Emphasis is on tasks that encourage the negotiation of meaning between students and between students and teachers with the goal of making input comprehensible to participants.

- The teacher oscillates between the roles of facilitator and director transmitter.

- The teacher sets an environment that is interactive and not excessive formal.

- A commitment to using the target language as a medium of classroom communication.

- It is learner centered.

- Methodology is geared not only to competence but also to the expectations of those participating in the learning process.

- Learners seem to focus best on grammar when it relates to their communicative needs and experiences.

- Emphasis is on successful communication, especially that which involves

risk taking.

- Emphasis is on learner autonomy and choice of language, topic and so on.

- A communicative classroom seeks to promote interpretation, expression and negotiation of meaning - implying learners are active.

- Context is important in interpreting the meaning of a text (oral or written).

(Adapted from Language Australia-CRLTM Communicative Language Teaching

Project, Mangubhai et al, 1998).

The roles of the teachers and students change in this approach. Teachers in communicative classrooms talk less and find themselves listening more, i.e. becoming active facilitators of their students' learning (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). The teacher sets up the exercise

but because the students' performance is the target, the teacher must step back and observe, sometimes acting as referee or monitor. The students do most of the speaking, be more active during the exercise, and may leave their seats to compete a task. Because of the increased responsibility to participate, students may find that they gain confidence in using the target language in general. (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). In CLT, errors are seen as a natural outcome of the development of the communication skills. students can have limited linguistic knowledge and still be successful communicators (Larsen-Freeman, 1986). One of the main principles of CLT is the emphasis on fluency rather than accuracy.

The study

This study aims to examine the effectiveness of using CLT on developing Yemeni student-teachers' oral proficiency in English through answering the following question:

Can the use of Communicative Language Teaching Approach help to develop Yemeni student-teachers' proficiency in speaking English?

The study is based on the following hypotheses:

- a- the inadequate proficiency of Yemeni student-teachers in speaking English is due to inefficient methods of teaching in the first place.
- b- the inadequate proficiency of Yemeni student-teachers in speaking English is due to unsuitable textbooks used in teaching spoken English.

To examine that empirically, two groups have been assigned; one as an experimental group and the other as a control group. The experimental group was taught using the Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLT) whereas the control group was taught using the traditional methods like the Direct Method and The Audio-lingual Method. A pilot run was conducted to find out the clarity and comprehensibility of the task items of the test so

that the respondents in the main study would not interpret them in a different way or find them difficult.

The subjects of the intervention were selected from two Colleges of Education (Rada'a and AlBaydha). Thirty student-teachers were selected randomly from each college. The selected subjects were the second level students at English Departments with age range between 20-24 years. The selected subjects from College of Education- Rada'a were assigned as an experimental group and the ones selected from College of Education- AlBaydha as a control group. Three drop outs in the case of the experimental group and five drop outs in the case of the control group were found. In administering the post-test, there were twenty-seven subjects, of which 14 were boys and 13 were girls, in the experimental group. On the other side, there were twenty-five subjects, of which 14 were boys and 11 were girls, in the control group.

It was essential for the researcher to know the learners' language level in English so that he could help them to develop proficiency in speaking the language. This was achieved with administering a pre-test in which the selected participants had to respond to four tasks orally. The Speaking Test in Cambridge FCE (First Certificate of English) was used in both pre/post-tests. This helped in adopting and designing tasks with the assumption that the participation of the subjects in the tasks would help them improve their speaking skill and become more confident and more fluent speakers. The intervention of the course which was expected to develop speaking proficiency in the subjects of the experimental group was conducted for a period of three months. There were 16 sessions of the course preceded by a round of speech recording (pre-test) and followed by the second round of speech recording (post-test). The four sessions of the first two weeks were devoted for administering the pre-test and the four sessions of the last two weeks were devoted for administering the post-test. Two sessions were taught per week and the duration of each session was two hours, i.e. it

was a course of thirty-two hours. The subjects of the experimental group were exposed to tasks and activities that could enable them to communicate effectively in real-life situations. The course was designed to address, as much as possible, the language functions crucial to communicate effectively in the target language taking into account what learners need in real life situations. It attempted to consolidate and maximize students' interaction and help them overcome hesitation and reluctance in speaking English. Destructive feedback was avoided and fluency as well as accuracy trend was followed though much more emphasis has been paid to fluency. The contents of the course were graded in terms of difficulty- from easy to difficult- as a way of scaffolding and promoting learners to attain the ultimate goal, i.e. speaking proficiency.

In analyzing the pre-test and post-test, a criteria adopted from Brumfit (1984), Fillmore (1979), and Leeson (1975) were devised to look at the following features in continuous speech:

1. Pauses
2. Use of L1 structure
3. Coherent sentences
4. Pronunciation
5. Initiation
6. Elaboration

Each one of the six features was assessed according to the following :

1. Pauses: only wrong pauses are taken into account based on:

- Less than 3 wrong pauses 3 scores
- 3 wrong pauses 2 scores
- 4 wrong pauses 1 score
- More than 4 wrong pauses 0 score

2. Use of L1 structure: how many uses of L1 structure is taken into account based on:

- No use of L1 structure at all 3 scores
- 1-2 L1 structures 2 scores
- 3-4 L1 structures 1 score
- More than 4 L1 structures 0 score

3. Incoherent sentences: only incoherent sentences are taken into account based on:

- No incoherent sentences 3 scores
- 1-2 incoherent sentences 2 scores
- 3-4 incoherent sentences 1 score
- More than 4 incoherent sentences 0 score

4. Pronunciation: only wrongly pronounced words are taken into account based on:

- No wrong pronunciation at all 3 scores
- 1-2 wrong pronunciation 2 scores
- 3-4 wrong pronunciation 1 score
- More than 4 wrong pronunciation 0 score

5. Initiation: the cases in the respondents lack the ability to start or close a conversation or to respond to a task are taken into account based on:

- No lack of initiation (always initiative) 3 scores
- Lack of initiation in 1 or 2 cases 2 scores
- Lack of initiation in 3 or 4 cases 1 score
- Lack of initiation in more than 4 cases 0 score

6. Elaboration: the cases in which the respondents lack the ability to explain or elaborate on a given topic are taken into account based on:

- No lack of elaboration (always elaborative) 3 scores
- Lack of elaboration in 1 or 2 cases 2 scores
- Lack of elaboration in 3 or 4 cases 1 score

- Lack of elaboration in more than 4 cases 0 score

The overall performance of each respondent is the sum of scores of all the six features. Having got the scores of both the pre-test and the post-test, of the experimental group as well as the

control group, a paired t-test was run to find out the degree of difference (mean) between the pre/post-tests on one hand and between the experimental group and the control group on the other hand. Having applied the mentioned criteria, the following results are obtained:

The overall performance of the respondents

Speaking features	Experimental Group				Control Group			
	Pre-test		Post-test		Pre-test		Post-test	
	Mean of frequency	Mean of scores	Mean of frequency	Mean of scores	Mean of frequency	Mean of scores	Mean of frequency	Mean of scores
Wrong pauses	3.740	1.407	2.00	2.555	3.00	1.8	2.96	1.88
Use of L1 structures	3.888	0.888	2.518	1.555	2.96	1.28	2.92	1.36
Incoherent sentences	2.370	1.666	1.407	2.074	1.6	2.04	1.76	1.88
Wrong pronunciation	4.740	0.703	2.962	1.407	4.16	0.72	3.6	1.00
Lack of Initiation	2.148	1.703	0.888	2.407	1.32	1.96	1.52	2.12
Lack of elaboration	2.740	1.444	1.333	2.111	1.44	2.00	1.56	1.96

Having run the paired t-test, the following results were found:

1. Experimental Group

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1 posttest	12.1111	27	3.01705	.58063
pretest	7.8148	27	4.14206	.79714

Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 posttest & pretest	27	.774	.000

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 posttest - pretest	4.29630	2.62847	50585	3.25651	5.33608	8.493	26	.000

2. Control Group

Paired Samples Statistics

	Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	10.2000	25	3.48807	.69761
posttest	9.5600	25	2.84429	.56886
pretest				

Paired Samples Correlations

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 posttest & pretest	25	.564	.003

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower				
Pair 1 posttest - pretest	.64000	3.01220	.60244	-.60337-	1.88337	1.062	24	.299

The analysis of both pre-test and post-test conducted on the two groups revealed the following:

1. The t-test value is significant (0.00 at 2 tailed) which by significance means that the post-test result is markedly different from the pre-test which indicates that the intervention resulted in that change. Thus, it is proved that the intervention has been effective for the experimental group.

2. The mean value of post-test (12.11) is higher than the pre-test (7.81) which shows that the intervention given has increased the performance of the experimental group.

3. The t-test value is non-significant for the control group (0.299) which by significance means that there is no change in the pre-test and the post-test. As a result, the mean values change is not looked into.

4. The use of CLT in English classroom has been proved successful. A comparison of t-test value for the experimental group with that of the control group revealed that there is a significant difference between the performance of the two groups. The score of post-test was 12.11 and the score of pre-test was 7.81 in the experimental group so the mean difference was 4.29. However, the score of post-test was 10.20 and the score of pre-test was 9.56 so the mean difference was 0.64. The mean difference of 3.65 was statically highly significant. Thus, it is proved that the use of CLT in teaching the experimental group has been successful and led to significant improvement in speaking fluency.

5. Regarding pronunciation, it could be generalized that:

- /p/ is often pronounced as /b/
- /v/ is often pronounced as /f/
- /tʃ/ is often pronounced as /ʃ/
- /s/ in case of plural and third person singular (present simple) and /ed/ in case of past and past participle are often pronounced incorrectly.

- /j/ is always pronounced as /g/ by people of some Yemeni regions like Taiz, Aden, parts of Ibb, Hodeidah, and so on.

6. The analysis of pre-test and post-test revealed that most of the respondents tend to use L1 structure to form an equivalent English sentence, however, there was a considerable change in the performance of the experimental group as a result of the intervention. The errors in the selected examples resulting from L1 interference could be classified as follows:

- Addition of unnecessary item.
- Omission of a necessary item.
- Use of an adjective before a noun.
- Use of a verb before its subject
- Use of a sentence which is acceptable in Arabic but not acceptable in English

References

- ACTFL 1986. *The ACTFL Proficiency Guidelines: Speaking* (revised 1999). Yonkers, N Y: ACTFL.
- Brown, H. 1994. *Teaching by Principles: An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. Prentice Hall.
- Brumfit, C. 1984. *Communicative Methodology in Language Teaching: The Rules of Fluency*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Chaney, A. and Burk, L. 1998. *Teaching Oral Communication in Grades K-8*. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.
- Fillmore, C. 1979. On Fluency. In Fillmore, Kempler and Wang (Eds). *Individual Differences in Language Ability and Language Behavior*. New York: Academic Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. 1986. *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Leeson, R. 1975. *Fluency and language Teaching*. Longman Group Limited.

Lennon, P. 1990. Temporal measures of fluency: automatic and manual extraction of temporal variables, Soohwan Park: Purdue University.

Mangubhai et al, 1998. Primary Lote Teachers' Understandings and Belies about Communicative Language Teaching: Report on the first Phase of the Project. Centre for Research into Language Teaching Methodologies: Toowoomba.

Mohanraj, J. 1995. *Spoken-Conversational English. A resource Book for Teachers of English*, Sterling Publishers Private Limited: New Delhi.

Nunan, D. 1991. Language teaching methodology. A textbook for teachers. New York: Prentice Hall.

Nunan, D., 2003. Practical English Language Teaching. NY: McGraw-Hill. O'Loughlin, K. 2001: The equivalence of direct and semi-direct speaking tests, Studies in Language Testing, vol.13.

Richards, J. & Rodgers, T. 2001. *Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching*, Studies in Language Testing, vol.13.

The Oxford Pocket Dictionary of Current English (2009) cited in

<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1O999-speaking.html>. Accessed on 30/5/2011.