Learning English Language in Bangladesh: CLT and Beyond

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Abstract

This article examines the nature and effectiveness of current English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh. Findings are reported from a study looking at the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in schools and its limitations within the Bangladeshi context. This work is used as a basis on which to critically examine the broader context in which language learning occurs, particularly the degree to which the implicit goal of participatory membership of a global community is one that can be achieved. The discussion is drawn from personal experience, though it also incorporates theoretical concepts encountered in studying global citizenship. The paper concludes that changes to CLT, and policies associated with its use, are needed; however, it also argues for the need to include critical thinking in classrooms in order for children to develop into global citizens within the context of Bangladesh.

Introduction

Language plays an important role in the negotiation of power relationships both at an interpersonal level and at a wider societal level. Increasingly it also plays this role at the global level. Since English has become a global language, competency in English is not only instrumental but also status related.

Bangladesh is basically a monolingual country. However its education policy and curriculum mandate English as a compulsory second language because of its global nature, Ministry of Education, Bangladesh (MoE), (2010). Thus for students who study at least to graduation level, English is taught as an essential subject for more than fourteen years of their educational life. For nearly two decades, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been used to teach and learn English in Bangladesh. CLT has the reputation of being one of the best approaches for second or foreign language learning (Savignon, 2003; TQI-SEP, 2006). However, in general public examination results indicate that students perform poorly in English, with a high failure rate compared to other subjects.

This article examines the nature and effectiveness of current English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh. It describes findings that are more fully documented in my Masters thesis (Rasheed, 2011) and critically examines the broader context in which language learning occurs, particularly the degree to which the implicit goal of participatory membership of a global community is one that can be achieved. This discussion is drawn from my personal experience in navigating the complexities of international study as well as from the theoretical
concepts encountered in studying global citizenship during the course of the project.

**English language learning in Bangladesh**

In both popular and policy constructs of education, literacy bears a particular ‘power status’: it is considered necessary for boosting economic, social and political opportunities (Datta, 2007). Clearly language plays the key role in literacy learning. Language is a tool for communication and learning a language includes four basic skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing (TQI-SEP, 2006). Usually, these are referred to as oral (listening-speaking) and written (reading-writing) language. Although there are connections between the two, there are key differences in some syntactic structures, and in the intended purpose and use of the communication. People normally learn to speak before they learn to write; however written language is often considered more significant than oral language. In a multilingual situation, different languages also may be used in different contexts. However, one language usually takes a dominant position in education. English is now considered to be the global medium for communication and business, and so has become the most dominant language in the world. Most people want to learn English, but when they come from diverse backgrounds and speak other languages, the language is often challenging to learn.

There are enormous challenges to both learners and teachers in Bangladeshi mainstream classrooms because of the irregularities within English, the words borrowed from other languages, and the consequent different phonological representations. These make it challenging to learn English as Second Language (ESL), though supports have been developed that facilitate more successful learning (Anderson, 2008; Lu & Berg, 2008; May, 2002; Safford & Costley, 2008; Sirota & Bailey, 2009). I address some of these later when I discuss the concepts underlying the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. Additionally, this article also considers how language affects a person’s learning and achievements, as well as the realities of learning English in Bangladesh, and its relationship with critical literacy, so examining what makes for effective global citizenship.

This discussion draws on a review of relevant existing literature and on data that comes from fieldwork in four secondary high schools in two divisional cities (Northern and Southern) of Bangladesh. The schools were selected on the basis of English subject achievement results in the public examinations. A total of twenty students and parents and fourteen English teachers were interviewed. Six English sessions were observed. In addition, a number of imported achievement tests [National Education Monitoring Project in New Zealand (NEMP) (Crooks, Flockton and White, 2007; Crooks, Smith, & Flockton, 2009) and the Progressive Achievement Tests (PAT) (New Zealand Council for Education Research, 2008 & 1991)] were applied to measure variations of English language attainment. After reporting the results of the research I move to a broader discussion of the value of English language learning in Bangladesh and relate it to call for global citizenship and to what I see as the resulting need for critical as well functional literacy. Here the discussion draws on my own personal experiences as well as taking inferences from the literature and from my research data. My analysis of these experiences is explicitly personal. Personal perception is offered, because
citizenship is a personal as well as a political concept, and at the personal level it is constructed from similarly situated and partial analyses.

Because there is little published literature about language learning in Bangladesh, I strategically draw on international literature. In many cases this examines English language learning in the context of immigration or minority status in English-speaking countries. While the situation in Bangladesh is clearly different, in that those learning English are not in a minority group, many of the points made are relevant to Bangladesh where issues of poverty cause marginalisation, as I will explore.

Realities behind learning English

Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with more than 160 million people living in 0.145 million square kilometers. It is also reported to be one of the poorest countries, with a Gross National Income of less than $400 USD per head per annum in 2005. It has an overall illiteracy rate of 58.7% compared to the 24.6% average across developing countries (World Bank, 2003, cited in Imam, 2005). These figures represent the huge challenges involved in simply continuing to provide universal education, especially in rural areas where the dropout rate from schooling is very high. However, this scenario is changing fast due to initiatives taken by the government in the recent decade.

Developing countries continue to struggle against poverty, financial crisis, internal strife, dissent and movements for autonomy, natural disaster and cultural hegemony on the part of former colonial countries (Said, 2003; Willinsky, 1998). Like other developing countries, Bangladesh is also struggling to cope with these challenges. Literacy is playing a most important role in these conditions. Many current issues of social and educational interest transcend national borders. As stated earlier, it is important for economic growth and the well-being of all citizens not to be monolingual, particularly in rapidly developing countries, where the home language is unique to that country. In education, schools and teachers are facing challenges to provide effective instructions to ensure that students participate effectively as global citizens (Andreotti & de Souza, 2008; Macfarlane, 2007).

The education system in Bangladesh has four stages of schooling. It incorporates primary, secondary, higher secondary and higher education. Secondary education includes Years six to ten of the ten-year cycle of formal schooling, so this is an important part of a student’s education. In Bangladesh a large number of students drop out at this stage to begin their working lives. If education is not given priority at this phase, it may be detrimental to students’ later lives and, on a large scale, can affect the well-being and development of society (Imam, 2005).

Learning a second language is important. As English is an international language, it is more appropriate than other languages to be the second language in Bangladesh for a range of purposes of passing school exams, going on to further study, learning about world literature, increasing employment opportunities (either in Bangladesh or overseas), communicating with foreigners, using internet and emails, and travelling to other countries. If students learn English and can appropriately use it outside the classroom, it promises to provide many more choices in their future lives. All the participants interviewed expressed similar views about the value of English. As one student stated:
We need it because it is an international language.... It will get us a good job, higher education, the internet, [help us] to be global, [provide] knowledge, and communication everywhere.

This view is supported by Nesa (2004) who states, “English is the lingua franca of business, commerce, science, arts, literature of the whole world” (p. 8). The teachers and parents also put the highest emphasis on learning English in order to obtain better life opportunities. Therefore learning English as a second language in Bangladesh is not viewed in terms of passing school examinations only. English can provide a wider range of life choices and knowledge about global issues, particularly if it can be used successfully outside the classroom. It is believed that learning English could bring empowerment to life.

Challenges Common to the Learning of English in Different Educational Contexts

The challenges ESL learners and teachers face are very complex. Though the challenges may at first appear insurmountable, they usually occur at certain points. Firstly, the development of vocabulary knowledge, and its growth, is a large and persistent challenge that impacts on both learners and teachers equally.

Carlo August, Mclaughlin, Snow, Dressler, Lippman, Lively, & White, (2004) affirm that vocabulary is one key determinant of poor reading comprehension for ESL learners. They also assert, ‘Knowing a word’ involves learning many things of a word- its literal meaning, its various connotations, the sorts of syntactic constructions into which it enters, the morphological options it offers, and a rich array of semantic associates, including synonyms, hyponyms, and words with closely related yet contrasting meanings as well as its capacity for polysemy (p. 192).

So, vocabulary growth is vital for ESL learners for successful mastery of the language. However, as I shall show later, there are many challenges in using words effectively other than knowing their meaning.

Secondly, there is a reluctance to use the language inside and outside of the classroom. Research shows that the ESL learners often use silence as a strategy to overcome the fear of learning the targeted language (Safford & Costley, 2008). They are often fearful about making a mistake. Through language we frequently make sense of our experiences in the world; and it is arguably one of our primary and most influential acts of identity (LePage & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). The fear of using the language, in both spoken and written forms can affect motivation and engagement in learning in different ways in classrooms.

Thirdly, the backgrounds of ESL learners and other related socio-linguistic factors are often barriers to learning. Without having specific knowledge about learners’ background and socio-linguistic aspects, teachers as well as their learners can be disadvantaged. Anderson (2008) in the US argues that the usefulness of information about students’ backgrounds (family, culture, community) extends far beyond just as an instrument for communication, as it represents everything about that learner. Similarly, in the UK Slattery (2004), when considering Asians learning English, writes:
Community languages teachers were aware of the needs of children born and raised alongside English children and of their part in helping these British-born Asians to better understand aspects of their heritage as well as enabling them to realise their potential as fully-fledged, rather than partial, bilinguals, and of the positive benefits arising from this diversity (cited in Anderson, 2008, p.83).

The research of Hite & Evans (2006) supports the contention that encouraging learners to use their native / home language is essential in learning and concept building, even when the teachers do not know that language. So, it is important to know the social and cultural backgrounds of learners for effective learning to occur.

Fourthly, different approaches to learning are often characteristic of Language Two (L2) learners as they frequently use different learning inspirations and systems to learn the targeted language. This can be caused by personal culture and gender influences (Lu & Berg, 2008). For example, research has shown that "while many Hispanic ESL/EFL learners in the US chose compensatory strategies and social strategies, many Japanese learners chose cognitive strategies and memory strategies and they tend to work alone" (Bedell & Oxford 1996; Oxford, 1996a cited in Lu & Berg, 2008, p. 18). In addition, it is frequently argued that male and female learners are different in their approaches to learning a language (Clark & Trafford, 1995; Ludwig, 1983). So, there are many influences affecting motivation for learning such as age, anxiety, aptitude, culturally determined gender roles, sex-related personality differences and self esteem (Ehrman, 1996, p. 168).

Fifthly, there is the issue of non-cooperation that can characterise some L2 learners. L2 learners may be unwilling to cooperate with teachers due to teachers’ preconceptions about the students, such as notions about the content knowledge gap between minority and non-minority children (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Teachers may consider students from backgrounds other than those of the target language will not be able to achieve the expected results in a mainstream educational setting. Therefore, their attitudes towards L2 learners become negative and they pay less attention to them, which can result in non-cooperation from students. As Sirota & Bailey (2009) continue to argue, research in this area in the USA showed that "both white and black teachers perceive white students more positively than they do to minority students, including those who speak English as their second language" (p. 2). It is also noted that children’s academic outcomes are strongly influenced by teachers’ perceptions (Brown, 2006). So, it is a real challenge for teachers to encourage students, especially L2 learners, to be co-operative and engaged in the classroom in order to make learning fruitful. Although the students in the Bangladeshi context are not a minority, teachers’ perceptions of students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds may impact on their expectations for progress.

**Pedagogical Considerations**

As discussed earlier, vocabulary enrichment for L2 learners is important. Carlo et al. (2004) argue that specific instructional components involving a socio-constructivist approach, such as small group activities, crossword puzzles,
specific text assignments and various kinds of information about words can be helpful for vocabulary enrichment.

There is a need for teachers to pay attention to students’ existing experiences inside and outside the classroom to reduce the fear in communication. EAL (English as an additional language) students are very often underestimated by teachers and other students, as their English level is below that of others, although they are well experienced and educated in their own language and culture. As a result, this brings ‘silence’ and a slow or often negative outcome in learners’ performances. Teachers need to imagine what the classroom looks like and sounds like from student’s point of view in order to select appropriate methodology for teaching (Safford & Costley, 2008). This includes a careful consideration of the different linguistic and cultural starting points for different learners, so that “creativity and difference [in language production] are seen as normal and as productive” (Kress, 2003, p. 120), “rather than barriers to academic success” (Safford & Costley, 2008, p. 149).

The literature also suggests that teachers must be familiar with the different strategies used by different students. Schools should adjust curriculum to fit the needs of both male and female students as well as students from different geographical backgrounds and support them to use different learning strategies when learning English. Although in Bangladesh classrooms are not packed with multicultural students, there are differences in socio-economic levels and cultural differences across Bangladesh. So it is equally important for Bangladeshi teachers to be aware about the different learning strategies depending on students’ gender and cultural backgrounds.

A further consideration is the place of an integrated pedagogy of language teaching for multicultural classrooms. Communicative, content-based approaches are taken to be the most effective in classrooms for second language teaching and learning (Lynch, 2003). As a result of evaluating some of the disadvantages of this approach, a different view emerged that is referred to as the “post-communicative approach” (Pachler, 2000). This incorporates linguistic and cultural comparisons across the curriculum. Cross-curricular activities can reinforce not only what has been learnt, but also how it has been learnt. Byram (1997) has argued in his own model of ‘intercultural communicative competence’ that linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and intercultural competence are needed to make language teaching successful. Not only has the role of grammar changed in communication but also the exclusive use of the target language in the classroom is no longer regarded as essential. The direct learning of grammatical rules and the sole use of the target language in the classroom could slow down the use of the learning language for effective communication (Anderson, 2008). Accordingly, classroom pedagogy should incorporate strategies that enable students to engage with more cognitively challenging tasks, which must go beyond the prescribed curriculum (Nisbet, 1993; Anderson, 2008). May (2002) references this point in the following quote:

We cannot talk about building a ‘knowledge economy’ unless we are concerned to adopt and pursue those educational approaches best suited to accomplishing this for all students – not only for the first language learners but for second language learners as well (p. 21).
It is important to establish learner-sensitive teachers. Teacher education courses may need to focus on fostering sensitivity and increasing awareness of issues related to multiplicity (Sirota & Bailey, 2009). Teacher education programmes could also incorporate clinical components and practical work with multilingual classrooms. This may assist teachers to apply theory to practice and become more confident in working with diverse learners. Thus teachers could have the opportunity to explore and test their own observation and use the evidence to improve their dealings with diverse classrooms.

Anderson (2008) argues that the students of other languages often get ‘stigmatised’ by the approaches used in the mainstream classrooms, and although the curriculum may advocate more flexible approaches, the classroom tasks often fail to take account of the perspectives and needs of bilingual learners. He also adds that there are some general attitudes about bilingual students noted by researchers such as Byram (1997), Tosi (1988), Cummins (2001), and Lynch (2003) particularly, that suggest that communicative content-based approaches are the most effective in classrooms for teaching and learning a second language. An approach that focuses more on teaching skills than content, thereby incorporating the needs of the learners will ensure that learning is the central focus. It is also argued that links between home and community, and the interrelationship of cultures within diverse societies can make a valuable contribution in learning the target language (Anderson, 2008; Macfarlane, 2007). Although, see Franken & Haslett (1999) for arguments against using interactive or collaborative tasks in the classroom.

Overall, however, the literature suggests that effective approaches including the use of culturally responsive pedagogy and a communicative approach, minimising teachers pre-conceptions about multilingual learners, paying attention to students’ existing experiences, being aware of different learning strategies based on students’ gender and cultural diversity, along with the provision of professional development could be the most helpful to ESL teachers and learners (Anderson, 2008; Carlo et al., 2004; Fletcher & Parkhill, 2007; Lu & Berg, 2008; Safford & Costley, 2008).

The Communicative Language Teaching Approach

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the more recent developments for teaching and learning second languages in the mainstream classroom where English is not the mother tongue (TQI-SEP, 2006). CLT is based on the theoretical concept of communicative competence, which focuses not only on accuracy, but also on fluency in communication (Savignon, 2003; TQI-SEP, 2006). Following the linguistic theory of Chomsky (Savignon, 2001), CLT focuses on ‘communicative competence’ which incorporates the grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic use of the language in different contexts (Hasan & Akhand, 2009). To understand this concept, it is important to examine language and language learning. Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols that a community uses to communicate with each other (SEDP, 1999). The main purpose of a language is to make successful communication with others. If language learning fails to reach this goal then there is little point in learning that language. When learning any language, it is essential to remember that the goal is to communicate effectively with that language, particularly in the oral form. CLT emphasises the learners’ communicative competence with a focus on linguistic form, social context, interpretation and the function of the language in diverse
situations (Savignon, 2003). Language use is therefore more important than mere knowledge of the language.

CLT is highly regarded and widely used in the non-English speaking countries as an approach to develop English as a second language (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2007; Sakura, 2001; Savignon, 2003; Thompson, 1996). Asian countries, Latin American countries and others where English is not the ‘mother tongue’, use CLT to teach and learn English as a second language (Hiep, 2007; Howard & Millar, 2009; Nishimura, 2000; Sakura, 2001; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Savignon, 2003; Zhang, 1997). Furthermore, English-speaking countries such as the UK, USA and the European Union also use this approach to teach ESL learners from diverse backgrounds (Anderson, 2008; Sirota & Bailey, 2009; Carlo et al., 2004; Hite & Evans, 2006; Safford & Costley, 2008; Savignon, 2003).

CLT focuses on the phenomenological perspective of ‘learning by doing’ and the notion that language learning not only depends on learning the grammatical rules but also the ability to use the language in real life situations for communication (Hymes, 1972). The key characteristics of CLT include an emphasis on the meaning of the language, incorporation of four basic language skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing), teaching grammar in context, enhancing learning by doing, and focusing on many language practice activities such as dialogue, role play, interviews, games, pair and group work (TQI-SEP, 2006; Hiep, 2007).

For any activity, CLT follows some prescribed but flexible stages such as, pre-, main and post- activity (TQI-SEP, 2006). Before starting the activity, the teacher sets the scene with a lesson-related short discussion, including the introduction of difficult words, providing guiding questions and clear instructions. During the main part of the lesson teachers are expected to monitor students’ performance, according to the objectives of the learning and assist with difficulties. At the end of the task they must elicit answers, correct confusions and provide feedback to the whole class.

CLT also does not consider reading aloud as an effective technique to develop learners’ reading skill (TQI-SEP, 2006). The theory that underpins the reading component of CLT assumes the need to understand the text; therefore silent reading is more appropriate than oral reading to increase comprehension skills. Reading aloud is useful at the earliest stages of learning when the learners’ attention is centred on pronunciation rather than understanding the meaning. Therefore, CLT tends to focus on silent reading activities in the classroom to develop reading skills.

Savignon (2003) argues that in spite of the learning in CLT being contextualised, sometimes it is undermined in practice by focusing excessively on the achievements in learners’ communicative competence. She states that in most cases this is not due to CLT itself as an approach, but it is the implementation and evaluation procedures that make it seem unsuccessful. To overcome these challenges, Japan has a reformed curriculum, Hong Kong and Costa Rica changed public examination systems and curriculum, Taiwan shifted into a bilingual environment with all road signs in English as well as Chinese and the European Union shifted its focus on learner autonomy in language education (Hiep, 2007; Howard & Millar, 2009; Nishimura, 2000; Sakura, 2001; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Savignon, 2003; Zhang, 1997). So it can be said that although CLT is used widely in learning English as a second language, some modifications
may be needed to accommodate the background of the learners in different contexts and to make it more learner centred.

**CLT and Bangladesh**

In Bangladesh the CLT approach has been used to teach and learn English as a second language for nearly two decades, but public examination results (MoE, 2010) and my personal experience as a teacher educator, and more recently as a researcher, indicate that the outcome for students is not consistently positive. In reading, writing and speaking tests (NEMP, Crooks, Flockton and White, 2007, and PAT, New Zealand Council for Education Research, 2008 & 1991) carried out with 20 students in the four schools, there was, as Figure 1 below shows, a clear difference between the achievement of oral and written skill tasks. The level of written achievement was nearly double that of oral achievement in each school.

![Figure 1: Differences in Scores on Oral Tasks Compared to Written Tasks](image)

Hasan & Akhand (2009) articulate that a lack of classroom instructions and insufficient resources may result in CLT being a non-effective approach in the Bangladeshi context. However, there is continuing debate about whether a blend of content-based approaches and CLT could minimise the challenges of teaching English in Bangladesh. Thus Nesa (2004) argues that very limited teaching / learning materials and implementation strategies create hindrances in the implementation of CLT in Bangladesh. She suggests that enhancing self-directed study, including more instructional materials, and furthering teacher training in CLT as well as supervision of CLT sessions could improve student's achievement. Though the Ministry of Education of Bangladesh has already taken actions to enhance continuous teacher training and provide more resources for ESL classrooms, the outcome is not yet satisfactory. This is reflected in the public examination results (TQI-SEP, 2006; MoE, 2010).

Though large class sizes are often cited as one of the major barriers for implementing CLT effectively (Machemer & Crawford, 2007; Greer & Heaney,
2004; Herreid, 2006; McConnell, Steer & Owens, 2003) and were mentioned as a big problem by the participants in this study, it is the economic reality in Bangladesh. Study of the four schools (20 students, 12 parents and 8 teacher participants) also indicated concern about a lack of English practice environments and resources, a shortage of time, a vast syllabus, lack of awareness by parents and teachers about the importance of practicing English, the examination system, an attitude of aiming only to pass, a lack of proper motivation for students to use English, time shortage and class load. To overcome these challenges, it was recommended by many of the participants that both teachers and parents could work together to motivate students by creating a suitable practice environment at home and school. It was noted that it would be easier to achieve, if the examination system was changed to reflect the goals of the curriculum. Participants stressed that any change should be designed in a way which gave students sufficient time to adjust.

Regarding the challenges of large classes, participants recommended a reduction in the number of subjects / sessions (from 7 or 8 sessions to 4 sessions) a day, thus leading to increased class (session) time and allowing two teachers in each class. This would enhance practice through decreasing the class loads for the teachers, thereby increasing communicative opportunities. Participants also hoped that using multimedia in teaching would bring positive outcomes through making large classes more practice oriented. Parents agreed to assist teachers in English classes to improve cooperation and help teachers to manage large classes more easily. They also agreed that a positive attitudinal change from all groups (teachers, parents and students) needed to occur.

**Limitations of CLT in Bangladeshi Context**

Though CLT has been used for many years in Bangladesh for teaching and learning English language, it still has not been adequately used to develop critical thinking. CLT is based on a ‘learning by doing’ approach and focuses on participatory processes where every student can get equal opportunity and learn accordingly even in a classroom with a large number of students. However CLT is only exercised to get fluency in communication. The data of this study support this. Students were found to be doing better in written skills comparing oral skills. However, functional communicative competence in English in itself is not enough to fulfill the aspiration of preparing Bangladeshi students to become global citizens. Our students need not only improved communication strategies but also strategies to examine and critique received ideas in order to live and negotiate one’s own position in terms of international influences and to understand, and balance, power status in this age of internationalism. CLT could be utilized using appropriate themes in classrooms to facilitate students thinking about others and evaluating positions in this world. So my suggestion in the following pages is that our Bangladesh curriculum needs a mix of critical literary topics in the textbooks, use of student responsive pedagogy and a positive attitudinal change towards learning English as a language. Such change could extend language learning into developing critical awareness about global needs, possibilities and limitations. In the following discussion I turn to my own observations and critical reflections.

**Literacy and Global Citizenship**
As stated earlier, one of the overarching goals of making English language a compulsory part of the curriculum is to enable Bangladesh to take an active and potent role in the global marketplace and the people of Bangladesh to become global citizens. So the development of literacy and communicative skills in English is fundamental to national development goals and international aspirations. It seems a trend of recent times that everybody wants to be a member of the global village. But becoming a successful global citizen is not so easy.

The promise of global citizenship is that we would live interdependently, fulfilling each other’s needs. Education would be globalised to reflect the needs of all. But the developed always thinks that the under- or un-developed should be taken to the developed position. Unless they achieve this position they will not be called global citizens. There is a dominating culture among the developed world that thinks they are superior in all aspects. However, the under- or un-developed local area could also be rich in culture, education, literature, tradition and all resources except money. The economy is not the only indicator of development.

The Need for Criticality

Gramsci asked the question in his Notebooks:

“...is it better to ‘think’, without having a critical awareness......, or on the other hand, is it better to work out consciously and critically one’s own conception of the world?... revolutionaries need to be critical and make it clear that the starting point of critical elaboration is the consciousness of what one really is ....” (Gramsci, 1971, p. 323).

Since its beginning with Socrates philosophy has typically involved the project of questioning the accepted knowledge of the day. Later Locke, Hume, and especially Kant developed a distinctively modern idea of philosophy as the critique of knowledge. Michel Foucault’s ‘critical philosophy’ focused this questioning on the human science to make it more concrete. So, why is this criticality needed? Because, of the word Equality. If considered in its broadest sense, then we are equal in belonging to a large group called human beings. Although individuals are not the same, equality can be discussed in a worldwide sense. We have to learn to see the world through the eyes of others (Andreotti & Souza, 2008). Criticality is needed to prevent hegemony in society and in the world. Hegemony deals with power relationships. Gramsci coined the phrase ‘ideological hegemony’ to describe the influence of ruling class over knowledge. He argued that counter hegemony can be developed to break the hegemony of the ruling class. In a simple way, education can make citizens universally conscious about each other and uphold each other’s position. McCowan (2009), among others, calls such education Global Citizenship Education. As McCowan says, “if you ask people why they are engaged in teaching citizenship, they can tell you confidently that they are helping to make good citizens and thereby a good society” (p. 87). But what kind of society do we see as good? And what type of global citizenship education serves that goal? For example, Battiste (2008) discusses the struggles between Eurocentric Knowledge (EK) and Indigenous Knowledge (IK). He explains that Indigenous Knowledge is often presented to students as an inferior kind of knowledge and Eurocentric Knowledge is always shown as the higher one. Not only education but also publications are produced to serve the elites. Altbach (2008) also explains that “the products of knowledge
are distributed unequally” (p. 55). The third world countries are not critically conscious enough to address this very important issue. They are short of technical facilities and also lack indigenous writers to research and write on subjects of national and international concern. So they become ‘book hungry’. However, most of the books are imported from the West and often such books do not bring good to the countrymen.

Altbach (2008) states that “developed nations have manipulated third world publishing solely for their own national interest and economic gain” (p. 56). It is also seen through the charity images on TV channels and magazines; they (West) are trying to keep this elitism. They are selecting a particular image of a particular country, because this is the way they want to see that country. So, generally, people accept it without thinking or asking questions, as it is not usual to question the ‘legend’ (Pike, 2008). The ‘benevolence’ of the West and the ‘naturalisation’ of the creation of an ‘inferior’ other confront us with the various versions of truths. Thus global citizenship education often changes its face to be more colonial than global.

The experience I shared with colleagues of study abroad reflects similar issues. A cameo of our experience, as I perceive it, might look something like this. A group of fourteen senior teacher educators from Bangladesh, a third world developing country, are very busy preparing themselves to go to a first world country. They are very happy indeed, because from more than a hundred competitors they have been selected. It is a great opportunity for them, they think. They are going for a Masters programme in a university of that Western country, although all of them have already completed Masters degrees from their own country. Why are they then so happy? Because, they think, they are going to merge with the legend that is with the West, the developed world. They will be treated as superior in their own context later. But who had decided that they are inferior? When faced with unexpected situations in that ‘legendary’ country, because of their colour and origin, they wake up from their daydreaming and realise that the situation is worse than, not superior to, their own country. In the course of the programme they are about to lose their identity, but now they can still feel proud of their distinctiveness.

We find the same alarm in Andreotti’s words (2006), when she said,

> In order to understand global issues, a complex web of cultural and material local/ global processes and contexts needs to be examined and unpacked..... if we fail to do that in global citizenship education, we may end up promoting a ‘civilising mission’ as a slogan for a generation who take up the ‘burden’ of saving/ educating/ civilising the world (p. 41).

A ‘Bangla’ saying, “je jai Lanka, sei hoi Rabon” relates to the same fear. It can be translated as “He who goes to Lanka becomes Rabon” where ‘Lanka’ is a place and ‘Rabon’ is evil, according to the holy Ramayana of Hindus. The threat is that while we may hope to reconstruct the situations in which power is held, there is a probability that after joining with the power elites, we may be inclined to act like the prevailing ones. The United States of America, which once was a colony, is now behaving like a coloniser, and countries like China, India, and Brazil, the rising giants, are now starting to act like the power elites to manipulate and get control over others.
So, is global citizenship education failing to do its job? Teaching individuals to be able to assess concepts critically such as ‘global citizenship’ may reduce such failings. People in the developing world believe in the legend and never want to challenge it. But they have to learn how to weave together the strands of knowledge in their way. Pike (2008) says that the legend should be reconstructed, and global educators have a vital role to play to reshape the legend and even make the structure of the new legend.

Creating Critical Awareness

The Bangladesh Education Policy (2010) asks its people to learn English language so that they can become effective global citizens. The CLT approach, launched nearly twenty years ago, serves as a tool towards this goal. As an outcome, the English achievement rates in public examinations, which assess only written language, are relatively high compared to oral communication skills, but students appear to be far behind in developing critical thinking in their language learning.

Though English language is learnt in Bangladesh as a foreign or sometimes second language, the most common attitude behind this learning is that it brings empowerment and better opportunities in life. But the question remains: why must it be only English that provides empowerment and better opportunities in life; why not Bangla, Bangladesh’s own language?

In Bangladesh, perhaps in other developing countries, most of the people believe that foreign (white) people know everything and they behave accordingly. They never try to argue with them. When any foreigner is seen on the street, they look at them with great excitement and try to respect and touch them, thinking that they are from a heavenly place where everything is perfect. They want to join them. The same is seen in the earlier anecdote about the ‘fourteen Bangladeshi educators’. Those educators became conscious that the reality was different. They became aware that the ‘legendary status’ which they gave to this world was an illusion. Some unwanted prejudiced (racial) situations crushed this daydream. Critical literacy offers us tools for uncovering the truth and reality, and the ability to deal with such situations.

Conclusion

Bangladesh is a developing country with Bangla as the first language, and English as a second language that is needed to keep pace with the global world. No country can be isolated in a fast growing multicultural world with ever changing communication technologies. For advancement in life it is no longer desirable to be monolingual, particularly in developing countries. As English is widely used all over the world, Bangladesh is now responding to this challenge through programmes such as CLT. Therefore, the present discussion began with reporting students’ perspectives on their learning and the effects of the CLT programme, as well as the challenges students face and the supports they have, or would like to have, to make ESL learning effective in school life and beyond. While many factors are responsible for students’ underachievement in learning English, evidence argues that with the cooperation of students, teachers, parents and teacher educators, it is possible to lift achievement levels (Fletcher & Parkhill,
Though the CLT approach is used widely and effectively in non-English speaking countries to learn English as foreign or second language and for developing communication skills (Mangubhai, Marland, Dashwood & Son, 2007; Sakura, 2001; Savignon, 2003; Thompson, 1996), in itself it fails to generate critical thinking that is needed to understand the current international context. CLT instigates creativity, but creativity in itself is not enough to equip students to deal with issues of distinctiveness and to look at their world “differently”. We need also to help students value their own culture, language and history at the same time as they learn the language and values of others.

In Bangladesh the situation is shifting very rapidly. Now the status of English has changed from being a foreign language to being a second language. But is the change enough to deal with changing global circumstances? In this time of change, attitudes towards English language need to be altered to keep pace with the world. A CLT approach in classrooms could begin to bring about desired outcomes if it is blended with critical literacy. Communicative approaches to language learning can be developed to encourage the growth of citizens who will be globally accepted at the same time as they uphold their own identity, and will be able to negotiate power relationships while they respect others’ positions. So it is high time to change the focus of learning English language in Bangladesh to survive effectively and valuably in this modern world.
References


