

SHIFTING TEACHERS' ROLE IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE CLASSROOM IN BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

In Bangladesh, a lot of changes have taken place in the field of English language teaching. Though there has been a significant shift in the curriculum, the role of the teacher has hardly shifted from the traditional Grammar Translation Method. As a result, the new methods of English Language Teaching have become ineffective to some extent. Based on an empirical study, this paper tries to identify what roles teachers are actually playing in the language classroom and why there exists a gap between theory and practice. It also focuses on teachers' beliefs and attitudes and how these clash with the expected roles of the teachers in the new methodology. Finally, it ends with some recommendations for teachers and administrators.

Keywords: Bangladesh, CLT, teacher, role, effectiveness.

Introduction

English has been taught in educational institutions in Bangladesh as a major subject for more than a hundred years. This paper focuses on the shifting roles of the teacher in our English language classroom through the years. A lot of changes have taken place in the field of language teaching in recent years. The required approach shifted from the traditional Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). After CLT was introduced in the 1980s, there was a cry for change in every sector. The traditional roles of the learners and teachers were no longer appropriate. To help the teachers, a number of training programmes were arranged by the National Curriculum Textbook Board (NCTB), National Academy for Educational Management (NAEM) and the British Council. These programmes are aimed to make the teachers aware of the new method, their new roles in the classroom and the usage of the new study materials. The major training programmes include: English Language Teachers' Improvement Project (ELTIP), Continuous Professional Development 1 (CPD 1), Continuous Professional Development 2 (CPD 2) and

workshops and seminars arranged by Bangladesh English Language Teachers' Association (BELTA). Though there has been a widespread shift in the overall English Language Teaching scenario, the role of the teacher has hardly departed from the traditional Grammar Translation Method. As a result, the new methods have failed to satisfactorily achieve their intended goals. This paper tries to identify the factors behind the wide gap between the changing teaching methods and teacher roles in Bangladesh. This paper presents the research findings of a small scale survey on this issue and ends with some recommendations about how to adjust to this new situation.

English Language Teaching in Bangladesh: A Brief Overview

The history of modern English Language Teaching in Bangladesh precedes independence to the days of East Pakistan. Alam (2007) writes, at that time, "English was the medium of instruction and...Bengali was taught extremely inadequately and rather half-heartedly" (p. 373). Such education made the students quite proficient in English and rather poor in Bengali. This is because in schools most of the time students communicated in English than Bengali. But after the independence, the whole scenario changed. With the birth of Bangladesh in 1971 there was a rise of "linguistic nationalism ...English was increasingly marginalized in public life. Bengali became the state language of Bangladesh" (Alam, 2007, p. 374).

As Bengali was gaining prominence over English, the use of English became limited to the English classroom only. According to Yasmin (2006), "the reason for this attitude was socially and politically grounded." (p. 133). She also states that due to linguistic nationalism, people were passionate about Bengali and using it in all sectors of life but they failed to realize the long term effects of neglecting and ignoring English. The government was also nationalistic in devising the language policy. As a result, the field of English Language Teaching was somewhat marginalized. Yasmin (2006) believes that this negligence has had an adverse effect and the consequence is poor performance in English language teaching and learning.

The Ministry of Education has recognized this situation and tried to improve the issue of poor performance of English language teachers and learners. With this aim, the ELT Task Force was formed in 1975 by the Ministry of Education. According to Yasmin (2006), this Task Force conducted a survey to determine the state of English language teaching-learning "at secondary, higher secondary and teacher training level" (p. 134). She also notes that the finding revealed a disturbing and frustrating picture of the overall teaching-learning situation, especially regarding the quality of the teachers. The survey found that around

seventy percent of the teacher trainees who were attending teacher training programmes at secondary teacher training institutions, only had enough proficiency to teach the materials up to the seventh grade, although these teachers were expected to teach up to the tenth grade. Twenty percent of the trainees participating in the training programmes at Primary Training institutions had skills and proficiency to teach the materials which were designed for the third to the fifth grade (Bangladesh Education Extension and Research Institute, 1976). These findings of the ELT Task Force were remarkable as it was the first attempt by the government to identify the real teaching-learning situation in Bangladesh and language teachers' deficiencies in ELT.

Following the results of the Task Force survey, the government felt there was a need to produce new curricula and syllabuses for "primary, junior primary, junior secondary and higher secondary as well as technical and vocational education" (Yasmin, 2006, p. 134). To serve this purpose, the Bangladesh National Curriculum and Syllabus Developing Committee was formed. The committee emphasised the teaching of all four skills in primary and secondary education. Emphasis was also put on teaching grammar, translation and English literature. In 1977, English was made a compulsory subject which was supposed to be learnt from the third grade up to the twelfth grade (Haque, 1995). It was a major shift because previously English had been taught as an optional subject from the third grade and as a compulsory subject from the sixth grade (Bangladesh Education Extension and Research Institute, 1976). Importance was given on literary texts and GTM was widely used to teach English. Between 1978 to 1986, the focus shifted from literature to language and new textbooks were published for primary and secondary levels. These books prioritized language skills and literary texts started to be replaced by more language-oriented texts (Rahman, 1988). But there was no teacher's guide to help the teachers with the new methods and new materials. Though the committee emphasised the four skills, in practice the teachers still focused on teaching the grammar and literary texts. In the language classes, the teacher was the only speaker, who was expected to know everything. The teacher used to provide all the grammatical structures, model essays and paragraphs and prepared all the materials for the students. There was hardly any scope for learners to do anything on their own.

However, near the end of the century, there was a deliberate shift from the GTM to CLT. Theoretically, the progress and use of CLT marked a huge departure as CLT entailed changes in the nature of materials, textbooks, classroom teaching, learning environment, learners' and teachers' roles. To promote CLT in Bangladesh, the English Language Teaching Improvement Project (ELTIP) was launched in 1997. The Government of Bangladesh and the Government of the UK jointly funded this teacher improvement project. To try and ensure a CLT-

friendly teaching-learning situation, this project focused on “three main areas: teaching materials, teacher training and the reformation of the examination system” (Yasmin, 2006, p. 137). The textbook *English for Today* was introduced in the primary, secondary and higher secondary levels. ELTIP trained the teachers at different levels to acquaint them with the principles of CLT. The new method brought new challenges, so there was a huge burden upon the teacher. The teacher’s role was now not just limited to providing model answers but extended to creating a sense of autonomy in the learner. CLT bestowed multiple roles upon the teacher. The whole perception of the traditional role of a teacher was turned upside down by CLT.

Review of the Literature

In this section of the paper, we would like to look at some views on teacher’s role as identified by different scholars. Richards and Lockhart (2005) point out that, “A role can be defined as the part taken by a participant in any act of communication” (p. 97). They believe that the role of a teacher is primarily determined by the educational institutions. Teachers interpret their roles in different ways depending on issues, such as, teaching methods, their cultural background and their individual personalities.

The traditional GTM focuses upon the teacher-centeredness (Foster, 1994) in the classroom. Here the teacher is the sole authority. He is the main instructor and lecture-giver. According to Larsen and Freeman (2000), the teacher’s role in GTM include: giving lectures; explaining everything to the learners; translating everything from target language to the learner’s mother tongue; providing models of writing; conducting practices; and correcting mistakes. Richards and Rodgers (2001) maintain that in an Audio-lingual classroom, the teacher is regarded as the “primary source of language and of language learning” (p. 28). He is the role-model for the learners to imitate. Learners do whatever the teacher asks them to do. In Counseling Learning, the teacher’s role is that of a “psychological counselor” (p. 28).

However in CLT, we notice a shift from the traditional roles of teachers. Harmer (1991) states that, in a CLT classroom the teacher has multiple roles to play. Here the teacher acts as a *controller, prompter, participant, resource, tutor* and *performer*. A good teacher is someone who has a “good rapport” with his learners (pp. 108-113).

In recent years, it is believed that one of the major roles of a teacher is to initiate interaction. Breen and Candlin (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001) suggest that in a communicative classroom the teacher plays many roles such as a

“facilitator, organizer of resources, guide, counselor, advisor, needs analyst, group process manager, and friend” (p. 167).

Thus, the role of a teacher varies with different methods and the success of a method depends on how successfully the teacher performs these roles. In order to try and gain some insight into the teachers’ actual role in Bangladeshi classrooms, we conducted a small scale research. At this point of the paper we would like to focus attention on that survey and its findings.

Methodology

The survey was carried out among 18 Bangladeshi English language teachers who came from two different geographical areas. Group 1 consisted of 8 teachers from 4 schools within Dhaka, the capital. Group 2 consisted of 10 teachers from 5 schools outside Dhaka. 70% of them had more than twenty years’ experience of teaching English as a second language. 90% of them had the experience of dealing with big language classes. All of them had experience of attending teacher training courses.

In order to find out how teachers actually perform in the classroom as compared to the expected role as mandated by the CLT approach, a questionnaire was designed. A face-to-face informal interview was also used to find out why teachers failed to perform the expected roles. The first part of the questionnaire included eight questions. The questions were aimed to find out the teachers’ beliefs. We decided to focus on this issue because we believe it has great importance in influencing teachers’ roles (Richards, Gallo & Renandya, 2001). Let us now focus our attention on the questionnaire data.

Results and Discussion

An analysis of item 01 shows that only a small number of teachers (25% inside Dhaka and 30% outside Dhaka) believe that in a language classroom, learners can contribute in the teaching-learning situation (Table 1). None of them considers the learners as ‘empty vessels’ which is contrary to the old belief. But what is interesting to note here is that 75% teachers inside Dhaka and 70% outside Dhaka chose the third option which indicates that they believe in both, that is, learners can contribute and they also come to learn ‘everything’ from the teacher. In response to item 02, all the teachers agreed that learners’ involvement is necessary in a language classroom. While responding to item 03, the majority of the teachers (75% inside Dhaka and 60% outside Dhaka) suggested that the best attitude for the teacher is to be friendly with the learners. But in their response to the next item most of them (50% inside Dhaka and 60% outside Dhaka) mentioned that sometimes friendly behavior may cause chaos in the

classroom. From their self-contradictory comments, we can deduce that in a big language class, too much freedom is not preferable. The focus of the next item was on learner autonomy. The majority of the teachers (75% inside Dhaka and 80% outside Dhaka) responded that sometimes the learners should be given freedom to work on their own. However, this belief does not fully match the principles of CLT as CLT requires a high degree of learners' autonomy (Joshi, 2011; Breen & Candlin as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Shahidullah 1999).

Regarding the item on reflective thinking, most of the teachers (75% inside Dhaka and 80% outside Dhaka) responded that they prefer to discuss their problems with their colleagues rather than thinking about those problems on their own. Most of them (75% inside Dhaka and 80% outside Dhaka) do not have the habit of keeping diary or journals to reflect on their own performance or problems regarding teaching. Though teacher development requires reflective thinking on the part of a teacher (Farrell, 2003; Wallace 1991), in reality, most of the teachers do not reflect or think back about their classes. This kind of attitude hinders their development as effective language teachers. The last item attempts to identify which skill is emphasised in the language classroom. A majority of the teachers surveyed identified grammar (75% inside Dhaka and 100% outside Dhaka), reading skill (75% inside Dhaka and 80% outside Dhaka) and writing skill (100% inside Dhaka and 80% outside Dhaka) as major skills to be taught. They indicated little focus on developing listening and speaking. According to Brown (2001) and Breen and Candlin (as cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001), a teacher's major role in CLT is 'facilitating' the communication between the learners. But the response to the last question shows that verbal communication skills get less attention from the teachers surveyed. Hence it can be inferred that oral interaction and communication may be a lesser priority in these language classrooms.

The second part of the questionnaire included nine questions focusing on teachers' role in the language classroom. Let us now look at their responses.

Table 1: Teachers' Beliefs

			Response (Grp 1)	Response (Grp 2)
	Question	Answers	In Dhaka	Outside D.
1.	Can learners play an important role in a language class or are they passive receivers of education from you?	a. Students can contribute to the class b. They come to the class to learn everything from teachers c. both	a. 25% b. 0% c. 75%	a. 30% b. 0% c. 70%
2.	Is learner's involvement necessary in a language classroom?	a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes	a. 100% b. 0% c. 0%	a. 100% b. 0% c. 0%
3.	What should be your attitude towards your learners?	a. Friendly b. Strict c. Both	a. 25% b. 0% c. 75%	a. 40% b. 0% c. 60%
4.	If a teacher has friendly attitude, do you think that he/she may lose control over the class?	a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes	a. 25% b. 25% c. 50%	a. 30% b. 20% c. 50%
5.	Should learners be given some freedom to express themselves in the classroom?	a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes	a. 25% b. 0% c. 75%	a. 20% b. 0% c. 80%
6.	If you have any problem (regarding teaching method, classroom management, etc.) what do you think you should do?	a. Go home and reflect on the matter to find out a solution b. Discuss the problem with colleagues to find a solution c. Do not bother about classroom problems once you are outside the classroom	a. 25% b. 75% c. 0%	a. 20% b. 80% c. 0%
7.	Do you think it is necessary to keep a diary or journal to keep a record of the activities of your classroom?	a. Yes b. No	a. 25% b. 75%	a. 20% b. 80%
8.	Which skills should be focused in a language classroom? (you can choose more than one)	a. Grammar b. Reading c. Writing d. Listening e. Speaking	a. 75% b. 75% c. 100% d. 25% e. 50%	a. 100% b. 80% c. 80% d. 10% e. 30%

Table 2 shows that most of the teachers are aware of the new roles they are expected to adopt. The responses indicate that since they have attended different language training programmes, they are familiar with these terms defining the new roles of a teacher. However, what is most surprising is that when they were asked about the mode of teaching used in the language classroom, the majority of the teachers (50% inside Dhaka and 70% outside Dhaka) reported that they prefer “lecture-mode” while conducting their class. Here we notice that though the teachers are aware of the multiple roles of a teacher advocated by CLT, they indicate a continuing strong preference for the traditional “lecture-mode” (Rahman, 1999; Shahidullah, 1999). Again, when asked about the medium of instruction in their English language classroom, most of the respondents (75% inside Dhaka and 80% outside Dhaka) reported that they use a mixture of English and Bengali in their classroom. Though CLT emphasises on the maximum use of L2 (Karim, 2004; Willis, 1996; Lightbown, 1991) in the language classroom, the result of the present study shows that the teachers do not practice target language monolingualism in reality.

When they were asked about the activity types used in the classroom, most of the respondents (75% inside Dhaka and 70% outside Dhaka) indicated that instead of pair work and group work, they prefer individual work by learners. While CLT promotes pair work and group work (Ellis, 2003; Oxford, 1997; Savignon, 1991), these are not practiced in class by most of the teachers surveyed. Teachers were also asked about the ratio of Teacher Talk Time (TTT) and Student Talk Time (STT) in their classroom. Most of them (50% inside Dhaka and 60% outside Dhaka) were in favor of giving more time (TTT 80%: STT 20%) to the teacher than the learner. Though CLT advocates giving more time to learners (Littlejohn as cited in Chowdhury, 2012), the surveyed teachers do not observe this. When the teachers were asked whether they prepared any lesson plan before coming to the class, most of the teachers (50% inside Dhaka and 70% outside Dhaka) responded negatively. They use the textbook *English for Today* and they follow most of the exercises and activities given there. Teachers were also asked about the type of study aid they provide to their learners. The majority of the respondents (75% inside Dhaka and 100% outside Dhaka) mentioned about providing model answers for some questions so that learners can have some sort of guidelines to prepare them for examinations.

In the aspect of giving feedback, the majority of the teachers (50% inside Dhaka and 70% outside Dhaka) emphasised teacher-correction. The teachers were also asked about the importance given to fluency and accuracy, and here most of the teachers (50% inside Dhaka and 70% outside Dhaka) reported that they focus on developing learners’ fluency. This finding appears to contradict the finding in Table 1 which shows more teachers emphasised developing grammar skill where

accuracy is crucial. They also said that in their language classes less time is given to listening and speaking which also seems to be inconsistent with the idea of developing fluency.

Table 2: Role of a Teacher in the Language Classroom

			Response (Group 1)	Response (Group 2)
	Question	Answers	In Dhaka	Outside D.
1.	Which ones of the following roles are applicable for you? (you can choose more than one)	a. Mentor b. Guide c. Facilitator d. Friend e. Class Manager f. Feedback- giver g. Motivator h. Resource	a. 100% b. 100% c. 100% d. 75% e. 75% f. 75% g. 100% h. 100%	a. 100% b. 100% c. 100% d. 100% e. 100% f. 80% g. 100% h. 100%
2.	Which of these modes of instruction do you use?	a. Lecture-mode b. Interactive-mode c. Both	a. 50% b. 0% c. 50%	a. 70% b. 0% c. 30%
3.	Which of the following language do you use as medium of instruction?	a. Bengali only b. English only c. Both	a. 0% b. 25% c. 75%	a. 0% b. 20% c. 80%
4.	What kind of activity do you encourage more?	a. Individual work b. Pair work c. Group Work	a. 75% b. 0% c. 25%	a. 70% b. 0% c. 30%
5.	What according to you should be the ratio of Teacher's Talk Time/Student Talk Time?	a. 50/50 b. 20/80 c. 80/20 d. 100/0	a. 50% b. 0% c. 50% d. 0%	a. 40% b. 0% c. 60% d. 0%
6.	Do you prepare a lesson plan before coming to your class?	a. Yes b. No c. Sometimes	a. 25% b. 50% c. 25%	a. 10% b. 70% c. 20%
7.	What kind of study aids do you provide to your learners? (you can choose more than one)	a. Model answers b. Visual aids c. Extra Materials (handouts, reference books etc.)	a. 75% b. 25% c. 50%	a. 100% b. 0% c. 20%
8.	Which of the following do you use to give feedback / to correct?	a. Peer correction b. Teacher correction c. Both	a. 25% d. 50% e. 25%	a. 10% c. 70% d. 20%
9.	Which of these options gets more importance in your class?	a. Accuracy b. Fluency c. Both	a. 25% b. 50% c. 25%	a. 20% b. 70% c. 10%

Reasons behind the Unchanging Teachers' Role

We used an informal interview for the clarification of some points. Our main focus here was to identify the reasons for our teachers' failure in performing their expected roles. From their responses we have identified that their experience as language learners, lack of proper training, lack of logistic support, time pressure, work-load, large class size, lack of administrative support and passive learners are responsible for their failure.

Our study reveals that some of these factors appear to play significant roles in influencing teachers' roles and attitudes in Bangladeshi language classrooms. These are some of the reasons behind our teachers' failure to adopt the new roles required by CLT.

If we focus on the educational background of Bangladeshi teachers, we find that most of them experienced the GTM as learners. Richards and Lockhart (2005) suggest that a teacher's experience as a language learner and established practices play a vital role in shaping teachers' beliefs. Our teachers were taught in a GTM classroom where the teacher delivered lectures, provided samples and prepared answers for students. The teachers' beliefs are largely derived from their experience of learning in teacher-oriented classrooms. They have internalized the same belief which seems apparent from our research findings. Richards, Gallo and Renandya (2001) also found a similar picture in their study. Though these teachers were made aware of the roles of a teacher in the CLT approach during their training programmes, in practice, they retained the same traditional lecture-mode.

The teaching-learning situation of a Bangladeshi classroom convinces the teacher that the "lecture-mode" (Rahman, 1999; Shahidullah, 1999) is more applicable in the classroom. After the survey was conducted, the teachers involved were asked why they used the lecture-mode and not the interactive-mode in their classroom. Most of them reported that they had to deal with large heterogeneous classes (Chowdhury, 2012; Karim, 2004) with fixed benches and chairs and with very little logistic support (Bamber, 1999) which they believe makes it impossible for them to involve the learners in pair or group works. While CLT advocates the interaction between small number of students (Chowdhury, 2012), in reality, most general classes in Bangladesh exceed that number (NAEM Research Report, 2005). Again, our students also love to play the role of passive listeners (Brown, 2001; Brindley as cited in Richards, 1998; Chowdhury, Haq, & Ahmed, 1997). In such a situation, it becomes difficult for a teacher to involve his learners in interactive activities or pay attention to the needs of individual learners. As a result, we do not find the teacher performing the roles of an 'initiator', a 'friend', a 'needs analyst' and a proper 'feedback-giver'. The overall teaching-learning situation in a Bangladeshi classroom convinces the teacher that

the traditional lecture-mode is the “best” practice as it “requires few specialized skills on the part of teachers” (Brown, 2001, p. 19).

Moreover, new practices require a lot of reflection, hard work, time and devotion on the part of the teacher. Due to financial reasons and professional pressure (Karim, 2004), teachers may struggle to pay attention to all these matters. In most of our educational institutions, there is a shortage of English language teachers (Karim, 2004). So, teachers have heavy class loads. As they have little time to reflect on their own development, they may feel it is safer to practice the established tradition.

We also found that our culture is partly responsible for this situation. In our tradition, it is believed that an ideal teacher is the one who plays the role of a lecturer and who has a well-disciplined class (Karim, 2004; Rahman, 1999). This kind of cultural assumptions make the teacher resistant towards the new mode of teaching that de-centers the teacher and centralizes the students in the classroom. CLT practices learner-centeredness, while the culture expects the teacher to be authoritative (Bamber, 1999) in the class. In a classroom, adopting a CLT approach means the teacher may be anxious about losing their importance in the classroom. Such cultural pressure (Karim, 2004; Mackay, 2002; Rahman, 1999) creates a belief in the teacher that if they allow learner-autonomy, there may be a loss of teacher authority over the class and this is evident from many responses to our survey. Moreover, the administrators, who are hardly aware of the demands of CLT, expect the teacher to maintain discipline in class and complete the syllabus within the given time (Karim, 2004; Rahman, 1999). So, the teacher is caught in between the administrative and cultural expectations and his role as a CLT teacher.

Limitations of the Study

We realized that our study was carried out on a small scale and the findings should be applied very cautiously to the larger population. We worked with a very small number of teachers (n=18) from nine schools. All of these schools were government institutions. It would have been better if we could include more teachers and private schools and Madrasas in our survey. We also did not try to find out from the learners what they felt about their teachers’ role and classroom practice. Neither did we try to find out the opinion of the administrators. A more comprehensive picture of our teaching-learning scenario would have come out if we could include more variables in the study.

Recommendations

In this paper, we focused on the expected role of a teacher in ELT classrooms in Bangladesh. We have sought to find out how much the role of a teacher has actually shifted in practice in line with theory. We have attempted to highlight the issues that bar the self-improvement of the teacher. However, we do not believe that the shift in the role of a teacher is impossible. We believe that the transformation is a complex process that requires the collaborative effort of the teachers, learners and administrators. We would like to end our paper with the following recommendations:

Improved Training Programmes

We feel that our training programmes need to be improved. Instead of imposing the theoretical ideas of CLT, the focus should be more on limitations and contextualized implementations. The training programmes should give the teachers enough scope to explore and express their beliefs and ideas regarding their own classroom. Emphasis should also be given on developing teachers' language proficiency to make them more confident about using the L2 in the classroom. Resource persons and mentors can frequently visit different schools and colleges in rural areas and can work with teachers in the real classroom to find some practical solutions.

Administrative Support

Instead of being authoritative and threatening, the administration can facilitate the professional development of the teachers by giving them more freedom, lessening unnecessary administrative workload, and providing them with logistic support.

Improvement of Lecture mode

Instead of depending on excessive use of lecture-mode, the teachers can improve the lecture-mode by including some interactive activities from the group-mode.

Change in Exam System

Along with reading and writing, speaking and listening should also be assessed in the examinations. In the examinations, some marks should be allotted for these skills. This can be done through presentation and viva voce. We believe this will make the teachers and learners motivated and more serious about practicing these skills in the classroom.

Self-improvement

We would like our teachers to become reflective practitioners (Wallace, 1991) through peer-observation, group discussion and critical evaluation as advocated by Farrell (2003). We feel that colleagues as critical friends (Francis as cited in Farrell, 2003) can support each other in their professional development. Though

journal writing or keeping portfolios is very important for teacher development, our teachers cannot do it because of excessive workload and shortage of time. But they can occasionally engage themselves in journal writing. They can either write their own journals at home or they can write in groups.

We believe that with these changes, our teachers will be able to adopt new roles in practice and make their classroom teaching more effective.

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