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Communicative Language Teaching in the Education System of India

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Abstract : One of the more influential pedagogical approaches in second language teaching has been Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which focuses on meaningful interaction and authentic language use. CLT has become more popular in the Indian education system (its secondary tier model) where English serves as a second language and medium of instruction. This paper undertakes a critical overview of continuity and change in Indian EFL education with regard to the history, principles, classroom practices, and challenges of CLT. It also analyzes policy level measures, teacher preparation, and assessment practices. The paper argues that although CLT has been incorporated into curriculum frameworks, its classroom implementation remains uneven due to systemic constraints. Suggestions are offered for effective adoption of CLT in Indian classrooms.

Keywords - CLT, Language Teaching, Pedagogy, Interactive teaching, classroom Teaching, Second Language.

I. INTRODUCTION

The teaching of English in India has traditionally been dominated by the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), which emphasized memorization of rules, translation, and written examinations. However, globalization and the growing importance of English for academic and professional communication necessitated a shift toward functional language use. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged as a response to these changing needs, focusing on the development of communicative competence rather than mere grammatical accuracy [1]. English in India serves as a link language, and it is also considered the medium of instruction at most Indian institutes of higher education. This was eventually acknowledged by educational reforms which incorporated communicative language teaching into the curriculum. Adoption of CLT has been favored by policy, but issues with its implementation persist on pragmatic grounds (e.g., structural, pedagogical and socio-cultural). CLT is based on Hymes' (1972) theory of communicative competence, which goes beyond grammatical knowledge to incorporate sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Later, Canale and Swain (1980) elaborated this framework by emphasizing the functional and contextual use of language [3]. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT is characterized by emphasis on meaning over form, Use of authentic language, Learner-centered interaction, Integration of listening, speaking, reading, and writing as well as Task-based and activity-oriented learning [4]. The primary goal of CLT is to enable learners to communicate effectively in real-life situations rather than merely mastering linguistic structures.

II. CLT IN THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

The adoption of CLT in India can be traced to educational reforms such as the National Policy on Education (1986), which emphasized the development of communicative abilities in English. This vision was further strengthened by the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, which advocated learner-centered pedagogy, constructivist learning, and functional language use [5]. The NCF explicitly criticized rote learning and recommended activity-based teaching, group work, and meaningful classroom interaction—core principles of CLT. Following NCF 2005, CBSE and various State Boards revised their English syllabi to include communicative activities such as role plays, discussions, and project work. Textbooks were redesigned to integrate language skills and promote contextual learning [6]. However, the effectiveness of these reforms largely depends on classroom execution, which varies widely across regions. CLT classrooms emphasize student participation through Communicative Activities like Role plays, simulations, Pair and group discussions, Information-gap activities, Presentations or debates and Task-based projects. These activities encourage learners to use language meaningfully and develop fluency [7].

In CLT, the teacher acts as a facilitator, organizer, and guide rather than a sole knowledge provider. Teachers create communicative situations, monitor interactions, and provide feedback without interrupting fluency [8]. Traditional pen-and-paper tests are insufficient to measure communicative competence. CLT encourages performance-based assessment such as oral tests, presentations, portfolios, and group tasks [9]. However, in India, assessment practices continue to be largely exam-oriented. The Challenges for CLT in India are various and in numbers like Examination- Oriented System, the dominance of board examinations focusing on grammar, writing accuracy, and memorization discourages teachers from adopting communicative practices Kumaravadivelu, 2006 [6]. Next, Large Classrooms, overcrowded classrooms restrict interaction and make it difficult to conduct pair or group activities effectively. Then, Lack of Teacher Training, many teachers lack formal training in CLT methodology and continue to rely on traditional teaching methods [8]. Rural and government schools often lack or access of 4 Limited Resources like language labs, audio-visual tools, and exposure to authentic English, hindering communicative learning. Also, India's multilingual context creates varying proficiency levels among learners, making uniform implementation of CLT difficult. Technology has emerged as a powerful tool in enhancing communicative competence. Language labs, multimedia resources, and online platforms provide exposure to authentic language use. [10]. Online tools such as Language learning apps, Virtual classrooms, Audio-visual materials, Online discussion forums, support learner autonomy and interaction beyond the classroom. For successful CLT implementation, teacher education programs must focus on practical training in communicative methodologies, Classroom management for interactive learning, Designing communicative tasks and Continuous professional development. As Richards (2006) emphasizes, teachers must experience CLT themselves during training to effectively apply it in classrooms. Thus, CLT offers several advantages Improves real-life communication skills, enhances learner confidence and motivation, encourages collaborative learning and most important Develops critical thinking for employability and global competence These benefits align well with India's educational and economic objectives in a globalized world. To strengthen CLT implementation in India we should focus on Curriculum and assessment must be aligned with communicative objectives, Teacher training programs should emphasize practical CLT strategies, Examination patterns should include speaking and listening components, Schools should invest in digital and language-learning infrastructure and Policy support must be backed by classroom-level monitoring.

III. CONCLUSION

Communicative Language Teaching represents a significant shift from traditional language teaching methods toward meaningful communication. While Indian education policies support CLT in principle, practical challenges hinder its full realization. Addressing issues related to teacher training, assessment patterns, and infrastructural limitations is essential for successful implementation. With sustained institutional support and pedagogical reform, CLT can effectively enhance English language proficiency and prepare Indian learners for global communication demands.

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