

Silver Jubilee of CLT in Bangladesh: EFL Teachers' Preparedness for Teaching and Understanding of CLT

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Abstract

This paper examines Bangladeshi secondary school English teachers' preparedness for teaching and their understanding of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). For this mixed methods case study, data were collected through a questionnaire and semi-structured open-ended interviews. The participants were 70 English teachers selected from three secondary schools: one public and one private school were from an urban area and one semi-government school was from a rural area of the Dhaka Division of Bangladesh. The findings indicate that Bangladeshi EFL teachers are not adequately prepared for teaching using CLT. Moreover, they do not have sufficient training and teaching skills to conduct an effective communicative class. Furthermore, a significant number of teachers do not have a sound understanding of the goals of CLT. The main reason is that most of the teachers (72.9%) did not receive any pre-service training in relation to ELT or CLT. Although more than half of the teachers (55.7%) received in-service training in relation to ELT and CLT, they claimed that the training was inadequate to conduct CLT classes effectively. Additionally, most of the teachers do not have the requisite language skills. Based on the findings, this study recommends systemic reforms, including (i) comprehensive and recurrent teacher training, (ii) alignment of assessment practices with communicative goals, (iii) provision of classroom resources and manageable class sizes, and (iv) fostering an English-friendly environment within schools. Such measures, if implemented consistently, could help improve teachers' preparedness for teaching and their understanding of CLT, and thereby enhancing students' communicative competence in Bangladesh.

Keywords: Bangladesh, Communicative Competence, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), EFL, Preparedness for Teaching, Teachers' Understanding.

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been a predominant approach to English language teaching (ELT) in second and foreign language contexts in the past few decades. The primary objective of CLT is to help students achieve communicative competence (CC) (1). Like many other countries, Bangladesh also adopted CLT as an approach to English language teaching in 1996, substituting the traditional grammar-translation method. It has now been 25 years (2). However, CLT in Bangladesh appears unsuccessful, as students could not gain the required level of competence in English (3-8). Literature identifies teachers' lack of understanding of CLT and its goals as one of the main reasons behind the students' low level of competence in English (9-11). A good number of studies throughout the world (10, 12-26) show that EFL/ESL teachers' lack of understanding of CLT is a major hindrance to the implementation of the communicative approach.

There is also literature showing that most of the teachers do not have the requisite proficiency to teach English effectively (10, 12, 16, 23). Therefore, CLT has not been successful in achieving communicative competence. Although extensive research has been carried out on various factors that affect the implementation of communicative language teaching, there is limited empirical research on Bangladeshi EFL teachers' preparedness for teaching English using CLT and their understanding of CLT. Therefore, this study aims to examine Bangladeshi secondary school English teachers' preparedness for teaching and their understanding of CLT. Here, teachers' preparedness for teaching refers to the training in ELT and their proficiency in English, while their understanding of CLT includes their views about CLT as a teaching approach and about communicative competence as the goal of CLT.

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Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that intends to achieve 'communicative competence' (27) as the primary objective and generates "procedures for the teaching of the four basic language skills" (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an integrated way for communicative purposes (28). CLT refers to "a diverse set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures" (28). The principles of CLT include: the objective of language learning is to communicate; the goal of classroom activities is to produce authentic and meaningful communication; fluency is the main concern; different language skills are included in communication; learning occurs through the process of trial and error (28). Communicative language teaching not only focuses on 'what to teach' (utterances and sentences, functions and grammar) but also 'how to teach' (meaning-focused communicative tasks and more traditional study techniques) and has become an 'umbrella' term "to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students' ability to communicate" (29). The aim of teaching in CLT is not to focus on 'learning bits of language' but 'on their use in communication' (29).

Communicative Competence

Communicative competence (CC) refers to knowledge of the rules of grammar and the knowledge of the rules of language use (30). It combines the knowledge of a learner about the language and the skills of using this knowledge in actual communication. Johnson argues, "Communicative competence involves three types of 'knowledge' – of grammar, signification and use" (31). Communicative competence is also seen as "a way of describing what it is a native speaker knows which enables him to interact effectively with other native speakers" (32). The interaction is 'spontaneous' or 'unrehearsed' and it demands "much more than a knowledge of the linguistic code" (32). The speaker knows "not only how to say something but what to say and when to say it" (32).

The term 'communicative competence' was first introduced by Hymes as an attempt to "contribute to the study of the 'language problems of disadvantaged children'" (27). The ideas put

across by Hymes about communicative competence are distinct and distinguished from the ideas of Chomsky about competence and performance. Not language learning but 'language as social behaviour' was focused by Hymes (33). It was argued by Hymes that Chomsky's notion of competence was insufficient to explain the social and functional rules of language in use (34, 35). Rather, sociolinguistic competence is an essential component of any successful communication (36). It is asserted that "there are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (36). Therefore, competence is the overall 'tacit knowledge' and ability for language 'use' (36). The interaction among grammatical, psycholinguistic, socio-cultural and probabilistic subsystems is emphasized in communicative competence (27). Hence, Hymes' idea of communicative competence is described as "what a speaker needs to know to communicate appropriately within a particular speech community" (36). More specifically:

Communicative competence extends to both knowledge and expectation of who may or may not speak in certain settings, when to speak and when to remain silent, whom one may speak to, how one may talk to persons of different statuses and roles, what nonverbal behaviours are appropriate in various contexts, what the routines for turn-taking are in conversation, how to ask for and give information, how to request, how to offer or decline assistance or cooperation, how to give commands, how to enforce discipline, and the like – in short, everything involving the use of language and other communicative dimensions in particular social settings (36).

Communicative competence is comprised of the knowledge of whether (and to what degree) something is formally possible, feasible, appropriate and actually conducted (27). The view of communicative competence by Hymes is much more comprehensive than Chomsky's view of 'competence' that deals chiefly with abstract grammatical knowledge (34). Some scholars suggest three components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, strategic competence, and sociolinguistic competence (comprising sociocultural and discourse competence) (30). However, the idea was further modified by creating all components independent, such as grammatical competence, discourse

competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (37). Among them, the first two components reflect the use of the linguistic system and the last two explain the functional aspects of communication (35). Grammatical competence refers to the “knowledge of lexical items and of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology” (30). This competence indicates the mastery over the linguistic code of a language, i.e. ‘linguistic’ competence (35). Discourse competence refers to the ability “to connect sentences in stretches of discourse and to form a meaningful whole out of a series of utterances” (35). Sociolinguistic competence refers to the “sociocultural rules of use and rules of discourse” (30). This competence is essential for interpreting utterances for social meaning. Strategic competence refers to the “verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (30). The strategies primarily relate to “grammatical competence (e.g. how to paraphrase grammatical forms that one has not mastered or cannot recall momentarily)” and then to “sociolinguistic competence (e.g. various role-playing strategies, how to address strangers when unsure of their social status)” (30). The interrelationship of the aforementioned four components of communicative competence is shown by depicting communicative competence as “a synthesis of knowledge of basic grammatical

principles, knowledge of how language is used in social contexts to perform communicative functions, and knowledge of how utterances and communicative functions can be combined according to the principles of discourse” (30). Therefore, great stress is laid on all the components of communicative competence.

Methodology

This study employed the mixed methods case study approach to explore the issues related to teachers’ preparedness for teaching English using CLT and their understanding of CLT. A case study “allows investigators to retain the holistic and meaningful characteristics of real-life events” (38). Thus, case study contributes “to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (38). Three different types of schools (one public, one private and one semi-government) were selected for this study. The public school with the pseudonym of Horizon School, and the private school with the pseudonym of Landmark School were selected from an urban area, and the semi-government school with the pseudonym of Town School was from a rural area of the Dhaka Division of Bangladesh. The uniqueness and the contexts of these multiple cases can be considered as “typical or representative of other cases” (39). These multiple cases provided extensive insight into the state of the English teachers’ preparedness for teaching and their understanding of CLT in the context of Bangladesh.

Table 1: Number of Participants Selected Within the Case

Methods	Case 1: Horizon	Case 2: Landmark	Case 3: Town
Questionnaire	22	44	4
Interview	3	3	3

This study adopted purposeful sampling in understanding the research problem and central phenomenon in the study. The researcher selected all English language teachers teaching English at three different secondary schools as participants to complete the questionnaire, with the aim of collecting wide-ranging data (Table 1). Furthermore, nine English language teachers (three from each school) were selected as informants for an interview to get a comprehensive picture of English language teaching using the Communicative Approach. The interviewees were selected mostly based on their

teaching experience, training, and on the recommendations of the Principal or the Headmaster of the particular institutions, or the Head of the department. Priority was given to the teachers who used to teach in classes IX and X.

Teachers’ Background

A total of 70 English language teachers from the three secondary schools responded to the questionnaire. Among them, the great majority of the participants (94.5%) had Master’s Degree. Even 2.9% of the participants had a Doctoral Degree (Table 2). Additionally, the educational specializations of the participants are shown in the

same table. Although 88.6% of the participants mentioned their specialization, the rest (11.4%) did not mention their specialization and the reason for that was unknown. More than three-quarters (77.1%) of the participants specialized in English Literature, 5.7% in TESOL, 4.3% in Linguistics and the rest are shown in the table. The table also

shows EFL teachers' teaching experience. The highest number of participants (31.43%) had 1-5 years teaching experience, 27.15% had 6-10 years, 20.0% had 16-20 years, 14.28% had 11-15 years and 7.14% had even more than 20 years' experience.

Table 2: Characteristics of Teacher Participants

Demographic Information	Frequency	Percent
Highest Level of Education		
Bachelor	1	1.4
Bachelor (Hons)	1	1.4
Master's Degree	66	94.3
Doctoral	2	2.9
Total	70	100.0
Specialization		
English Literature	54	77.1
TESOL	4	5.7
Linguistics	3	4.3
Other	1	1.4
Total	62	88.6
Missing (info not provided)	8	11.4
Total	70	100.0
Teaching Experience		
1-5 years	22	31.43
6-10 years	19	27.15
11-15 years	10	14.28
16-20 years	14	20.0
More than 20 years	5	7.14
Total	70	100.0

It is significant that more than three-quarters of the participants (77.1%) specialized in English literature and the majority had no orientation to English language teaching. Only 5.7% of the participants specialized in TESOL. Therefore, teachers felt the need for receiving special training to be prepared for teaching English language.

In this study, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews with the purpose of investigating the complexity of the cases over a period of time to get a holistic view of the cases. Different sources of data were utilized to gain insight into various situations from diverse viewpoints and to offer multiple interpretations. Moreover, the mixed data may enhance the validity and reliability of findings. To obtain information from all English language teachers in each of the three schools, the researcher used a questionnaire that elicited the teachers' responses to their views on communicative competence and

communicative language teaching. A questionnaire consisting of both structured and open-ended questions was provided to the participants to gather information from all participants. The questionnaire was comprised of two parts. Part I contained participants' demographic and background information, whereas Part II contained closed-ended statements related to EFL teachers' understanding of communicative competence and communicative language teaching. Moreover, there were open-ended questions to explore teachers' understanding of the concept "Communicative Competence" in more detail. A 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree," was used in the questionnaire to obtain responses to individual items. The researcher obtained written consent from the participant by completing an informed consent form before collecting the data. The researcher explained the purpose of the study,

the required time commitment, and the plans for using the data obtained from the questionnaire to the participants.

Semi-structured open-ended interview questions were used to investigate EFL teachers' understanding of communicative competence and communicative language teaching. In this research, one-on-one interviews were conducted considering the accessibility of individuals, and time as "one-on-one interviews are ideal for interviewing participants who are not hesitant to speak, who are articulate, and who can share ideas comfortably" (40). The researcher determined varied strategies for analyzing the data obtained from various sources. The quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and the qualitative data were analyzed using procedures of theme development by obtaining help of the qualitative data analysis software, namely ATLAS.ti 7. Then the data were organized and displayed based on dimensions. Later on, the results obtained from both data sets were compared, contrasted and synthesized to identify the similarities, differences and relations in the data sets. Finally, the results were summarized and interpreted to produce a more complete understanding.

Results

The findings of this study are presented to show Bangladeshi secondary school English teachers' preparedness for teaching and their understanding of CLT.

EFL Teachers' Training in English Language Teaching

Teachers require the necessary training in order to teach; otherwise, teaching will never be effective. This section specifically portrays the state of teachers' pre-service training, in-service training in relation to ELT and CLT, adequacy of the training, proficiency in English, teachers' perceptions of their ability to develop students' communicative skills and the participants' self-evaluated ability in developing the language skills in their students. Thus, the very picture of EFL teachers' training in ELT depicts the teachers' ability to teach English communicatively in an EFL classroom. The data show that more than two-thirds of the participants (72.9%) had no pre-service training to use the communicative approach and only about a quarter of the participants (27.1%) received pre-service training. Among the participants, 8.6% of the participants had 24 days of training, 5.7% had 21 days of training, 4.3% had 30 days of training, and the rest are shown in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Pre-Service Training

Days	Frequency	Percent
0	51	72.9
3	2	2.9
14	1	1.4
15	1	1.4
21	4	5.7
24	6	8.6
28	1	1.4
30	3	4.3
56	1	1.4
Total	70	100.0

Table 4: Adequacy of Pre-Service Training

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	15	21.4
No	4	5.7
Total	19	27.1
N/A	51	72.9
Total	70	100.0

It is noteworthy that out of 27.1% participants who received training to use the communicative approach, 21.4% of the participants reported that

the training was adequate for them (Table 4). Nevertheless, more than two-thirds of the participants (72.9%) had no comments on the

adequacy of pre-service training as they did not receive any pre-service training to use the communicative approach. One participant from Landmark School made an interesting comment in the questionnaire on the adequacy of pre-service training. He expressed, "It was done only for the purpose of giving the validity of 'something has been done' ... this fake principle." This very

comment reflects the inadequacy of the in-service training.

Regarding in-service training, it was found that about half of the participants (42.9%) did not receive any in-service training in relation to English Language Teaching (ELT) and the rest (57.1%) received ELT training of different durations ranging from 2 days to 2 years (Table 5).

Table 5: In-Service Training-ELT

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	40	57.1
No	30	42.9
Total	70	100.0

However, slightly more than half of the participants (55.7%) received in-service training in relation to the communicative approach of different durations ranging from 3 days to 30 days and nearly half of the participants (44.3%) did not

receive any in-service training in relation to CLT (Table 6). It is also seen in the table that one-fifth of the participants (20.0%) received the training for 24 days, 17.1% for 21 days and the rest are shown in the table below.

Table 6: In-Service Training-CLT

Days	Frequency	Percent
0	31	44.3
3	2	2.9
5	2	2.9
7	4	5.7
14	4	5.7
21	12	17.1
24	14	20.0
30	1	1.4
Total	70	100.0

Concerning the adequacy of in-service training, it is seen in Table 7 that about half of the participants (51.4%) who received the in-service training reported that the in-service training in relation to the communicative approach was adequate for

them. On the other hand, 21.4% of the participants reported that the training was not adequate for their needs. However, 27.1% of the participants did not respond to the question. The reason may be that they did not receive any training.

Table 7: Adequacy of In-Service Training

	Frequency	Percent
Yes	36	51.4
No		
Total	15	21.4
Total	51	72.9
Missing (info not provided) System	19	27.1
Total	70	100.0

One of the participants from Landmark School remarked that the in-service training was not adequate for them. He said, "To improve communicative language teaching skills we need more in-service training. The training which was given was not enough." Another participant

expressed that the in-service training would be adequate if teachers had received the training frequently. He remarked, "For continuous development, teachers need this type of training from time to time."

Thus, the data gathered from the questionnaire show that the vast majority of teacher participants had no pre-service training to use the communicative approach. Moreover, almost half of the participants did not receive any in-service training in relation to ELT or CLT. It is noteworthy that a good number of participants who received in-service training in relation to CLT of different durations reported that the training was not adequate for them.

Teachers' Proficiency in English

The data collected from the questionnaire regarding participants' self-proclaimed proficiency in English are presented in Table 8. One-fifth of the participants (20.0%) claimed that they had excellent language proficiency. However, two-thirds of the participants (65.7%) reported that they were good in English language, 12.9% were average and only 1.4% of the participants declared that they were very weak in English.

Table 8: Teachers' Proficiency in English

	Frequency	Percent
Very Weak	1	1.4
Average	9	12.9
Good	46	65.7
Excellent	14	20.0
Total	70	100.0

The teacher participants' self-evaluated ability to develop communicative skills among students is displayed in Table 9. Most of the participants (95.6%) claimed that they had enough communicative skills. Only 2.9% of the

participants reported that they were weak and 1.4% were very weak. The rest are shown in Table 9. Teacher participants' self-evaluated ability in developing the language skills in their students is reflected in Table 10.

Table 9: Teachers' Ability to Develop Communicative Skills

	Frequency	Percent
Very Weak	1	1.4
Weak	2	2.9
Average	8	11.4
Good	40	57.1
Excellent	19	27.1
Total	70	100.0

Table 10: Language Skills Evaluation

		Frequency	Percent
Listening	Very weak	2	2.9
	Weak	4	5.7
	Average	15	21.4
	Good	32	45.7
	Excellent	17	24.3
	Total	70	100.0
Speaking	Very weak	3	4.3
	Weak	3	4.3
	Average	10	14.3
	Good	35	50.0
	Excellent	19	27.1
	Total	70	100.0
Reading	Very weak	1	1.4
	Average	5	7.1
	Good	43	61.4
	Excellent	21	30.0
	Total	70	100.0

Writing	Very weak	1	1.4
	Weak	3	4.3
	Average	6	8.6
	Good	35	50.0
	Excellent	25	35.7
	Total	70	100.0

The vast majority of participants claimed that they were good enough to develop students' language skills. About a quarter of the participants remarked that they had an excellent ability to develop students' listening and speaking skills. On the other hand, nearly one-third of the participants remarked that they had excellent reading and speaking skills. Only a small number of the participants (2.9%) remarked that they were very weak in listening skills and 5.7% remarked that they were weak in that particular skill. Furthermore, 4.3% of the participants remarked that they were very weak and another 4.3% remarked being weak in speaking skills. Moreover, 1.4% of the participants remarked that they were very weak in reading skills. Additionally, 1.4% of the participants remarked being very weak and 4.3% of them remarked being weak in speaking skills. The rest are shown in the Table 10. It is really

surprising that almost all of the participants (98.6%) claimed that they had adequate proficiency in English (Table 8). Besides, the vast majority of participants (95.6%) claimed that they had the requisite ability to develop communicative skills among students (Table 9). In addition, more than two-thirds of the teachers reported that they had enough language skills to develop students' basic language skills (Table 10).

The data gathered from the questionnaire also show that the great majority of participants (78.5%) disagreed with the view that the lack of knowledge related to appropriate English usage hindered them from teaching English communicatively. Only a small number of participants (15.7%) agreed that the lack of knowledge related to appropriate English usage hindered them from teaching English communicatively (Table 11).

Table 11: Problems in Teaching English Using the Communicative Approach

Statement	Percent (Strongly Agree + Agree)	Percent (Strongly Disagree + Disagree)
My lack of knowledge related to appropriate English usage hinders me from teaching English communicatively.	15.7	78.5

However, in the interviews, teachers acknowledged that a large number of teachers were incompetent and unaware of their responsibilities. They lacked the basic language skills. A teacher from Landmark School made some serious comments on the qualities of teachers and their activities. He said:

In Bangladesh, becoming a teacher is the easiest job. Whenever someone fails to get a suitable job somewhere else, he then goes to teaching. I think being a teacher should be the toughest stage with proper training, with proper learning, proper knowledge on how to motivate students, how to teach the subjects and try to understand the target of the subject. They don't know what the target of the subject is and they are being taught identically. That's why we are not getting the

feedback and CLT is not fit for us.

He further added:

The problem is that we (teachers) are not talking in English in the class and we are not teaching the language in the class. This is the main problem. When will you be able to make the teacher and students clear that you are teaching a language? You have to learn a language. You don't need it only to pass the exam. Then how will I assess you whether you have learnt the language or not.

Another participant shared his views that most of the teachers were incompetent and lacked the basic language skills. He recognized, "I see the teachers those who are getting recruited, they are not skilled. They are not competent in these four basic skills." In the questionnaire he wrote, "We do not have qualified teachers to teach English. The

teachers don't have enough training." One participant from Horizon School also acknowledged, "Many problems I face. At first I myself am a problem because of the lack of vocabulary." In this way, teachers expressed their lack of proficiency in English.

What Teachers Understand by CLT and Communicative Competence

Questionnaires and interviews were employed in order to investigate EFL teachers' understanding of CLT and communicative competence. The data obtained from the questionnaire by using descriptive statistics, display the numerical representation of the participants' opinions on the statements provided for investigating teachers' understanding of communicative competence. In addition, the themes appeared from the interviews reflect as well as expound the participants' thoughts and opinions. In fact, the qualitative data help to go to a deeper level of understanding of the issue. In this way, this section produces a complete picture of the EFL teachers' understanding of CLT and communicative competence.

The salient themes that arose from the interviews are presented here to show EFL teachers' understanding of CLT and communicative competence. The themes mainly include teachers' concepts of communicative competence, their views about the goals of CLT and their perceived knowledge of CLT. Additionally, teachers' views on achieving communicative competence in the context of Bangladesh and teachers' suggestions on how to achieve communicative competence are also stated here.

Concept of Communicative Competence

The data obtained from the questionnaire and interviews are presented here to reflect teachers' concepts of communicative competence. The data from the questionnaire display that most of the teacher participants agreed with all the statements provided in the questionnaire regarding EFL

teachers' understanding of communicative competence. The great majority of the participants (95.7%) agreed that "Communicative competence (CC) requires not only the knowledge of the language but also the skills to use this knowledge in actual communication." Furthermore, most of the participants (92.8%) remarked that "CC means that the speaker knows not only how to say something but what to say and when to say it." Almost the same number of teachers (91.4%) felt that "CC requires knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that would enable us to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur." More than two-thirds of the teachers (78.6%) opined that "CC demands not only grammatical competence but also the appropriate use of vocabulary, politeness, and style in a given situation," however 17.1% of the participants disagreed with the view. The reason may be that they did not have a clear understanding of communicative competence. About three-quarters of the teachers (77.2%) stated that "CC involves the ability to combine language structures into different types of texts such as letters, poetry, academic essays, and cooking recipes." Nevertheless, 14.3% of the participants opposed this view. About two-thirds of the teachers (70.0%) indicated that "CC involves the use of language in particular social settings," nonetheless, 24.3% had a contrasting view. The details are shown in Table 12 below.

The findings from the questionnaire demonstrate that most of the teacher participants had the knowledge of communicative competence. Therefore, the majority of participants agreed positively with all the statements related to communicative competence. It is noteworthy that a small number of participants had opposing views on all the features of communicative competence. The disagreements with the key aspects of communicative competence reflect the teachers' lack of understanding of communicative competence.

Table 12: EFL Teachers' Understanding of Communicative Competence

Statement	Percent (Strongly Agree + Agree)	Percent (Strongly Disagree + Disagree)
1. Communicative competence (CC) requires not only the knowledge of the language but also the skills to use this knowledge in actual communication.	95.7	1.4

2. CC means that the speaker knows not only how to say something but what to say and when to say it.	92.8	4.3
3. CC requires knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that would enable us to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur.	91.4	2.9
4. CC demands not only grammatical competence but also the appropriate use of vocabulary, politeness, and style in a given situation.	78.6	17.1
5. CC involves the ability to combine language structures into different types of texts such as letters, poetry, academic essays, and cooking recipes.	77.2	14.3
6. CC involves the use of language in particular social settings.	70.0	24.3

In interviews and the questionnaire, teachers described communicative competence in various ways. One teacher from Horizon School conceptualized, "Communicative competence means how we can communicate with people, how we communicate with another person in English in different situations. This is actually mutual intelligibility." She wrote in the questionnaire, "Communicative competence means the ability to communicate with others in different situations." Another teacher from Landmark School interpreted, "Communicative competence means to me to make our learners (students) competent, skilled, to develop confidence in themselves so that they can communicate in English properly, accurately and appropriately as per the situation demands." Another teacher explained communicative competence as "having competence in the four basic skills of language." According to a teacher from Town School, communicative competence means "achieving the four language skills." A teacher from Horizon School defined, "Communicative competence is the ability to communicate with the people without any fear of accuracy. In this approach, it is important to use English language fluently. Grammatical mistakes are not too important here." Another teacher from Horizon School expounded communicative competence as "the power and capacity of communicating with others. CLT sets the goal of creating communicative competence in learners. CLT makes use of real-life situations that associate communication." Some other significant views may be presented here to reflect the variety of understandings of the teachers. A teacher from

Landmark School stated:

Communicative competence basically means to speak with other people without any hesitation, without any inertia and be able to express his feelings in a second language as Bangla is our first language other than English that is our second language. That is why I think communicative competence means to gain competence in a language other than its first language.

A teacher from Town School pronounced that:

Communicative competence means actually perfectness. The students or any learner can have perfectness on the topic or on the language and the fitness also, the perfect knowledge and the perfect skills also on the language. This is called communicative competence and through this way they can communicate with others very easily. I think communicative competence demands a lot of abilities to share their ideas.

It is remarkable that a group of teachers considered communicative competence as oral competence only although communicative language teaching advocates developing all the four language skills. It is also noteworthy that some of them conceptualized that grammatical correctness was not necessary for being communicative competent. In fact, grammatical competence is one of four interconnected components of communicative competence without which communicative competence cannot be achieved. It is found that teachers emphasized on fluency not accuracy though fluency and

accuracy are complementary principles of developing communicative competence. Although the primary objective of CLT is to develop communicative competence through teaching all the four basic language skills in an integrated way, only a few teachers held the view that communicative competence required competence in all the basic language skills. It is clear from the teachers' opinions that some of them had no idea of the components of communicative competence, namely grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence (30). Therefore, a number of participants opposed all the ideas provided in the questionnaire regarding communicative competence (Table 12).

Goals of CLT

The interviewees expressed the goals of CLT in different ways, yet there are similarities in their views. One teacher from Landmark School articulated the goals of CLT as "the main goal of CLT is enabling the students to communicate in English with others for their life purpose or whatever it is." In the same way, another teacher stated, "The main goal of communicative language teaching is to communicate with the other people."

A teacher from Horizon School said:

Our goal is that our students might be able to use the language outside the classroom to communicate with the people when they visit another country or the visitors from another country to our country; they could communicate, they could give information about our country, about themselves. So, we just try to make them confident in the language.

Additionally, a teacher from Landmark School focused on oral communication skills by saying:

Actually, the main goal of CLT is just to make our students talk. I think if they can converse with other people in different situations, in different circumstances, we can say that they will be able to know what communicative language teaching is. Communicating effectively is the main thing here.

Similarly, another teacher from Horizon School mentioned, "The main goal of CLT is to prepare our pupils to communicate with others easily. They will be able to speak English and communicate with foreigners on global issues or interests." The

identical expression came from a teacher from Town School who mentioned, "I think if the students can learn the topic and if the students can communicate with the others in English they will become proficient in English I think. It will be the actual goal, to achieve the language."

Some of the teachers emphasized on being competent in four basic language skills. As one teacher from Town School said, "The main goal of Communicative Language Teaching is the development of the four language skills (RWLS)." Another teacher stated, "The main objective of CLT is to increase the four skills but it does not help the students to increase the listening and speaking skills. There is no scope in the classroom to improve the listening and speaking skills." A similar view was also shared by a teacher, "Actually I think the goal of CLT is to acquire the definite knowledge on different languages or particular language." In a similar way, a teacher from Horizon School voiced:

In our country, we know that our society is Bengali oriented. Students actually don't have so much scope to practice English in their homes. So, the English classroom is the only place where they can communicate, they can share their experience, they can speak in English, they can use all the four skills. I think for that reason CLT is very important and it is their goal to achieve the four skills.

Another teacher also mentioned:

Our target is to understand the language skills. They could listen to people, they could understand, they could convey their message to other people and they could write their views and feelings on paper, and they could read the message and the information they need to. So, this is our goal. They could listen to, they could read, they could write and they could speak; develop all the four skills. We try to make them confident to use these skills outside the classrooms.

It is evident in most of the teachers' views that they think the main goal of CLT is enabling students to communicate with other or to achieve oral competence. Nevertheless, a few teachers shared the opinion that achieving competency in all the four basic language skills was very important for the learners. Actually, the aim of CLT is to help

learners achieve both oral and written competence.

Teachers' Perceived Knowledge of CLT

The data obtained from interviews show that teachers had contrasting opinions about their knowledge of CLT. Quite a few teachers claimed that they had sufficient knowledge of CLT but many of them reported that they did not have adequate knowledge of CLT in order to use it in the classroom. A teacher from Horizon School asserted, "Yes, I am adequately prepared to teach English using the communicative approach." However, another teacher from the same school stated, "No, I am not prepared because a lot is lacking. More training is needed." Similarly, a teacher from Town School stated, "If we get adequate training in CLT, I can teach my students properly." Likewise, a teacher from Landmark School expressed, "I have already mentioned we don't teach English as a language. We teach English as a subject. So, I cannot say that I am fully prepared." Another teacher from the same school expounded:

As it is a very new scene in this arena, teachers need more and more training, different types from time to time. They need to join workshops with different language teachers from different schools and colleges. I think it would strengthen their knowledge, their comprehending power because when we will work in a group, some new things will come about. Because everybody doesn't know all things. So, we have to share our knowledge. That's why training is very important.

Additionally, another teacher stated:

What is CLT? What are requirements of CLT? How can a CLT class be conducted? What are the requirements to make a CLT class successful? We are not that much aware of these things. If there is training and such things are given then it will be better.

It is clear from teachers' replies that most of the teachers did not have adequate knowledge of CLT. Therefore, they were unable to teach their students properly. Hence, teachers asked for training and workshops on CLT.

Achieving Communicative Competence in the Context of Bangladesh

Teachers indicated assorted opinions in interviews on the possibilities to achieve communicative

competence in the context of Bangladesh. Some of them believe that communicative competence can be achieved in an EFL classroom in Bangladesh while some of them believe that communicative competence cannot be achieved in the context of Bangladesh. Additionally, another group of teachers believe that communicative competence may be achieved if it is possible to overcome some obvious shortcomings.

A teacher from Landmark School expressed, "Communicative competence can be achieved in an EFL classroom." A teacher from Horizon School also expressed the same view. She said, "Yes, it can be achieved." Another teacher from the same school also mentioned, "I think yes." Furthermore, a teacher from Town School stated, "Yes. By practicing all the four skills in class we can achieve communicative competence." Thus, some teachers opined that communicative competence can be achieved in an EFL classroom in Bangladesh.

On the other hand, some other teachers took the view that communicative competence cannot be achieved in the context of Bangladesh. As one teacher from Landmark School said:

Well, it's quite impossible because in our context we do not have the appropriate or the suitable classroom for communicative situation or communicative approach because in communicative approach we need to develop four basic skills but we do not have the classroom specially I am talking about multimedia. We do not have the sound box, sound recorder and teachers are not well-trained. They do not use English in English language classes. Usually, they are teaching English language using their own mother tongue, i.e. Bengali. They use the grammar-translation method. They do not use CLT in the classroom. We have some schools, especially if you go to the rural area, you will see that they do not have the equipment, audio-visual aids. So, it is not possible to implement CLT in the classroom of our country.

A teacher from Horizon School also stated, "Communicative competence cannot be achieved totally but partly can be achieved."

However, another group of teachers was optimistic about the success of CLT. They believed that communicative competence can be achieved by overcoming the existing shortcomings. A teacher

from Town School expressed:

Actually, in our country (Bangladesh) our language is Bangla and most of the learners do not have any idea about English. They don't practice English. For this reason, after practising more and more they are not getting better in the language. Yet I think it will be possible if the students practice more and more in the classroom and other facilities, if they enjoy then it will be possible, I think.

Similarly, a teacher from Landmark School expressed:

It is not 100% possible in our country to implement this because we have some shortcomings in textbooks selections, from our teachers' side, from our classroom arrangement as well as our environment is not congenial to apply this method in our schools and colleges.

Based on teachers' remarks about the possibilities to achieve communicative competence in the context of Bangladesh, it can be said that considering the current teaching-learning situation and teachers' classroom practices it will be really difficult for learners to achieve communicative competence. Nevertheless, we are optimistic that communicative competence may be achieved in the context of Bangladesh if the abovementioned shortcomings can be overcome.

Teachers' Suggestions on how to Achieve Communicative Competence

In interviews, the teacher informants suggested a number of ways to achieve communicative competence. A teacher from Horizon School proposed, "It can be achieved if the situation is friendly and the number of students in our class is a bit less, then this is definitely possible. That means it depends on the situation." Another teacher expounded:

Our classroom should be rearranged with some equipment like visual aids. We need to show some movies or some documentaries they (students) could just listen to because they have no opportunity to listen outside our classroom. There is no audio-visual aid here. So, I will suggest our government or authority to provide audio-visual aids and audio-visual cassettes too in our classroom. So, we could just make them listen and if they listen, they will feel comfortable and

they could use the language comfortably. They will know how to use the language. So, they have to listen first because in their house they will not get any opportunity to use this language. Everybody just gets afraid of English. All of us (teachers) also. Not only students, we (teachers) also feel shy to speak in English outside. It is because of the environment (socio-cultural condition). If our people all over our country use this language as a second language like India, then we will not feel shy. As a foreign language people might think that the person is showing her smartness by using this language. So, it is a cultural barrier. Because of this cultural barrier, we will not use this language outside our classroom.

A teacher from Landmark School stated:

Only classroom teaching is not enough because CLT is an approach which includes all other branches of language learning. It requires mutual communication, interaction, collaboration of everything for a successful EFL classroom but it is not exactly present in our scenario.

Considering the current teaching-learning situation, teachers recommended some possible ways to achieve communicative competence. The most important suggestion provided by the teachers was to create an environment so that both teachers and students can speak English at least in the classroom. Therefore, the classroom should be reorganized and well-equipped. Moreover, teachers should be properly trained.

Discussion

This study investigated Bangladeshi secondary school English teachers' preparedness for teaching and their understanding of CLT, revealing persistent gaps between policy-level aspirations and classroom realities. While questionnaire data suggested that teachers were generally aware of the broad principles of CLT and CC, the interviews uncovered significant misconceptions and limitations in practice. For example, many teachers equated communicative competence with oral proficiency alone, downplayed the role of grammatical accuracy, and prioritized fluency over accuracy. Such views echo earlier findings that Bangladeshi teachers often hold a partial or distorted understanding of CLT (6, 8). A critical

issue emerging from the study is teachers' preparedness for teaching. The majority of participants lacked pre-service training in CLT, and even in-service training was either absent or deemed inadequate. This aligns with prior research suggesting that training provisions in Bangladesh have been sporadic and insufficient to support sustained pedagogical change (7, 9). Without systematic professional development, teachers remain ill-equipped to translate CLT principles into effective classroom strategies (5, 11).

The findings also highlight systemic and cultural barriers. Teachers reported difficulties in connecting textbook content with real-life communication, organizing pair or group work, and managing large classes. Many admitted a lack of confidence in their own English proficiency, despite self-reported claims to the contrary in questionnaires. This dissonance reflects a broader issue of self-perception versus actual competence, which has also been reported in other Asian contexts where CLT has been introduced (25, 26). Interestingly, teachers expressed mixed views on the feasibility of achieving communicative competence in Bangladesh. Some considered it unattainable due to infrastructural and socio-cultural limitations, while others were cautiously optimistic, suggesting that improvements in training, classroom resources, and language environment could make it possible. This optimism resonates with research in Vietnam and India, where teachers view CLT as beneficial but constrained by contextual realities such as assessment systems, curricular rigidity, and large class sizes (12, 22).

Comparative perspectives from other Asian countries strengthen this interpretation. In China, CLT adoption has been hindered by exam-oriented systems and rigid curricula (16, 26), while in Vietnam and India, despite policy endorsement, teachers face challenges of limited resources, traditional practices, and assessment misalignment (22, 12). Bangladesh mirrors these challenges but is further constrained by inadequate teacher training and limited exposure to authentic English use beyond the classroom.

Conclusion

Taken together, the results suggest that the failure of CLT in Bangladesh is not due to theoretical

weaknesses of the approach, but to contextual barriers at multiple levels—teacher preparation, institutional support and classroom realities. Addressing these challenges requires systemic reforms, including: comprehensive and recurrent teacher training, alignment of assessment practices with communicative goals, provision of classroom resources and manageable class sizes, and fostering an English-friendly environment within schools. Such measures, if implemented consistently, could help narrow the gap between CLT policy and practice, thereby enhancing students' communicative competence in Bangladesh.

Recommendations

Curriculum Modifications

- Integration of all four skills: Current classroom practices often prioritize reading and writing, while listening and speaking remain neglected. The curriculum should explicitly embed tasks that balance fluency and accuracy, ensuring equal emphasis on all four language skills.
- Task-based and authentic materials: Lessons should move beyond textbook-bound content to include real-life communicative tasks, role-plays, and problem-solving activities that link classroom learning to actual communicative needs.
- Assessment reform: National examinations remain grammar- and writing-heavy, which undermines communicative goals. Aligning assessment with communicative outcomes—through oral exams, interactive tasks, and performance-based evaluation—would incentivize teachers and students to prioritize communicative competence.
- Context-sensitive adaptation: Instead of importing CLT wholesale, the curriculum should be adapted to Bangladesh's realities—large classes, exam culture, and bilingual contexts—so that implementation becomes feasible and sustainable.

Teacher Training Programs

- Pre-service preparation: Teacher education programs should embed CLT principles into their foundation courses, ensuring teachers graduate with not only theoretical knowledge but also practical skills for managing interactive classrooms.
- Continuous in-service training: One-off workshops are insufficient. Regular, modular

training focused on classroom techniques (pair/group work, error correction, use of L1, etc.) should be institutionalized.

- Skill enhancement: Many teachers lack confidence in their own proficiency. Training programs should include intensive language development components alongside pedagogy.
- Collaborative professional learning: Peer observations, mentoring, and communities of practice (e.g., teacher learning circles) can support reflective practice and help teachers adapt CLT strategies to their specific contexts.
- Technology integration: Training should include practical use of ICT (e.g., multimedia, apps, online resources) to facilitate communicative activities, especially where resources are otherwise limited.

Institutional Assistance

- Resource support: Schools require basic infrastructure—audio-visual aids, smaller class sizes, flexible seating arrangements—to facilitate interaction.
- Administrative encouragement: School leaders should foster an environment where teachers are encouraged (not penalized) to experiment with communicative practices, even if they deviate from traditional exam-prep teaching.
- Policy alignment: Ministries and boards need to ensure that policy documents, curriculum goals, and examinations are coherent and mutually reinforcing, reducing the disconnect between what is taught and what is tested.
- Cultural shift: Awareness campaigns and institutional policies should normalize the use of English within school environments, reducing socio-cultural resistance and teacher reluctance to use English in class.

Limitations and Future Research

Directions

Despite its contributions, this study is not without limitations. First, the research was confined to three secondary schools in the Dhaka Division, which constrains the extent to which the findings can be generalized across diverse educational settings in Bangladesh. Although the sample size of seventy teachers provided meaningful insights, it remains relatively modest when compared to the large population of English teachers working at the secondary level nationwide. Second, the study relied heavily on self-reported data collected through questionnaires and interviews. The

possibility of self-reporting bias—such as the overestimation of linguistic proficiency or pedagogical competence—cannot be excluded. Third, the study focused exclusively on teachers' perspectives; the absence of learners' voices limits the ability to capture the bidirectional dynamics of classroom communication. Finally, the investigation was restricted to the secondary level of education, leaving unexplored the challenges and opportunities of CLT implementation in primary, higher secondary, and tertiary contexts. These limitations open several promising avenues for future research. Large-scale and multi-site studies, incorporating schools from both urban and rural contexts, are necessary to provide a more representative picture of CLT practices in Bangladesh. Longitudinal designs could yield valuable insights into how sustained professional development and recurrent in-service training influence teachers' ability to translate CLT principles into classroom practice. Furthermore, comparative research across different educational levels would illuminate how the challenges of implementing CLT vary along the educational continuum. Equally important is the inclusion of learners' perspectives, which would allow researchers to examine how students perceive, experience, and respond to communicative classrooms. Experimental and quasi-experimental studies assessing the efficacy of specific interventions—such as task-based teacher workshops, peer mentoring programs or technology-enhanced CLT models—could provide actionable recommendations for policy and practice. Finally, cross-national comparative studies may identify context-sensitive strategies that have proven successful in similar EFL environments, thereby situating the Bangladeshi experience within the broader global discourse on communicative language teaching.

Abbreviations

CC: Communicative competence, CLT: Communicative language teaching, EFL: English as a foreign language, ELT: English language teaching, ESL: English as a second language, TESOL: Teaching English to speakers of other languages.

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Author Contributions

Muhammad Tofazzel Hossain: conceived, designed the study, data collection, performed the analysis, interpreted the results, drafted the manuscript, critically reviewed the manuscript, Ali Azgor Talukder: critically reviewed the manuscript. Both authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Declaration of Artificial Intelligence

(AI) Assistance

Grammarly was used solely to enhance the readability, coherence, and cohesion of the manuscript. The authors exclusively completed all aspects of conceptualization, idea development, theoretical application, and argumentation.

Ethics Approval

This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the Institutional Research Ethics Board of the university, and with the 1964 Declaration of Helsinki and its subsequent revisions.

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