

A Study of the Implementation of the New Communicative Language Teaching Curriculum in Malaysia

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1. Introduction

In the field of second language teaching, the current standard method called Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been becoming the mainstream method in the world. The method's purpose is to make learners acquire the reading, listening, writing, speaking competence of a second language through conversation. Jack C. Richards explains CLT.

Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. ... Communicative language teaching sets as its goal the teaching of communicative competence. (2-3)

As he states, CLT places importance on communicative activity. Recently, this method has become popular in Asian countries. For example, in 2009, the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) of Japanese Government decided to apply CLT to the junior high and high school English education curriculum. According to the Japanese foreign language curriculum for high schools, the new method's goal is to enhance the students' English writing, reading and listening skill through conversation (3). Also, in Malaysia, the government decided to introduce a new English curriculum based on CLT for primary and secondary schools so as to enable students to communicate effectively and in a variety of contexts*. Both governments aimed to enhance the students' English conversation skills and knowledge through teaching with CLT methods. According to Hardman and A-Rahman, before the new

CLT based method has adopted, the class teaching was far from communicative in Malaysia.

For example, in a study of two primary English classes of two small rural schools ... it was found that the classroom talk is tightly controlled with pupils positioned as recipients of teacher-mediated text. There was little active participation from the pupils: the interaction was largely orchestrated and managed by the teacher, with the pupils providing labels of when requested, thereby limiting any possibility of the use of exploratory talk. (262)

This example clearly shows that there are no communicative interactions between students and teachers. Also, in Japan, before adopting the new method, MEXT put priority on the grammar components, reading skills and vocabulary, so the communicative competence was not considered important (Abe 46).

According to the information above, both countries have similar educational environments and backgrounds. Before MEXT adopted the new curriculum in 2012, the Ministry of Education of the Malaysian government had adopted the new method in 2011. In Japan, many concerns about the new curriculum were being discussed because it was thought to cause teachers and student confusion because of rapidly changing teaching style. On the other hand, in Malaysia, many problems appear in the new method implementation. To get suggestion for the new curriculum in Japan, it is important to observe the examples of other countries which have similar backgrounds. Here, I will investigate Malaysia's implementation of the new CLT based method.

2. The Current Situation of Malaysian English Education

[Background of the curriculum]

Before adopting a new curriculum in Malaysia, the mainstream method used for second language was called Traditional Approaches. This method was established in the 1960s. The method put emphasis on the competence of grammar. This theory believes that language proficiency requires much knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Jack

Richards clearly states its policy.

It was assumed that language learning meant building up a large repertoire of sentences and grammatical patterns and learning to produce these accurately and quickly in the appropriate situation. Once a basic command of the language was established through oral drilling and controlled practice, the four skills were introduced, usually in the sequence of speaking, listening, reading and writing. (6)

As he states, this method gave learners opportunities to study grammar, but this old teaching style tended to be monotonous.

Also, Richards argues the lesson structure of traditional method called Presentation, Practice and Production cycle (P-P-P cycle) is not sufficient. He explains abbreviation P-P-P.

Presentation: The new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it.

Practice: Students practice using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises.

Production: Students practice using the new structure in different contexts, often using their own content or information, in order to develop fluency with the new pattern. (8)

The P-P-P cycle is mainly given by teachers, so the traditional style lesson is always taught for students in a teacher-centered way. This lesson style prevents learners from active learning. While teaching grammar and vocabulary intensively, studying communication skills was not a priority. Therefore, with less conversation training, the curriculum based on this theory resulted in a lack of communication skill.

[Current lessons observation]

To overcome the hiatus of communication skill, the government introduced a new curriculum with the concept of the CLT method. The government found that CLT method would be the prescription for the lack of communication skill. To make the new curriculum more efficient, teachers in the Malaysian primary and secondary schools are required to participate in the three-day workshop about the new curriculum from 2011. During the workshop, teachers learn about the conception of CLT and new curriculum. The aim of this workshop is based on the belief that teacher understanding for the curriculum and the conception of CLT would give the positive influence for learning activities in their classroom (Hardman and A-Rahman 262).

Despite those efforts, the study researched by Jan Hardman and Norhaslynda A-Rahman argued that the Malaysian new English curriculum does not work well in the primary schools. To define the efficiency of the new curriculum, they researched eight English teachers who have teaching experience in the old and new English curriculum in one primary school, observed and recorded a lesson in a classroom with 35 students. Also, they took field notes of class size, lesson length, class layout, teaching and learning tasks and activities for three months. After the class, they conduct some surveys with the teachers (263).

They analyzed the teacher-students interaction by three movements called Initiation, Response, Follow-up (IRF) movements: an initiation, usually in the form of a teacher's question; a response, in which students attempt answer the question; and follow-up, in which the teacher provides feedback for students' response (264).

Furthermore, they also analyzed the classes by systematic observation and transcript analysis. In this observation, six types of initiation moves were seen during the class; 1) *teacher inform*, which refers to teacher's exposition to pass on facts, opinions and ideas about a subject; 2) *teacher open question*, which calls for more than one answer; 3) *teacher closed question* calling for a single answer; 4) *teacher check* on how the pupils are getting on, whether they can understand and hear; 5) *teacher direct*, used to get the class to do but not say something; 6) *pupil question*. During the lesson, follow-up moves were coded using the 7 categories: 1) *no feedback*, 2) *acceptance/affirming* of an answer, 3) *praise*, 4) *teacher giving the answer*, 5) *teacher asking another pupil to answer*, 6) *teacher providing an answer*, 7) *teacher comment on an answer* (264).

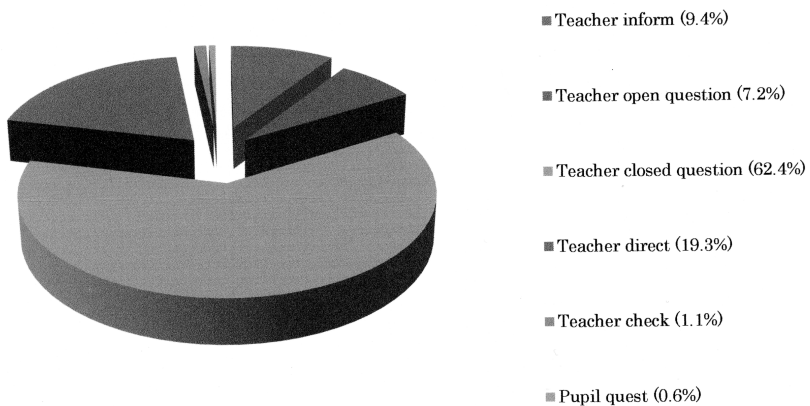


Figure 1: Initiation Moves

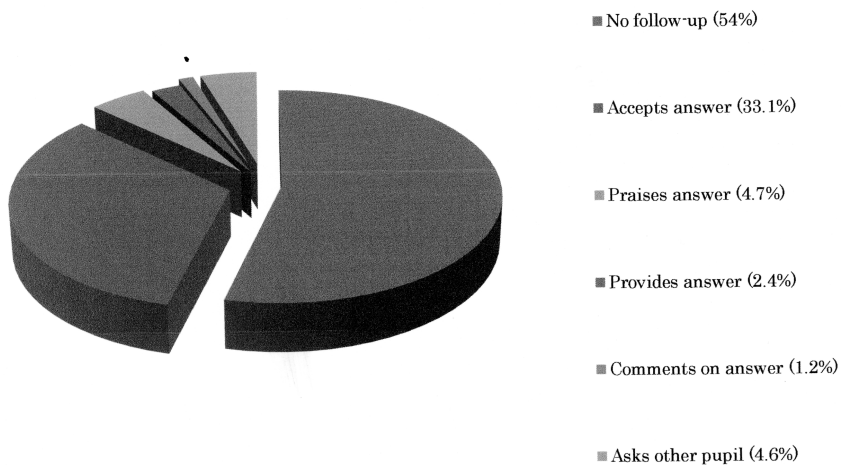


Figure 2: Follow-up Moves

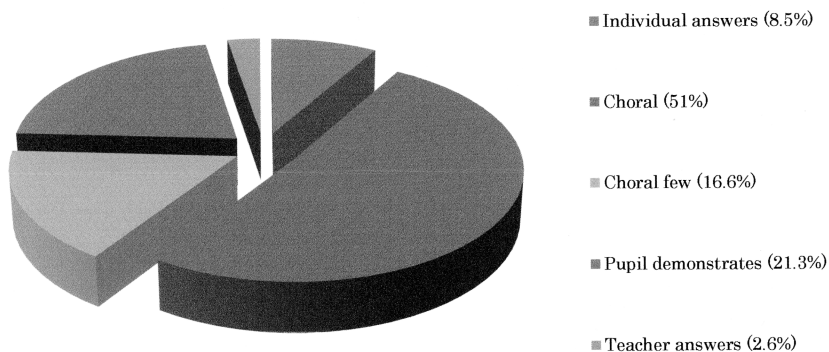


Figure 3: Response Moves

In the CLT class, the importance is students' speaking creativity, but the results revealed current situation (See Figure 1, 2, 3). The question between the teacher and students should be open-question, because it allows students to answer their own opinion. Also, teachers should organize and follow up the various kinds of answers from the students. Although the new curriculum was adapted, from the findings from the Hardman and A-Rahman research in figure 1, without other 30.4% conversations unrelated to the question, there were 7.2% teacher open question, and almost 62.4% were teacher closed question, which give the students monotonous answer. In figure 2, for each questions and answers, 54% answers were no follow-up. Also, teacher and students interaction should be communicative; in other words, it should be like a real-life conversation, but in figure 3, over 60% of the question and answer interaction were choral (266-27). From those findings, the actual lessons do not seem to satisfy the essential of CLT conception.

Table 1. IRF/IR pattern of discourse.

| Exchange | | | Move | Act |
|----------|---|---|---------------|--------------------|
| 1 | T | Boy use^ | Initiation | Elicit |
| 2 | P | He (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 3 | T | He | Feedback | Accept |
| 4 | T | Woman and girl use^ | Initiation | Elicit |
| 5 | P | She (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 6 | T | She | Feedback | Accept |
| 7 | T | Man and boy use^ | Initiation | Elicit |
| 8 | P | He (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 9 | T | He | Feedback | Accept |
| 10 | T | Ok, come Danish. Is he a boy or a man? | Initiation | Elicit |
| 11 | P | Boy (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 12 | T | a^ ... boy. | Feedback | Accept |
| | | Because he is small. Small we call boy | | Comment |
| 13 | T | What about your father? Your father, is he a man or a boy? | Initiation | Starter Elicit |
| 14 | P | Man (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 15 | T | a^ ... | Re-initiation | Elicit |
| 16 | P | Man (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 17 | T | What about your grandfather? | Initiation | Elicit |
| 18 | P | Father | Response | Reply |
| 19 | T | Man or boy? Grandfather? | Re-initiation | Elicit |
| 20 | P | Man | Response | Reply |
| 21 | T | a^ ... a^ ... | Re-initiation | Elicit |
| 22 | P | Man (chorus) | Response | Reply |
| 23 | T | Man | Feedback | Accept |
| 24 | | Aliya, what are you doing Aliya? | Initiation | Starter/ Elicit |
| | | Ok Aliya, your grandmother, a girl or a woman? | | Nominate/elicit |
| | | Keep your book. Keep. | | Direct |
| | | Ok Izat, your grandmother, she a woman or a girl? Grandmother? | | Nominate/elicit |
| | | Who can tell me, grandmother is she a woman or a girl? Ok Adriana? | | Elicit/nominate |

Table 1: Hardman, Jan and Norhaslynda A-Rahman. "Teachers and the implementation of a new English curriculum in Malaysia." *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 27:3 (2014): 260-77. Ebsco host. Web. 13 May 2015, 261.

As can be seen in Table 1, the teacher always uses rising intonation when she wants to an answer from student. The teacher's reaction is too fast to students to think about their own opinion answer (Hardman and A-Rahman 261). Because of these closed short questions, students could not construct long sentences. Consequently, students answered in just a few words. Additionally, this interaction is far different from actual communication.

Also, in the Hardman and A-Rahman's interview for eight teachers, they gave a

variety of comments, but all of them pointed out the difficulty for changing lesson style and lack of the government's support of the new curriculum implementation (269-270). They understood the outline of the CLT methods, but they did not know how to teach the lesson in communicative way. Moreover, the class size was related with their difficulty for teaching. In their class, there were too many students to communicate with one teacher.

According to the data above, it is clear that teachers could not adjust the CLT method in their classes well. The lessons still tended to be teacher-centered and monotonous, and not communicative. However, though the new method was introduced, teachers could not adopt the new curriculum immediately because their teaching environment had not been changed. When the new curriculum is implemented, the classroom size should be changed to make the curriculum efficient. In this case, classroom size was not designed for the CLT method, so both teachers and students had difficulty to communicate during the lessons. For the new curriculum implementation, rethinking the teaching environment is necessary.

3. Conclusion

Through Hardman and A-Rahman's observation, we can find out some causes of problems with Malaysia's new English curriculum. The main problem is the three-day teacher training. In term of the time, three days lecture is too short to understand the new method for the teachers. They can learn the concept, but they cannot imagine how to make their lessons communicative in their everyday classes. Just understanding the outline never makes sense for the actual lessons. To make the new curriculum efficient, the government should give concrete examples to teachers.

Additionally, the class size is another important point for the new curriculum. In the CLT, class size should be small because teacher should communicate with every student. In the case of Hardman and A-Rahman's observation, class size should be half (about twelve students). The government should think about the number of students in each school. To make the new curriculum efficient, they should establish the guideline for making classes smaller.

From the reasons I mentioned, the new curriculum implementation requires long-term training the teachers and useful model lessons. Also, the government has to rethink the English class construction. It is clear that educational improvement cannot succeed without time-consuming and laborious procedures and cannot advance rapidly.

Notes:

* Ministry of Education. (2011). *Malaysian English Language Curriculum for Primary Schools*. Kuala Lumpur: Curriculum Development Provision, Ministry of Education, p. 3, cited in Hardman, Jan and Norhaslynda A-Rahman. "Teachers and the Implementation of a New English Curriculum in Malaysia." *Language, Culture and Curriculum*, 27: 3 (2014): p. 261.

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