

## EXAMINING THE PRINCIPLES OF CLT APPROACH THROUGH HIGHER SECONDARY LEVEL ENGLISH TEXTBOOK IN BANGLADESH

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### ABSTRACT

Textbook plays a significant role in the field of English Language learning and teaching in Bangladesh. *English For Today* is the textbook for higher secondary level (Grade 11 & 12) which is designed by the NCTB (National Curriculum and Textbook Board) on the basis of communicative approach. Based on the previous studies, it is assumed that though the textbook is designed under the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), it has failed to meet the demands of the learners and teachers in terms of bringing communicative competency. Keeping this issue in mind, the study aims to examine the textbook through in-depth analysis using the criteria from CLT. Qualitative descriptive analysis was used for this study to analyse the textbook in terms of how communicative, authentic and meaningful it is and whether it is accuracy or fluency oriented. The findings of the study reveal that most of the activities of the textbook do not reflect the principles of CLT approach which limits the student's freedom of practicing all the language skills and as a result they end up being incompetent communicator. Finally, the paper concludes with some recommendations for the authorities to bring necessary changes in the activities and contents of the textbook in order to be an effective tool for both the language learners and teachers.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Principles, HSC, English For Today, Activities in the Textbook

### INTRODUCTION

English language education is considered one of the vehicles of the economic growth of Bangladesh. Since the independence in 1971, the government of Bangladesh has taken various initiatives in order to bring advancement in the field of English language teaching and learning. Introduction of Communicative language teaching (CLT) replacing Grammar Translation Method (GTM) in 1990s and designing textbook called *English for Today* (EFT) following

Communicative approach has been one of the important initiatives. At first, CLT was introduced in 1997 in class Seven, in 1998 in class Eight, in 1999 in class nine, and in 2001 at Higher Secondary level (Nayeen et al., 2020). But unfortunately, even though MOE took this initiative more than a decades ago with lots of expectation, it has been found that this new method too could not succeed due to a number of factors (Rana & Hasan Chowdhury, 2020). Therefore, English language learning and teaching has always been a challenging area for the government of Bangladesh.

Higher Secondary level (HSC) is considered an important stage of education which determines the future of the students in our country. So, students at this level are expected to have a good command in English where English is made compulsory in all classes (Profile, 2021). But contradiction has been found in many of the previous studies conducted in this regard. So, it is a matter of serious concern to be recognized the reasons lying behind the lack of English proficiency level of the students defined by the experts. The efficiency of the textbook (EFT) which is the only learning material has always been in question and went through a lot of changes and revisions for ensuring expected outcomes. The latest version of *English For Today* is redesigned by NCTB for the session 2015-16 following the principles of CLT approach. The aim of the English curriculum is to make the learners competent in using English, and thus, the book is claimed to be designed based on communicative approach to language learning (Billah, et al., 2017 as cited in (AnikaTabassum, 2018). Therefore, this study will examine the principles of CLT approach through *English For Today* by analyzing in-depth the activities of the book.

The textbook is the most used material provided by the MOE considering its imminence and affordability in the field of learning and teaching English in the context of Bangladesh. According to Cunningsworth (1995), the textbook is a book that contains a material summary of a particular topic or course, which has been systematically organized and chosen on the basis of a specific intent, learning orientation and student development for assimilation. Textbook is also considered “the visible heart of any ELT programme” by Sheldon (1988) which can be applied in the context of Bangladeshi English education. So, the textbook is designed to help the teaching - learning activities not only by becoming a guide to the teachers for the delivery of the materials, but also presenting necessary input through various explanations and activities. It influences the attitudes and performance of the students to the materials. According to Brown and Lee (2015), the contents of a textbook should include good quality tasks and exercises that focus on vocabulary, grammar and pronunciation in addition to the four major language skills both separately and in an integrated fashion. The activities should be learner-centered rather than teacher-centered. As the improvement of English teaching and learning process mostly relies on the textbook, required improvement by proper evaluation of the textbook will bring effective results for both learners and teachers. According to Hamid (2010) and Rahman & Pandian (2018), Bangladesh emphasizes the role of English education for two fundamental reasons as a developing nation: 1) to help to maintain the current economic growth trend, and 2) to develop a skilled workforce that would be locally relevant and globally

compatible. It is undeniable that the more development can be brought in English education, the more national development will be achieved. Thus, issues related to this particular field should be identified.

## **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The most recent change in ELT in Bangladesh is the introduction of the new English curriculum for the higher secondary level in 2012 and the new EFT textbook for the same level in 2015. Though a number of studies have been conducted in relation to the textbook evaluation at different level, there is still a gap or need to examine the textbook (EFT) of Higher secondary level through in-depth analyses. So, the objectives of the study are as follows:

- 1) To determine the activities of the *English For Today* communicative or not,
- 2) To determine the activities of the *English For Today* meaningful and authentic or not,
- 3) To determine the activities of the *English For Today* whether accuracy or fluency oriented.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

According to Anderson (1998), any 'successful research is based on all the knowledge, thinking, and research that precedes it'. Since this study examines the use of CLT at the HSC level English textbook in Bangladesh, the study intends to review what the literature says about CLT, its basic principles, and a review of previous studies has been done in this specific area so far.

### **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Its Principles**

Communicative language teaching refers to an approach to a second or foreign language teaching with an aim to develop the communicative competence (Richards, Platt & Platt, 1992). The approach started in the late 1960s in teaching a foreign language as a reaction to Situational Language Teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Later in 1972, it was further developed by Hymes' introduction of the term 'communicative competence' in response to Chomsky's (1957, 1965) rejection of social factors in the linguistic realm. The Council of Europe designed a communicative language syllabus based on Wilkin's (1976) book *Notional Syllabuses* which was a milestone in the development of communicative language programme and textbooks in Europe (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Canale and Swain (1980) also promoted this concept later who identified its connection with language teaching.

According to Hymes (1972), communicative competence refers to the knowledge of a language and the learners' ability to use it in terms of its appropriateness, context, feasibility, formality, and the performance of a language act. The aim of CLT is to develop ways of teaching the four

skills of a language (listening, speaking, reading and writing) that recognizes the interdependence between language and communication (Littlewood, 1981; Nunan, 1989; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Brown, 2001; Richards and Rodgers, 2014;). According to Littlewood (1981), CLT emphasizes both functional and structural views of language but the structural aspect never overshadows the functional aspect. Functional effectiveness is more important than the structural accuracy (Littlewood, 1981; Larsen-Freeman, 2000)

The principles of communicative language teaching summarized by Brown (2001) and Richards and Rogers (2007) as follows:

- (1) Communicative language teaching classroom focuses on all the components of communicative competence e.g. discursive, functional, grammatical, strategic and sociolinguistic.
- (2) The language techniques should be devised as may involve the learners in authentic, functional and pragmatic use of language;
- (3) Fluency should be given more importance than accuracy to involve the learners in a meaningful use of language;
- (4) The tasks should be introduced as may develop such skills in the learners as may engage them receptively as well as productively in un-rehearsed contexts outside of the classroom;
- (5) The learners should be provided with such opportunities as might facilitate their own learning process by developing an understanding of their learning styles and developing suitable strategies for automated learning; and
- (6) The teacher should behave like a facilitator and encourage the learners to construct meaning through interaction.

### **Communicative Activities in Textbook**

According to Larsen–Freeman (2000), students learn a language through various communicative activities. Language games, such as, card game, scrambled sentences, information gap or problem- solving tasks, picture strip story, and role play activities, using the language to share and process information match the principles of communicative approach that are integrated in a CLT classroom (Larsen–Freeman, 2000; Nunan, 1989; Littlewood; 1981). Richards and Rodgers (2014) categorized the CLT activities into seven: jig-saw activities, task completion activities, information-gathering activities, opinion sharing activities, information transfer activities, reasoning gap activities and role plays. All these activities are carried out in groups or pairs in the classroom which helps to create positive relationship between learner and teacher and also among learners. These types of activities motivate the learners to communicate with each other to use the target language related to real life. Language is used as a tool for social interaction in CLT (Littlewood, 1981; Larsen-

Freeman, 2000; Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Moreover, the process of language learning becomes pleasurable for the students. To develop learners' communicative competence in a meaningful way in the target language is the central aim of CLT.

### **Importance of Activities**

Activities are very significant for having a cognitive value to promote learning through social interaction (Long, 1990; Vygotsky, 1978). Activities are very beneficial from the perspective of language learning as they make the learning process pleasurable (Gak, 2011). According to Long (1990), the activities are important because they: (i) increase the language use; (ii) enhance the quality of language use; (iii) provide with an opportunity to individualize instruction; (iv) provide with less threatening environment for language use; (5) and motivate the learners for language learning. Therefore, such activities should be selected as may facilitate innovation as well as creativity among the learners to enhance their self-worth and competence focusing mainly on their needs (Gak, 2011).

In the context of Bangladesh, M. Islam; M. Stapa and M. Rahman (2021) carried out a research study to evaluate the promises and pitfalls of the higher secondary textbook in terms of layout, alignment between ILOs and the contents, level of language, unit as well as overall organization, coverage of the four skills, instructional activities, assessment methods, illustrations, grammatical accuracy and lexical appropriacy, and print quality. As far as activities in the textbook are concerned, they found that all the lessons have repetitive activities that are integrated without appropriate pedagogical consideration. Speaking and reading tasks and activities are not designed or organized according to the norms followed in textbook development and listening skill is totally absent in the textbook. The textbook lacks adequate communicative tasks and activities that are essential to engage learners in the classroom interaction. There is little integration of process-oriented tasks and activities. Lack of process-oriented tasks and activities will deprive learners of becoming independent autonomous learners (Islam et al., 2021)

Rabbi, Md Tahamid Ar, & Jwa, Soomin. (2021) examined the current English textbook from a teacher's perspective and the majority (eight) of the teacher participants claimed that many of the activities and exercises are not appropriate for learners. Most of the reading activities are focused on inferencing, most of the writing activities asking for writing in new literary genres, and the speaking activities tapping on traditional and stereotyped expressions, all of which are quite far from real-life encounters. Six of the participants opined that the language used in the textbook is not authentic as some of the language-focused parts to have been copied from online sources and the other parts to have been created artificially for pedagogical purposes. So, they also opined that the language in the textbook needs to undergo careful revision in order to bring more authenticity.

In her research, Anika Tabassum (2018) evaluated the textbook “English For Today” for Classes XI-XII and Alim from CLT perspective based on the survey questionnaires and the checklist. She found that the textbook does follow the communicative approach to some extent. The contents of the textbook are also interesting, includes current issues, and the activities promote real-life situations for the students in order to use the target language properly. However, it cannot be claimed that the full book is solely based on communicative approach as the equal integration of the four skills, mainly listening and speaking skills are still questionable.

From the above studies the gap has been found that nobody has undertaken a textbook analysis based on CLT principles as a framework to investigate how well the textbook aligns with the CLT principles.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Considering all the aspects and the research questions, this mini research-based article applied qualitative study which utilizes content analysis approach to examine an English language textbook taught to the students of higher secondary level (grade-11 & 12) in Bangladesh to see whether the activities of the textbook meet the requirements of communicative language teaching or not. Anderson (2007) defined a content analysis is applicable to various studies including language studies, which concern with analyzing content of certain matter through classification, tabulation, and evaluation. Dealing with analysis of textbook, this study was also classified as descriptive qualitative research design.

### **Data Collection**

The data was collected in this study from Bangladeshi higher secondary level English textbook entitled *English For Today* which is currently used by the students of grades 11 to 12. Bodgan and Biklen (2003) stated that descriptive is the characteristic of data in qualitative research as it is taken from documents, audio-video recordings, transcripts, words, pictures, etc. The data cover all the activities from the textbook.

### **Analysis of Textbook (English For Today)**

Different researchers have introduced different checklists and procedures for textbook evaluation. But every teaching and learning process is influenced by numerous variables. So, there is no universal criteria for ELT textbook evaluation. According to Sheldon (1988), “global lists of criteria can never really apply in most local environments, without considerable modification”. That is why, though the criteria was used to analyses the textbook is adapted from the communicative language teaching principle given by Brown (2001) and Richards and

Rogers (2007), it was also modified for accommodating the specific needs as it is essential for the evaluators to construct their own criteria so that they can evaluate the textbook effectively to see whether it is suitable for the particular group of learners (McGrath, 2002; Tomlinson, 2003). So, the study analyzed the activities of the textbook in terms of how communicative, authentic and meaningful they are; and whether they are accuracy or fluency oriented through modification of this criteria.

*English For Today* has 15 units, which are divided into 57 lessons and these lessons are subdivided into 472 different types of activities and exercises. Generally, a single or a few units are analyzed as a sample in order to generalize when the activities and exercises of all the units are designed in the same manner. As the activities of the EFT are different in kinds and also designed in various manner, it will be inappropriate to apply the same criteria and generalize. It was found that listening activity is totally absent in EFT and the activities are presented in isolation and combining of more than one skill. Though communicative abilities cannot be simply categorized as speaking, listening, reading, or writing skills; the nature of the book suits this type of categorization. So, by observing the mode of action of all the activities carefully, they were categorized into three main skills and two subskills: Reading, Writing, Speaking, grammar and Vocabulary. Then the analysis of the activities according to their category was described thoroughly under the light of CLT principles. The classified each activity in the textbooks as summarized in the table below. The quantitative analysis involved presenting the frequencies for each activity.

**Table**  
**Activities in the textbook**

<b>Unit</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Reading Activities</b>	<b>Writing Activities</b>	<b>Speaking Activities</b>	<b>Grammatical Activities</b>	<b>Vocabulary Activities</b>
1	People or Institutions Making History	15	3	5	2	1
2	Traffic Education	15	8	5	1	4
3	Food Adulteration	12	2	2	2	2
4	Human Relationships	10	6	4	1	3
5	Adolescence	20	4	9	2	8

6	Path to Higher Education	16	4	3	3	2
7	Human Rights	22	6	5	1	2
8	Environment and Nature	10	6	8	2	6
9	Myths and Literature	11	7	6	3	4
10	Dreams	8	8	3	3	4
11	Diaspora	12	1	8	4	7
12	Piece and Conflict	28	4	5	1	6
13	Greatest Scientific achievement	19	1	5	4	4
14	Art and Music	15	2	2	4	3
15	Tours and Travels	20	1	5	5	7
	<b>Total</b>	233	63	75	38	63

From the above table, it can be worth noted that reading and writing activities are given more importance than other types of activities. The main objective of this study is to analyses in-depth of the activities if they are communicative, meaningful, authentic and accuracy or fluency oriented. Thus, based on the above classification of the activities the analyses will follow a descriptive way of presentation.

### **Analysis of Reading Activities**

There are 233 reading activities in this textbook which are highest in number. They are various in nature such as reading texts and comprehensions, multiple choice questions, answering questions in brief, true/false or yes/no questions, filling the gaps with clues and without clues, rearranging the jumbled text, completing sentences or flow chart, matching tables or columns etc. Most of the reading texts are taken from authentic sources like newspaper articles and reports, excerpts from the declarations of Human rights etc. and they also cover diverse topics on realistic social issues like traffic education, food adulteration, historical events and speech, scientific inventions and technologies, true inspirational stories including poems, short stories etc. It is quite evident that reading texts are authentic and they are also supported by pictures, charts, graphs and tables. However, some of the texts have been copied from online sources



and few of them have been created artificially for pedagogical purposes which are inauthentic and contradicts the principles of CLT. Reading texts are also found to be lengthy enough to practice in the classroom as there is limitation and insufficient time discerned for every class. The learners also feel bored and demotivated if the activities have no meaningfulness in real life. Other types of activities are mostly focused on inferencing the given reading texts and they seems to be more accuracy oriented than fluency as they focus more on the form and structure of the languages. Moreover, there is no clear instruction given how they will be practiced in a communicative way. Few activities are designed in such a way that learners will have no freedom to perform and as a consequence it can impede them to be autonomous learners. Therefore, most of the reading activities lack to reflect the principles of CLT approach.

### **Analysis of Writing Activities**

There are 63 writing activities which includes summarizing texts, completing stories, writing poems, completing sentences, identifying different genre of literature and interpreting the theme and content, writing informal letters/e-mails/paragraphs/essays/summary/report, poster making, completing flow chart, making fact file and so on. The analyses of the writing activities reveal that some of the activities are asked to be presented in pair or group or as a whole class which requires discussion, prediction, brainstorming etc. and they will help the students to develop communicative competence in a meaningful way. The students will also have the opportunity to explore and develop their writing skills. However, these activities are not supported by any pre or post writing activities. In fact, no samples or writing mechanics or instruction are provided on how to approach the new genre of writing. These activities are rather preceded by reading texts and based on these reading texts, students are asked imperatively to perform these writing activities all of which are quite far from real-life encounters. In this way they not only lack meaningfulness but they are also perceived to be useless in terms of bringing long term effectiveness. Moreover, so far as accuracy and fluency is concerned there is no clarification given to the teachers in this regard which make the lessons teacher-oriented. Even the teachers will be in complex situation to facilitate the students appropriately as most of the teachers are untrained in Bangladesh. This is why teachers are found to be approaching to the activities in traditional and stereotypical manner. Thus, it can be interpreted that the reading activities mostly fail to be in line with the principles of CLT.

### **Analysis of Speaking Activities**

There are 75 speaking activities are found in the textbook and these activities are asked to perform in pair, group and individually on different topics related to the reading texts. They are: analyzing maps/graphs/charts, role play, debate, poster presentation, singing song, presenting project work, survey data presentation, compare and contrast ideas with partners, discussing pictures, completing questions, and asking and answering with partner, predicting

information in the text with partner etc. all these different communicative activities not only promote interaction between teachers-students and students-students but also encourage the students thinking critically and creatively. Learning language through different communicative activities is one the main principles of CLT. These communicative activities like discussion, debate, roleplay etc. in groups, pairs, individually or in whole class will provide opportunity for the students to interact with other and share their ideas and experiences in negotiating meaning by using the target language. As these activities mostly do not focuses on the form or accuracy; rather they aim at bringing fluency which is one of the principles of CLT approach. However, there are few activities where students are asked to perform on a situation they might have never encountered in reality. So, they seem to be unrealistic and meaningless which demotivate and discourage the learners to practice in the classroom. In addition, they are presented ignoring the size and duration of Bangladeshi classroom. But overall, most of the speaking activities are designed and falling in line with the communicative approach.

### **Analysis of Grammatical Activities**

The analysis of the textbook reveal that the grammatical activities such as rearranging sentences to the correct form, completing sentences by matching them from different columns, sentence completion with/without clues, making sentence with different types of words, finding different types of words (verb, adjective) in the context, finding noun forms of the adjectives from the context, finding adjectives of the given words from the text etc. are presented in the textbook. It is noticeable that the grammatical activities are in line with the curriculum's objectives as most of them have followed by context which is one of the characteristics of CLT. In addition, according to Thompson (1996), when the new language is introduced to the learners in a comprehensible context it becomes easier for the learners to understand their function and meaning. So, the presentation of the most of the grammatical activities provides the learners opportunity to practice them in a meaningful way. However, there are few activities presented in isolation and there is no scope given to the students to perform them through communicative way which contradicts the principles of CLT.

### **Analysis of Vocabulary Activities**

The textbook has 63 activities on vocabularies and they are also various in nature such as guessing word meaning from contexts, matching activities, describing words to convey meaning, making sentences with words/phrases from the text, finding root words, antonym/synonym etc. The analysis of the textbook elicits that the vocabulary activities are introduced in context which are to be used in different communicative situations. Most of them are also related to the learners' background and culture. But there is no instruction provided to practice these activities and use them through role play and problem-solving manner. In this respect, the effectiveness and meaningfulness of these activities creates doubts whether they

conform to the CLT principles or not. However, it can be interpreted that the activities on vocabulary do reflect the principles of CLT to some extent.

## **SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

The study examined Bangladeshi higher secondary level textbook called *English For Today* to know whether the activities communicative, authentic, meaningful or not and if they are accuracy or fluency oriented. In order to do that the activities of the textbook have been analyzed in five categories i.e., reading, writing, speaking, grammar and vocabulary. The analysis observed that the textbook includes some of the activities which conform to the communicative language teaching principles like role play and problem-solving activities, engaging the learners in pair or group work, providing authentic text and presenting vocabulary and grammar in the context. On the other hand, the analysis also reveals the said textbook ignores the equal presentation of the language skills in a balanced way. Excluding listening completely is another shortcoming that will not establish the book of being communicative to some level. In addition, some of the activities included in the English language textbooks were found to be artificial as well as controlled which will not allow the students to be autonomous learners. In the context of Bangladesh, class size and duration are two of the problems which hinder the application of the full potential of the book. But, some of the activities are designed in a way that requires more time than the students and the teachers can invest to complete the task. For which many of the activities may remain untouched for the time constraint. Though most of the activities are found to be communicative, authentic, meaningful and fluency oriented to some extent, yet it's not sufficient enough to the book to be aligned with the mentioned principles of CLT in the context of Bangladesh. Furthermore, it will fail to provide with sufficient opportunities for the students to communicate and interact with each other. For these reasons, it is not suitable to facilitate the development of communicative competence of the learners.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The study has tried to examine the principles of CLT through the textbook *English For Today* which was written following the CLT curriculum. Based on the findings, some recommendations are proposed below which are specific to the textbook EFT:

- a) The tasks and activities should be designed based on the proper analysis of the student's capacity and interest so that they do not get bored while performing them in the classroom.
- b) There should be conversations or dialogues like real life in the reading sections of the textbook which will increase the level of authenticity of the activities.
- c) Considering the proficiency level of the students, the reading and writing activities should be more learner-centered instead of teacher-centered.

- d) There should be listening activities like gist listening, information gap, listening for specific purpose, dictation in the book which could improve learners' listening skills.
- e) Grammatical and vocabulary items should be provided more in the context so that students can have the opportunity to practice them in communicative manner.

## CONCLUSION

The textbook 'English for Today' for higher secondary level has been appraised for its content and illustrations; and presenting the activities in communicative manner. However, by conducting an in-depth analysis, this study presented a different picture of the activities of the textbook. If the activities of the book had not been used completely and properly in the classroom, it will not be effective to develop student's communicative competence as expected in the curriculum. But the findings of this study show that the textbook does not follow all of the communicative language teaching principles fully. Therefore, it is necessary for the writers of the books and the NCTB officials to consider the aforementioned suggestions and bring necessary changes for ensuring proper implementation of CLT approach in the said textbook.

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