

## What about TEFL without Method?

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**Abstract:** In EFL settings CLT is now criticized due to the difficulties in its implementation. This article presents the criticisms on CLT and suggests alternative ways for TEFL, especially in Indonesia.

**Key words:** English language, teaching method

Supported by the wide use of English in science, technology and commerce, the openness of the language in accepting words or terms from other languages, and the tolerance of the variety of English dialects, it is no doubt that English will still play an important role as a means for communication in the globalization era in the 21st century (Hasman, 2000:3). Communicative language teaching (CLT), as a method for the teaching of English as a second or foreign language (TESL/TEFL), has been in fashion for about a quarter of a century. Its emergence in the mid of the 70's gave hope for the replacement of the Audiolingual Method which was found to have some weaknesses (e.g. the ineffective use of mechanical drills, discouraging effect of immediate correction, and too much emphasis on language accuracy).

However, as occurring to other methods, CLT also undergoes a cyclical process of method development, namely, a method emerges as a reaction to the weakness of the previous method, then accepted, applied, and criticized (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell, 1997:142). The last decade of the 20th century and the beginning of the 21st century seem to be the period of criticisms on CLT. The criticisms on CLT may signal the end of CLT method, whereas a new method which can revise CLT does not seem to appear yet. Kumaravadivelu (1994) and Rodgers (1998) call

this period as the post-method era. This article proposes alternative ways for TEFL in Indonesia in this post-method era. Before presenting the proposal, a description of the criticisms of CLT will be presented first.

### CRITICISMS ON CLT

There are two kinds of criticisms, namely the criticisms relating to CLT itself and those relating to the implementation of CLT.

CLT is not a unified method. It has a number of different syllabuses. In relation to the CLT itself, we can see that the earlier forms of CLT syllabuses, i.e. the notional/functional and situational syllabus, were criticized as merely replacing one kind of list, such as a list of grammar items (in structural syllabus) with another, e.g. a list of notions and functions, and therefore lacking a communicative process (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:74). They are referred to as Type A syllabus or a synthetic syllabus. A synthetic syllabus is one in which elements of the target language are separated into pieces and taught step by step; and then, it is the learners' tasks to synthesize the pieces when they want to use them for communication (Long and Crookes, 1992:28).

The content-based syllabus, which emphasizes the use of the target language the students are learning in all the subject-matters in their school, is difficult to be implemented in EFL setting such as Indonesia. The application of content-based syllabus will be considered to endanger the existence of the national language (Indonesian).

The emphasis on meaning-focused activities and the rejection of form-focused activities in task-based syllabuses, as experimented in Bangalore, India (Prabhu, 1987), seems to be workable only in ESL settings, where the target language is still found by the learners outside the classroom. The existence of the target language in the learners' environment helps enable the process of acquisition.

However, natural acquisition is criticized as a slow process. Schmidt (1991) and Widdowson (1990), as cited in Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1997:141), argue that language learning or form-focused instruction is still needed to increase the rate of language attainment.

Another criticism of CLT is that in teachers' perception CLT lacks testing precision to measure learning outcomes (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell, 1997:143-144).



Concerning the implementation of CLT, Li (1998:680-681) summarizes the reports about the hindrances and the objections of teachers and students to use CLT in various EFL countries in Asia. They are as follows. Teachers in China (Burnaby and Sun, 1989) had difficulties in using CLT among others because of their big class size, lack of sociolinguistic and strategic competence, and weakness in oral English. Teachers in Hong Kong (Chau and Chung, 1987) did not use CLT frequently because they felt that CLT required too much time to prepare the lessons. In Japan (Sano, 1984), students felt that they did not need communicative competence in English. In Vietnam (Ellis, 1994), the constraints to use CLT were big class size, grammar-based examination, and lack of exposures to authentic language. In Pakistan (Shamin, 1996), learners' resistance was found as a barrier for the attempt to use CLT. In the Philippines (Gonzales, 1985), people in rural areas did not feel the need to have English instruction since they seldom used it. Thompson (1996) adds that CLT expects too much of the teacher. In CLT classroom, the teacher should be ready with unpredictable student responses, should interact with the students in as natural way as possible, should have wide knowledge of classroom management skills, and should have high mastery of the target language as they are required to use it in their teaching and learning activities. It is due to the demand that teachers should be ready with unpredictable student responses that teachers in South Korea (Li, 1998), for example, reject the use of CLT. In Korea, when a teacher cannot answer students' questions right away, he/she cannot be a teacher.

Studies of CLT outside Asia show similar findings. Research with EFL teachers in Greek secondary schools (Karavas-Doukas, 1996:192-193) shows that the teachers had positive attitudes towards CLT, but their classroom practices seemed to favour a combination of traditional and communicative approach, with greater frequency of the use of the traditional approach. Efforts to use CLT in KwaZulu, South Africa, according to Chick (1996, in Li, 1998:681), met with pervasive reluctance on the part of teachers and students.

A similar condition occurs in Indonesia. At the beginning of the introduction of CLT in Indonesia, Nababan (1985:161) stated that many EFL teachers in Indonesia might feel disoriented, in that they might perceive that they did not function as teachers, if their culture of teacher-

fronted classes was to be changed. The change of teacher roles to become the facilitator, resource person, guide, and classroom manager in CLT, resulted in less acceptance of CLT. Ten years later, Sadtono (1995:16) expressed his doubts of the EFL teachers' competence to use CLT. Sadtono's statement may relate to Thompson's (1996:14) argument that: 'It is certainly difficult ... to ignore the charge that CLT is an approach developed by and for native [English] speaker teachers.' It may also be difficult to implement CLT in EFL settings when teachers may not believe their students to be capable of succeeding in this approach. In addition, Thornbury (1998) concludes that there are three reasons for the resistance to use CLT, namely, (a) the constraint due to the fact that structural syllabus is still widely used, (b) the novice teachers' attitude to avoid high-risk teaching strategies due to the high demand on the teachers, and (c) the learners who are knowledge-oriented and demand immediate learning results.

In the beginning of the emergence of CLT some of the difficulties in the implementation of CLT were considered as due to teachers' misperceptions or their unreadiness to use CLT. However, the problems such as big class size, lack of teacher's competence, or traditional teaching culture, seem to remain unsolved and then be considered as the weaknesses of CLT.

#### A PROPOSED ALTERNATIVE FOR TEFL IN INDONESIA

As stated earlier in this article, in this globalization era, English will still play an important role as an international language. The Indonesian government also considers that English is important in Indonesia. This is evidenced in the launch of a program to teach English at the elementary school in addition to the compulsory English teaching at secondary school level.

Seeing the weaknesses of CLT as described above, it is important to find an alternative way for the TEFL in Indonesia. The following proposed alternative is addressed to the practicing teachers and the educational institution which produces English teachers.

The practicing teachers and the prospective teachers should know not only the communicative approach but also various current approaches to teaching, teaching techniques, research findings, and teaching media,



which can be used for TEFL in Indonesia. In addition to the mastery of language skills and components, teachers should also familiarize themselves with knowledge of language learners, and classroom action research. The purpose of having all this knowledge is so that they have a wide range of alternatives to be selected. They may select any one or combination of them which is considered to be most appropriate for them (teachers), for their students, and for their existing school condition. By this, teachers will be empowered. They will be responsible with their own decision. Different teachers may develop different sets of techniques and procedures which are used equally successfully. They may also want to share their success by writing their unique or specific teaching techniques/procedures in a journal or presenting them in a seminar. Hence, we develop teacher autonomy which, according to Kumaravadivelu (1994:30), 'recognizes the teachers' potential to know not only how to teach but also know how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks.'

This proposed way out is not an eclectic method, in which teachers often unsystematically put together various techniques and label them eclectic. Rather, it is, as Kumaravadivelu (1994:30) calls it, a 'principled pragmatism', which relates theory and practice, idea and implementation, and 'focuses on how classroom learning can be shaped and managed by teachers as a result of informed teaching and critical appraisal' (Kumaravadivelu, 1994:31).

The proposed knowledge and skills to be possessed by teachers and prospective teachers are discussed below.

### **Current Teaching-Learning Approaches**

Teachers need to be equipped with knowledge of various current approaches to teaching and learning, such as, constructivist, contextual, or quantum teaching and learning. Constructivist approach is based on the view that learning process is not an accumulation of facts or development of skills, but a process in which learners actively construct their understanding of the world based on their experience. Constructivist approach is different from objectivist approach in that the latter emphasizes knowledge as object, whereas the former emphasizes the process of thinking to

get meaning. This approach is widely used for science teaching, but can also be applicable to TEFL. An attempt to apply constructivist approach in the teaching of reading has been made by Flood and Lapp (1989) with the idea of learners as meaning makers and the emphasis on instructional scaffolding in the teaching and learning process.

Contextual approach has some bases from constructivist approach. This approach emphasizes teachers' efforts to relate learning contents to the learners' environment, and learners' knowledge to its application in real life. As shared with constructivist approach, this approach also suggests the use of problem solving activity. This approach is being tried out for TEFL in five provinces in Kalimantan and Sulawesi.

Quantum teaching-learning approach is also derived from constructivist approach. Quantum approach focuses on efforts to create conducive, cheerful, and dynamic teaching-learning process. This approach attempts to maximize the learners' learning potentials. One of its principles is to lead us (teachers) to enter the learners' world and bring the learners to our world. This approach has similarities with Suggestopedia in TEFL, and is now becoming widely known in Indonesia.

### **Methods of TEFL**

Teachers are not necessarily introduced to only CLT. They have also to know other methods, such as grammar-translation method, direct method, audiolingual method, counseling-learning method, natural method, total physical response, suggestopedia, or silent way. Knowledge of these methods will benefit teachers in having a wide range of choices in their teaching. Teachers should not stick to any one method. They are free to choose any method or any part of a method. Therefore, they need to have abilities to apply them when needed. However, teachers should also know the strengths and weaknesses of each method, so that when they use them, they know their positive and negative consequences. Teachers may use the old method, such as grammar-translation method, when they consider that it is the best method for certain purpose of their teaching.



### Teaching Techniques

These include any techniques derived from any method, for example translation, pattern drill, task-based activity, lecturing or explanation, pair/group work, question-answer, jigsaw, problem-solving, discovery learning, puzzle/game, poem/song, oral/written exercise, role play, dramatization, etc. Teachers may have their own belief in the use of certain techniques for the success of their students, or teachers may be more comfortable in using certain techniques rather than the others. However, teachers need to be trained to use as many techniques as possible so that when they use one technique instead of another, it is not because they know only that technique, but because it is really useful for them and their students.

### Instructional Media

Media are aids in teaching-learning activities. The use of media is important for motivating students, for attracting their attention, or for clarifying certain concepts of the teaching materials. Teachers should be encouraged to use any media they consider helpful in their teaching. It should not be different whether the media are the traditional ones (e.g. pictures, drawing, charts, flash-cards, realia, real objects), or electronic media (e.g. cassette-tape, OHP, computer, internet, electronic dictionary). Any media will be useful when they help to attain certain teaching purposes. Teachers should not hesitate to use them. In addition, teachers are also advised to be able to create simple media, such as clipping or drawing simple pictures or stick figures.

### Knowledge of Learners

As a consequence of the shift to student-centered instruction, learner characteristics, e.g. personality, attitude, interest, motivation, learning strategies, and learner age, should become the focus of attention. Teachers need to know all these characteristics and take them into consideration when they determine the technique(s) to be used for their teaching practice.

Research shows that learners' personality and attitude lead to different learners' learning styles. Interest and motivation when treated properly

can enhance learning. Research into learning strategies and learner age produces findings on characteristics of good language learners and their learning preference, which in turn can be used by teachers to direct their teaching-learning activities to meet the needs of the learners (Lightbown and Spada, 1993:33-50).

### Research Findings

Teachers need to have access to research findings in TEFL area. They should have time to go to the library, so that they can read books, journals, or other library materials containing current information about TEFL. This will widen teachers' knowledge, keep them up with the latest development in TEFL, and make them grow professionally.

### Classroom Action Research

This kind of research is becoming more important in language education. The characteristics of this research are that: (a) it is conducted by the teachers, not outside researchers, concerning their own classroom, (b) it is carried out collaboratively, and (c) it aims at improving teaching and learning (Nunan, 1992:19). A simple procedure (i.e. planning, action, observation, and reflection) and the use of teacher's own class makes it easy to conduct. It can be done in several cycles with different focus for each cycle and continued as routine activities. This research gives immediate advantages to the teacher's own classes. It also leads to grow teacher's self confidence in his/her teaching practices.

### Final Remarks

Several factors (i.e. teaching-learning approaches, methods and techniques for TEFL, instructional media, knowledge of learners, research findings, and classroom action research) have been proposed to prepare teachers to become autonomous in their teaching profession. These factors may be added with some other factors when they are considered important. However, the above-mentioned factors are felt to be sufficient as minimal requirements for a TEFL teacher.

In preparing English teachers, the department of English education at



universities may need to review its teaching courses to meet the role of teachers in the post method era. The department of English education should prepare teachers to become 'cooks' provided with various ingredients and recipes, and let them create their own menus. In this way it is hoped that teachers are empowered, more creative, have self confidence, and grow professionally.

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