CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Give a man a fish and you feed him for a day.
Teach a man how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime.

-A Chinese Proverb

This proverb is quite apt when seen in context to language learning. Today, learners need to be trained to be more and more autonomous in their learning so that they may be able to handle their personal and professional language needs on their own. Unlike in the informal setting of first language acquisition, where the skills are imbibed through a natural process, the formal setting of second/foreign language learning requires systematic training.

Knowing English allows people to enjoy their life and work no matter where they are. For technical students especially, mastering English language is even more important not only for their academic life but also for their prospective career. In order to master the engineering skills and knowledge better, engineering students should own the English language competence. Most of the scientific papers and journal in the world are written in English. Most of the engineering graphs are also marked in English. Moreover, most of the lectures and tutorials at various technical universities are delivered in English language. Hence, engineering students should have at least a reasonable proficiency in English to deal with the countless English lectures, tutorials, labs, projects and papers and write various reports on them in English.

When engineering students graduate from college and become real engineers, they find that English appears to be even more crucial. Engineers usually work in groups, since their task can seldom be performed by an individual. The nature of their
work requires cooperation, collaboration and interpersonal communication. Non-native speakers, unfortunately, find that most of the engineers use English as their working language. In order to understand and coordinate with their colleagues and accomplish their projects efficiently, engineers have to use English language fairly well. Thus, it is really important for the engineering students to equip themselves with proficiency in the English language competency to enter and survive in the competitive global market.

Lot of innovations are being done from time to time in the field of English language teaching. Communicative language teaching is one such novel endeavour at the engineering institutes affiliated to Punjab Technical University in Punjab. CLT has been widely accepted and implemented by the academicians, administrations and language teachers all over the world for second/foreign language teaching. But, in spite of its wide acceptance, it has been found that it is not finding its rightful place in the language classrooms. Since, CLT is a western concept, there are certain roadblocks in its successful implementation in the Indian classrooms.

The present study made an attempt to analyze the teachers’ and learners’ perception of communicative language teaching (CLT) and how far they attempt to bring it into their practice in the engineering institutes in Punjab. The study revealed certain formidable gaps between their views and their actual classroom practice. The nature of these gaps were, therefore, realized and analyzed.

This chapter consists of the findings and recommendations of the research results. The present study, as mentioned in previous chapters, was intended to investigate the overall English language teachers’ and learners’ perception and classroom practice of CLT in the engineering institutes in Punjab. Therefore, to reach at the overall purposes of the study, questionnaires for teachers and learners were used as the primary data gathering instruments supported and substantiated by classroom
observation and teachers’ interview in the observed classes as the secondary data gathering instruments. The data gathered through the aforementioned instruments and were presented, analyzed and discussed in chapter four. Based on the analysis and discussion, the following conclusions and recommendations are made.

5.1 Findings

The study of teachers’ thinking has become one of the major interests in the field of education, especially in language teaching and learning, as it is a means to understand teachers’ behaviour in the classrooms. And it is widely accepted that behaviour is shaped by a person’s attitude or perception towards that particular subject (in this case Communicative Language Teaching). The overall findings of the study revealed that despite English language teachers’ and learners’ mildly high level of understanding about the tenets of CLT; many teachers retain some fear of adopting or adapting to CLT as an instructional method because of the contextual problems associated with its implementation.

With regard to teachers’ perception of CLT, the findings revealed that the total mean score for conceptual perspective was computed to be 3.91, the students’ learning perspective 4.08, perspective on group-work and pair-work activities 3.73, perspective on the importance of grammar 3.5, perspective on error correction and assessments 3.24, perspective on teachers’ role 4.13, perspective on learners’ role 3.2 and perspective on curriculum design 4.28. From the overall results (which yielded aggregate mean of 3.75), we find that English language teachers in the engineering institutes in Punjab have a moderately high level of perception of CLT with regard to its tenets. The mean values of few statements, in contrast, were less than 3, revealing teachers' mild disagreement with the statements. In addition, the mean results of each thematic category failed to record the two extreme scores in the attitude scale, i.e., it is
unlikely to find either 5 (strong agreement) or 1 (strong disagreement) in the teachers' responses, implying teachers' moderate acceptance of the idea of communicative principles. In the attitude scale, however, the respondents showed inconsistency to many of the statements. In other words, they inclined to react in the same way to both favourable and unfavourable statements, which may imply that the teachers' knowledge of the principles of communicative language teaching is not firmly established. But as Karavas (1996) suggests, an individual agreement with two apparently opposing statements (e.g., one favouring accuracy and the other favouring fluency) does not necessarily imply a lack of understanding or inconsistent attitude on the part of the respondent. Instead, a teacher may well respond to both, having in mind teaching contexts in which both principles have an important role to play.

The findings of this study also revealed that there were some statistically significant differences between the respondents' background (age, sex, qualification, experience and specialization) and attitudes towards the communicative approach. For instance, teachers of higher age group (40 and above) resist any change in the set patterns of teaching. They resist use of any technological aids and prefer their age old lecture system. They also hesitate from undergoing any sort of training in CLT, since they do not want to come out of their comfort zone in teaching. It has also been found that some of the teachers, who are from literature background, find themselves misfit in this system and feel difficult to relate to the revolutionary principles of Communicative language teaching. However, teachers from a younger age group (20 to 35) along with those who have had some sort of training or orientation in Communicative language teaching are enthusiastic and keen to implement new and innovative teaching tools and ideas in their language classrooms.
The findings also revealed that, in terms of mean score, the learners’ questionnaire on their perception of the CLT principles gave an aggregate value of 3.27; which is an indication of learners’ average perception of the communicative approach to language teaching. Some portion of learners tend to adhere to what might be called the ‘traditional view’ as is evident from the fact that the mean value of 38.46 percent of the results is less than 3.

On analyzing the results about classroom practices (obtained from both teachers’ and learners’ questionnaires), we get a total mean score 2.88 for the teachers’ and 2.64 for the learners’ responses- which means between the scale values of ‘sometimes’ and ‘rarely’. The teachers’ responses for the unfavourable statements depicting a mean value of 2.01 imply the fact that majority of the teachers tend to implement non-communicative (traditional) ways of language teaching ‘often’. Similarly, the results obtained from the learners’ response depict mean score 2 and 2.83 for unfavourable and favourable statements respectively. These results on classroom practice strongly suggests that teachers are often likely to implement non-communicative (traditional) ways of language teaching and ignore the communicative ones as it shows a clear gap between what teachers as well as learners advocate perceiving about CLT principles and what is actually being practiced in their English language classrooms.

The data obtained from the classroom observations and teachers’ interviews reestablish the primary findings that there exists a low correlation between what teachers as well as learners perceive about CLT and what they actually practice in their language classrooms. As can be seen from the results collected through the observations in language classrooms (table 4.5.1.1 to 4.5.1.6) as well as language laboratories (table 4.5.2.1 to 4.5.2.6), the aggregate mean scores of 1.39 and 2.59 respectively for
classroom and lab observation, imply that the teachers failed to practice communicative activities and rather they tend to practice non-communicative ones in their classrooms. It is also clearly evident from the results obtained from the class observations that the teachers find a more congenial and conducive environment in the language laboratories as compared to the theory classrooms where they feel handicapped by several factors. But unfortunately, the administration, the curriculum as well as the teachers and the students emphasize and accord more significance to classroom teaching.

The results obtained from the teachers’ interview revealed that there are a range of constraints that hinder or block the possible implementation of communicative activities in the language classrooms. The most common impediments documented by teachers are: large class size, faulty syllabus, flawed evaluation system, lack of resources and varied levels of students’ communicative proficiency. Almost all the interviewees agreed that these factors exerted powerful influence on their classroom instructions. The majority of the constraints categorized by the teachers were external, i.e., problems that are beyond teachers' control. The analysis of the observations indicated that most of the constraints forwarded by teachers do exist in the actual classrooms.

Most of the teachers interviewed, were unsatisfied with the existing syllabus; but the recommendations given by them were varied and in some cases startling too. Some teachers suggested to include more of grammar while, some regretted lack of literature in the prescribed syllabus. Some suggestions were also given towards inclusion of more practical activities. All the teachers unanimously recommended more contact hours between the language teachers and the students to develop the much needed communicative competence among the students. The responses given by the teachers, about the areas of ELT that have attained success so far in context of
engineering institutes in Punjab, were really disappointing with most of the teachers hardly making any choices. Exams and reading comprehension were the two areas opted as the successful areas by most of the teachers.

The interviews with the participant teachers also suggest that their perceptions and practice of CLT in the classrooms may have been influenced by their self-efficacy in this domain. Teachers’ self-efficacy in their pedagogical skills has an effect on their classroom practices and perceptions (Bandura 1993, 1997). Teaching experience is believed to be one of the most powerful sources of self-efficacy because teachers’ efficacy is developed from their success and/or failures of their learning and teaching experiences (Bandura 1997). Their positive perceptions of CLT appear to have stemmed, at least in part, from their exposure and experience in this field. Positive feedback by the students also motivate the teachers to go ahead with the effective implementation of CLT. On the other hand, students’ negative or no response in the classrooms may demotivate the teachers and make them lose confidence in their teaching methods which in a way may change their perception towards CLT.

To conclude, the overall findings of this study indicate that in spite of the fact that teachers have high level of understandings of CLT concepts, in reality they failed to practice them in their English language classrooms in the entire contexts. Similarly, although learners have somewhat considerable degree of perception of CLT tenets, it is challenging for the learners to adapt an alternate learner-centered learning approach and are forced to devote themselves to teacher-led classroom activities due to a number of reasons raised above. The above revelations clearly imply that this lack of consonance between the perception and practice of CLT is a formidable challenge to the successful implementation of CLT in the engineering institutes in Punjab.
5.2 Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations are made.

- First, literature (Hawkey 2006) suggests that incongruence between belief and practice is an issue that should be addressed by teacher educators, so that teachers become better equipped to reconcile beliefs and practices in order to provide more effective instruction which is evident in this study. With its findings, this study hopes to suggest that teachers can apply the most possible principles of CLT in the local contexts and it hopes to reveal the possible difficulties that English language teachers might face. These difficulties might not be the same in different contexts.

  However, teachers should not hesitate to practice CLT in their careers despite the problems faced by them since as Nunan (1986) suggests the appropriateness of the different types of communicative activity will depend not only on the purpose of but also on the context of learning. Therefore, workshops and other in-service programs should maximally be delivered to maximize teachers’ views of CLT tenets and its practical implementations.

- Since, the teacher is the most important factor in the implementation of any curriculum, it becomes imperative that any changes made in the curriculum be acceptable to the teachers who are supposed to practically carry it out. In other words, the teachers should be actively involved in the framing of the curriculum, after all, it is the teachers who have to bear the burden of it all. If innovations are made, teachers should be properly trained to adapt themselves to these changes. The CDC Report comments aptly in this regard:

  For a successful implementation of the curriculum proposed in this Report, it is imperative that the teacher be properly trained. The new
curriculum not only has some new objectives, new course content and a changed focus but it also suggests some new teaching materials, methods of teaching and devices for testing. The significance of that which is new in the proposed curriculum must in the first place be fully appreciated by the teacher herself before she can implement it. Indeed in some cases the teacher may have to familiarize herself with the new subject matter before she can teach it. To put it more emphatically the new curriculum fails if the teacher is not trained to implement it. (CDC Report 1989: 58)

In relation to this it may be important to quote what Androsenko cautiously suggests "transition to communicative methodology is unthinkable without adequate teacher training and education" (1992: 3).

Most of the teachers join and continue in the profession on the basis of their academic degrees in the field of literature without having attended any degree or diploma or may be a simple orientation programme or course or workshop on ELT. In this study, it has been found that only 9.5 per cent of the teachers have attended any orientation programme or workshop on CLT which forms the base for the present curriculum in language skills. This goes to show the paucity of teacher training programmes leading to lack of interest in the changes coming up in the language teaching methodology and pedagogy.

The teacher training should start immediately after the selection of the teacher for teaching language skills. This can be called pre-service training. It could be a six-months training at various training centers set-up by the University itself. Here, teacher trainees would be exposed to models of teaching and the latest teaching tools and methodologies coming up in the field. Various difficulties that the trainees would face or likely to face will get highlighted and remedies would be sought jointly by the trainer and the trainees. These pre-service training courses will inculcate certain basic techniques and skills that a teacher needs essentially to focus on.
Along with teacher training, some emphasis should also be laid on ‘teacher development’. As Aslam (1997) describes ‘teacher development’ is a more comprehensive process in which teachers from different areas pool their experience (i.e. interact) in order to become aware of each other’s situation. It becomes a process of sharing, interacting and negotiating one’s experience with fellow teachers in order to grow independently and autonomously. All the teachers teaching Communicative English course at various engineering institutes can meet once in a semester where they can discuss about the syllabus, their methods, materials and techniques with each other. The language teachers can also be engaged in discussions about their pedagogical experiences, struggles, as well as what they observe from students’ behaviours and performance. This allows the curriculum developers and the administration to further understand what the teachers are experiencing in their instructional process, and offer support to the teachers. Besides providing training to the teachers, encouraging them to try out innovations is important. Clark and Peterson (1986) point out that teachers who try out an innovation through which they witness progress in students learning will more likely modify their belief. Administrators should offer support and encouragement instead of limiting teachers’ choice in teaching methodology. At this platform, various experts in the field of ELT can be invited to contribute by ways of discussion, lectures or orientations for the overall betterment of the teaching programme. The latest literature on ELT can also be made available through handouts, books or photocopies of journal articles. These programmes can be organized at district levels, zonal levels and university level. Through this platform not only new trends, techniques and methodologies can be brought forward and implemented
in the ELT classrooms but also, a continuous check and regulation can be maintained on the curriculum development.

Creating ELT Cells at the university level can be one step towards ELT planning. Such cells would be necessary both for teaching and research work in ELT if we have to reconcile theoretical principles with local constraints and conditions. We must identify our local constraints and see how best and how far they should be reconciled, a job no outsider can do for us.

- Although, CLT has increased the teaching options available to language teachers, the real potential for them to practice CLT principles is tangible only if learners themselves are convinced of their values (Razmjoo and Riazi 2000). Therefore, it is advisable that teachers and other concerned bodies ought to deliver sorts of orientations to the learners about CLT principles and their importance in order to maximize their views prior to trying to implement this approach to language teaching.

- The present project confirms that the teachers conceptually acknowledge the importance of communicative teaching in the language classrooms but the observation reveals otherwise. The requisition of communication skills in any language largely depends upon frequent activities conducted in classroom in the form of conversations, drama, role-plays, language games etc. These communicative exercises give the students a practical training in the language which is of utmost importance in the present day world. But unfortunately, the language classrooms in the engineering institutes are unable to provide a communicative environment. One of the major reason behind it is the large class-size in the engineering institutes which hampers smooth conduct of the communicative activities creating indiscipline problems, lack of infrastructure
and time constraints. Though there is also a provision of language laboratories with 20-25 students in each lab, but it is conducted only once a week. And the most unfortunate part of the situation is that neither the students nor the teachers give due significance to these labs.

- Since, one of the causes that makes learners lack interest and motivation to involve in communicative classroom activities and adhere to grammar based teaching/learning is the type of traditional (written semester examination) non-communicative examination they take. The curriculum developers should at least modify the style of exam preparation and better try to make it as communicative as possible. Moreover, to evaluate the students on the basis of such exams worsens the situation; since, these are invalid indicators of learners’ ability and achievement in the language. In such contexts of learning what can be evaluated is the development in the quality of skills noticed in students, rating their fluency as well as the quality of their interaction. For this, some kind of periodical recording of student interaction will be necessary.

In language syllabus design, the communicative approach has become the latest trend. But lot of reformations are required at the implementation level. Teaching-learning activities and therefore testing activities have to be made more natural and realistic. In a language curriculum the important concern whether for teaching or for testing is that the crucial properties of language are not lost. Therefore, it is recognized that evaluation is concerned not only with the product or results of language teaching, but also with the processes through which language learning is accomplished (Long 1983). A worthwhile challenge is to design evaluation procedures that are so natural, intrinsically interesting and integrated into learning activities that students may forget that they are
being evaluated or that they themselves are evaluating. And a “…test might be viewed as an intermediate stage between the world of the classroom and the future target situation where the candidate will have to operate unaided” (Weir 1990).

- Students should also be involved in the modification or redesigning of the Engineering English course. Their feedback should be taken by the teachers as well as the administrators from time to time to understand their changing needs.

- It has also been found that students in the engineering institutes in Punjab come from varied social, economic, regional and specifically academic backgrounds. Thus, a uniform approach and course would not be able to cater to the needs of students from such heterogeneous backgrounds. For example, the communicative competence of a convent/English medium educated student would be far better than a student educated from a Punjabi medium government school. Similarly, students from urban and rural backgrounds also have different language competencies. So, what is required is a graded curriculum meant for different students falling under different language competencies. For instance, a placement test on language competency can be taken by all students entering the college. According to their performance in the placement test they would be graded into different proficiency levels namely Level 1 for students with poor language skills, Level 2 for students with average language skills and Level 3 for students with good language skills. Similarly, different language modules or capsules would be prepared for the students that they will have to clear through during their four year degree course. For instance, a student at level 1 will undergo Module I in the first semester and will go to Module II in the next semester. Similarly, student at level 2 would be directly entering to Module II
and would move on to Module III in the subsequent semester and so on. Thus, there would be different entry and exit points for the students so that they would get in their language classrooms what they require and that nobody gets an under doze or an over doze in their language classrooms which most student often feel.

- Many companies (especially in the IT sector) ask their employees to take Business English Certificate (BEC) examinations which has been found to be a great help in developing employees’ skills in the use of the English language and sensitizing them to the needs at the workplace. Such programs can be provided at the engineering colleges itself in collaboration with the British Council where the students can be prepared for the BEC examination.

- By and large, the research findings should help not only English language teachers but also the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other concerned bodies to understand various aspects of CLT and the practical problems in its implementation. Thus, it is recommended that teachers should not be deterred by the problems and obstacles coming in their way to implementing the communicative approach to language teaching since it may prove to provide the most promising results when it comes to develop learners’ communicative competence.

5.3 IMPLICATIONS

It is strongly believed that this study would be able to provide methodological insights and information to English language teachers at the engineering institutes which would facilitate effective implementation of the principles of communicative language teaching in their language classrooms. It is also expected that this work would provide pedagogical contributions and serve those who wish to develop curriculum and
design ELT materials as a reference to incorporate CLT principles with the actual classroom practices appropriately. The research findings in this study will encourage an extension of research into teachers’ knowledge and understanding of CLT. It would also stimulate possible other researchers to conduct similar or further studies and serve as an initial work. Therefore, this study is not intended to make any generalization, so any concerned and interested body can make use of this study as an avenue for further research.

5.4 Last Word

In one of the seminars that I attended on CLT, the expert asked all the participants to share our views and experiences in language teaching. Everyone in the class was enthusiastic, sharing our thoughts on what activities we ask our students to do, how we correct their errors and what kind of teaching aids we use. Just then one of the teacher participants, sitting at the back of the class, gave his comment that silenced the whole class. He said:

There are several ways in which we can learn a language. Now, we have CLT, and decades ago there was the Audio-lingual Method. No matter which method people adopted to learn a language, they could still communicate effectively through their speech and writings long before there was CLT. Many people could speak different languages fluently. How did they learn? At different times people used different methods to learn a language. So, it doesn’t matter what method we make use of, all that matters is the achievement of our communicative goals.

His remark made me ponder about language teaching and learning. Ten years later, are we going to discuss another methodology to language instruction? Is research going to say that the new methodology is more effective than CLT? Does it mean people who learn through CLT can speak and write better than those who learned their second languages from my grandparents’ generation? Certainly, there is more than one way to teach a language effectively. There are also many other factors that teachers need to
take into consideration when making pedagogical decisions: students’ learning needs, learning styles, personalities, teaching resources, and time.

Well, this realization cannot restrain us from understanding, analyzing and improving upon the current ELT scenario. And the current ELT scene in India urgently demands for a change. This need is ever so strong in the technical institutes where the students are being prepared for the global market where English competence acts as a ‘life skill’ or ‘survival skill’. Undoubtedly, Communicative Language Teaching is a ray of hope in the grim ELT scenario of India, which promises to cater to the language needs of our young aspiring technocrats in an effective way. CLT is now being accepted and introduced in many of the technical and professional universities in India but that is not the be all and end all of this situation. Before we could be able to reap the fruitful results of CLT, everybody involved in the teaching paradigm be it the students or the teachers, the administrators or the curriculum developers, need to deeply understand the basic principles of CLT. Mere acceptance and admiration in books and curriculum will not serve the purpose, what it requires is consistent and concerted efforts to implement, support and sustain this western concept in our local contexts. A complete overhauling of our language classrooms is required providing the students with a congenial and conducive environment to develop their communicative competence. Lot of contextual constraints that hamper the successful implementation of CLT in our classrooms must be sincerely dealt with along with some definite steps towards teachers’ and learners’ conditioning towards communicative language teaching.
References


