Problems in Using Communicative Language Teaching in Iran and Possible solutions
For the degree of M.A. in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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ABSTRACT: This is an essay to investigate the problems and constraints in applying communicative language teaching (CLT) in Iran. According to advocates of (CLT), the goal of teaching with this method is to use the language as a medium of communication. It is generally accepted that there is a need to distinguish between learning that and learning how. In other word, there must be a distinction between knowing various grammatical rules and being able to use them effectively and appropriately when communicating.

Dahmardeh (2009) Believed that Iranian students after teaching and learning English for seven years and finishing high school, cannot communicate in real situations, but a few simple cases such as greeting and taking a taxi. The application of the communicative approach in teaching English as a foreign language; however, is associated with some problems that can cause the method turn out not to be successful and the learning outcome not to be efficient enough. (Koosha and Yakhabi, 2013). This paper mainly intends to evaluate the problems that may lead to the failure of communicative language teaching in Iran and some suggestions. The findings can be useful for 1) curriculum planners as well as textbook designers in order to design and write English language text books with the communicative framework 2) English foreign language teachers and learners, providing them insightful ideas about how to manage their teaching and learning activities in order to implement this method successfully.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Solutions, Constraints, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), English Language Teaching (ELT)

INTRODUCTION

In the field of second language acquisition, there are many theories about the most effective way of language learners to acquire new language forms. Recently more language teachers have noticed the failure of form-focused methods such as Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio-lingual method (AM) in developing learner’s communicative ability in real life situations and have shifted to adopt the communicative approach. Based on Richard and Rogers (2001:155) both American and British proponents see (CLT) as the most comprehensive approach and a method that aims to (a) make the communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication. The applications of (CLT) to English as a foreign language (EFL) context, has recently been debated extensively. Teachers still find it difficult and challenging to adopt the approach and maximize the learning because of some problems; especially in EFL classroom in which, although the teachers now have gradually adopted approaches that focus on meaning and language use, the learning outcome is still not efficient enough. For this reason the author attempted to provide a comprehensive list of those difficulties and problems that Iranian learners and teachers may face implementing this method in their classes.

In order to collect valid and reliable data, some recent and useful books, researches, and articles with respect to the topic were carefully selected and studied by the author. In addition to the above mentioned sources, the most valid and reliable source, was the author himself who has been teaching English for more than twenty five years in various public and private schools in some cities and villages in Iran as well as in his own private English language center in Qurveh in Kurdistan.
Prior to preceding further, and in order to get an overview of the whole article, I think it would be a good idea to present a summary about teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) in Iran. There are some distinctive features about the role of English language teaching (ELT) in Iran, which make it a unique context in comparison to its neighbors or any other country in which English is taught. These features could be named as political, cultural, religious etc.

First of all, English is regarded as a foreign language and with respect to its origin, most people believe that it belongs to America. The political chaos in relation that existed between Iran and America caused the Iranian government to have a negative view toward the English teaching. As a result there are some people in positions of influence who really believe that English is the language of enemy (Dahmardeh, 2006).

With respect to cultural issues, in the Iranian school textbooks the West is depicted as an entity with of sins. Western nations exploit the colonized countries for their own economic benefits, promote opium and slave trade, and try to impose their own cultures and erase the local ones. Unlike other countries, Iran does not attract many tourists, despite its potential capacity together with many so-called tourist attractions, due to the policy that was taken by the leaders and policy makers in Iran.

Moreover, one of the neighbors of Iran that Iranians share a lot in culture and religion with is Pakistan; however, these two countries are extremely different and they cannot be even compared. For instance, English is regarded as a foreign or even an enemy language in Iran and it would only be used in schools or private institutes which are for teaching this language; while, with respect to Pakistan, the English language is regarded as a second language and it is the language in organizations, media and everywhere outside the house. Besides, Iranian people are not allowed to watch or have access to satellite TV legally since the policy makers as well as clergymen in Iran consider their programs inappropriate and against morality. So, this would be another issue which makes Iran unique in the region or maybe in the world (the same source).

Observing such a situation for many years and being interested in the topic, evoked me to write an article on it so as to help both the text book writers to consider the findings in designing new English textbooks for Iranians students based on (CLT) framework, and students and teachers, giving them effective insights in order to manage their learning and teaching activities to carry out the method effectively. Besides, according to Dahmardeh (2006) some of the problems teachers and pupils encountered in Iran could be traced to the textbooks and further, to Iranian program. I, as an English language teacher, do believe that the materials and the method being used by teachers, as well as the current ELT program, are structurally based and cannot be considered as communicative and they need to be revised completely.

**REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is best considered an approach rather than a method. It refers to a diverse set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning and that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures. Communicative Language Teaching appeared at a time when language teaching in many parts of the world was ready for a paradigm shift. Situational Language Teaching and Audiolingualism were no longer felt to be appropriate methodologies. CLT appealed to those who sought a more humanistic approach to teaching, one in which the interactive processes of communication received priority (Richards, 1985).

Since its inception, CLT has passed through a number of different phases as its advocates have sought to apply its principles to different dimensions of the teaching/learning process. In the first phase, a primary concern was the need to develop a syllabus that was compatible with the notion of communicative competence. This led to proposal for the organization of syllabuses in terms of notions and functions rather than grammatical structures (Wilkins, 1976 cited in Richard and Rodgers, 200). In the second phase, CLT focused on procedures for identifying learners’ needs and this resulted in proposals to make needs analysis an essential component of communicative methodology (Munby, 1978 as cited in Richard and Rodgers, 2003). In the third phase, CLT focused on the kinds of classroom activities that could be used as the basis of a communicative methodology, such as group work, taskwork, and information-gap activities (Prabhu, 1987 as cited in the same source).

A number of reports in the literature deal with CLT innovations in EFL contexts, especially in Iran. Many have proposed that most EFL teachers have found it challenging to use CLT. For instance, Burnaby and Sun (1989, as cited in Kooshia and Yakhaby, 2013) reported that teachers in China found it difficult to deploy CLT. The constraints cited included the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching methods, class size and schedules, resources and equipment, low status of teachers, English teachers’ deficiencies in oral English and sociolinguistic and strategic competence. The findings of a research done by Ghanbari and Ketabi (2011 as cited in the same
source) showed that there are some stumbling blocks that seriously affect the aims of this curriculum innovation to be fulfilled in Iran as an EFL context. These blocks involved: lack of feasibility, and compatibility of the new existing method with existing values and practices, lack of enough appropriate training and retraining course, teachers’ low confidence in the new approach, practical constraints, unsupportive school environment, and negative feedback from colleagues, school officials, students, and state evaluation centers. The following results were reported by Koosha and Yakhaby (2013):

1. EFL learners have low intrinsic motivation to communicate in foreign language.
2. CLT teaching method is not compatible with University Entrance Exam.
3. CLT lacks clear cut assessment procedures.
4. CLT is not always compatible with EFL home culture and values.
5. There are not enough teacher training courses to promote awareness of teachers.
6. Creating the right kind of interaction is a major challenge for teachers.
7. CLT compared with other approaches places greater demands on the teacher.

As this brief review reveals, CLT as the most known comprehensive approach in language teaching has proved difficult to be implemented on the part of teachers of English as a foreign language. Some of these problems that are considered to be more common in the majority of EFL contexts, specifically in Iran, will be discussed in more detail in this article.

AN INTRODUCTORY ISSUE

Before addressing the main problem sources, It would be a good idea to present a summary of how the first Iranian national curriculum for teaching foreign language (INCTFL) being written, its aims, as well as the current curriculum of teaching English in Iran. In 2007, the first Iranian national curriculum for teaching foreign languages was being developed by a team of seven people who was working under the supervision of the Ministry of Education, based on CLT. According to the authors of the curriculum, the main goals of the curriculum were categorized within four main domains. One was mainly about language and communication. The other one was about learning how to learn and then a series of goals about cross curricular aims which was about how other subjects could be practiced and learned by the English language learning. And finally, there was a cultural category. The curriculum writers explained the achievements as developing language skills according to pre-intermediate level, in order to have an external factor to evaluate and assess what was taught in Iran, it was decided to study the factors that European Union had defined for its curriculum. The Union had categorized its curriculum into A1, A2, B1, B2, C1 and C2 in which the C2 was advanced learner. Bearing in mind available facilities in Iran as well as situation, the interviewees had hoped to prepare students up to Pre-intermediate (B1) by the end of Pre-University Level (550 hours practice). In terms of oral expression they had to be able to satisfy their basic needs, to express themselves, their ambitions, their hopes, and to become involved in a conversation with other people and basically when they took a trip to another country they could satisfy their basic needs in English. Furthermore, in terms of listening comprehension, students were supposed to be able to use the data available inside the school and outside the school. In terms of writing they had to be able to produce very simple texts and text of different types up to the Pre-intermediate level. In terms of learning how to learn, basically learning strategies were included in this program and the students had to develop certain learning strategies to become to some extent independent because the aim was for a student to be able to use the available input outside the school without the help of the teacher after they graduate from secondary school. One of the author of the textbooks argued that students were supposed to be able to read passages measured using the Flesch-Kincaid Reading Level of difficulty.6. This was chosen as a yardstick by which they were trying to identify the reading difficulty of passages. And then from 1 to 12 level students were supposed to be able to read with 70 per cent of comprehension passages of 9 to 9.5 difficulty level. Furthermore, the teachers’ group indicated that by the end of the program, the students were supposed to have some basic understanding of grammar and some understanding of reading as well as a command of vocabulary, both general and technical. They were also supposed to use dictionary properly and to be able to communicate with a certain level. Moreover, it was very important for them to pass the exam which was running at the end of each academic year. Having compared the answers of both teachers and authors of the textbook, it may be argued that the major goal of both the textbook and the ELT program was reading comprehension. On the other hand, it can be argued that what the curriculum authors claimed as the goals of the document were different from what the teachers and the authors of the textbook stated, since the current textbook as well as the ELT program were not designed based on this curriculum at all.

To clarify the situation, as one of the curriculum authors pointed out the current document was available online...
for feedback; however, the curriculum was not approved by the government. Moreover, the other two believed that since this project had been stopped by the current government then this document was unavailable to people. This was a project from the time of the ex-president of Iran, Muhammad Khatami, and when the new government came into power, a one day seminar was held in order to assess the whole document. It seems that there were only representatives of the new government as well as the members of the team for designing the curriculum attending the seminar. According to the interviewee,

“Since the document was not compatible with new government’s expectations, then it was decided to stop the whole project and sack all members of the committee.”

These expectations were then further explained as religious and political issues. To sum up, from what the participants explained it can be claimed that there was no curriculum or syllabus or teacher guidance available in Iran for ELT and all the course-book materials were written subjectively by a group of authors based on no document, as the textbook author claimed.

On the other hand, the English language is a compulsory subject in the Iranian curriculum but because of the lack of attention that has been given to research within this subject, it could be argued that English has been neglected within Iranian educational system. Most curricular topics are selected primarily on the basis of what society believes students need to learn, rather than on the basis of students’ actual need. It is also the case in countries like Iran which there is an especial emphasis on achievement standards in school; as a result there is an increased pressure on teachers to prepare their pupils to take language exams as fast as possible. Dahmardeh (2006) continued by arguing that many teachers respond to this pressure by narrowing the curriculum and teaching to the test. Given that the vast majority of language exams and tests in Iran fail to assess real communicative language content, teaching communicative skills becomes or remains a neglected component in many foreign language classrooms. Consequently, students’ lack of success in communicating in English after studying it for seven years (three years in middle school and four years in secondary school) is the result (Dahmardh, 2006). As an English language teacher who has been teaching English in both secondary/guidance schools and high schools in different regions of Iran, I do believe that there is a huge gap between what is the aim of teaching English in Iran and what is really done in the classroom, with regard to CLT principles. As we all believe, practicing and teaching in real classroom is much more better than only reading different books with regard to the case. I myself have felt the ineffectiveness of the current method of learning and teaching English as a foreign language in Iran. I do believe, the best source with respect to this case for each researcher could be the Iranian English teachers just like me.

CONSTRANTS

1. Political Issues
Political issues were the first to be considered. From what was said by the participants, political issues were among those constraints that affected the process of writing the document. All the curriculum writers and textbook authors agreed that they received a document in the very beginning of establishing the committee, the ratification number 647 of the Ministry of Education in which all social, scientific, political, cultural, religious, economical aspects were considered and the members were supposed to follow them thoroughly. In a study about designing curricula (Dornyei, 2001, p.63 as cited in Dahmardeh 2009) it was suggested that most curricular topics are selected primarily on the basis of what society believes students need to learn, rather than on the basis of students’ actual need. This was also the case in countries like Iran where there was an especial emphasis on achievement standards in school. According to the authors of the curriculum, there were topics that they wanted to include but because of the limitations that existed this did not happen and as discussed earlier there were many other issues against their wishes that they had to follow because of their boundaries. The results from the curriculum analysis also supported this claim. For instance, tourism and music were considered as the topics that most students would be interested in, and as a result the authors were trying to put these topics into the curriculum; however, due to the pressure that existed from the government this did not happen and the results of the curriculum analysis showed no sign of such topics. The same issue was also stated by the author of the textbooks as one of his main concerns.

2. Cultural Issues
Culture is one of the issues that a great attention has been given to by CLT and it could be used as another assessment criterion. It has been suggested that knowing a language is inseparable from understanding the culture in which the language is spoken. Williams (1994, p.77 as cited in Dehmardeh2009) believed:
“The learning of foreign language involves far more than simply learning skills, or a system of rules, or a grammar; it involves an attraction in self image, the adoption of new social and cultural behaviors and ways of being, and therefore has a significant impact on the social nature of the learner.”

Therefore, Language learning is a deeply social event that requires the incorporation of a wide range of elements of the Second Language (L2) culture. Some scholars like Byram (1997 as cited in Kumaravadivelu,2006) even went further and believed that the main goal of language teaching should not be simply to teach communicative competence but rather ‘intercultural communicative competence’. Having said that , it is very important to realize that cultural awareness rather than cultural knowledge becomes increasingly important. Just knowing something about the culture of an English speaking country will not suffice. What must be learned is socio cultural competence which is a general understanding and openness towards other cultures. However, Kramsch (1993 as cited in the same source) argued that knowing about a culture (i.e., gaining cultural competence) does not mean that one has an obligation to behave in accordance with conventions of that culture. Thus the ultimate goal of cultural learning is not to convey information about a culture nor to promote the acquisition of culturally influenced ways of behaving, but rather to help students see their culture in relation to others so as to promote cross-cultural understanding. The cultural content of the ELT textbooks in Iran has never been explicitly discussed. There is a serious absence of thorough studies that examine the quality and the types of materials used in teaching culture. Interestingly, the author of textbooks also had the same opinion towards culture as authors of the curriculum had and he considered cultural issues as a very important factor too; however, during the process of designing the textbooks his hands were tied and he was not allowed to include any cultural values or factors of English speaking countries in the textbooks. Aliakbari (2004) in a study regarding the place of culture in the Iranian ELT textbooks concluded that the ELT textbooks in use in Iranian secondary schools did not prove helpful in developing intercultural competence and cultural understanding. He concluded that “the ELT textbooks in Iran appeared too weak to provide new information or broaden students’ world view or cultural understanding”. Having said that, it could be postulated that changes should be made if we want to prepare the students to communicate in the multicultural world of English and if we want to use the nationally developed textbooks for the optimum benefit. According to what the teachers as well as the author of textbooks indicated it could be concluded that cultural issues had a place within neither the ELT program nor the textbooks. Also, it needs to be borne in mind that thanks to advanced science, technology and the Internet and as the globe has become similar to a village; the English language does not belong to America or any other particular country any more. So, when we talk about the English language it does not necessarily mean American English and it could be applied to Indian English, Pakistani English or British English; therefore, the cultural values could be changed accordingly.

3. Authenticity

The definition of authenticity in the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics begins: “the degree to which language teaching materials have the qualities of natural speech or writing”. CLT also entails the use of authentic materials and the use of English in class. If teachers can find genuinely authentic materials which their students can cope with that will be advantageous. In order to justify why using such materials. It is proved that authentic texts can be motivating because they are proof that the language is used for real-life purposes by real people. So, authentic materials enable students to interact with the real language and pupils would feel that they are learning a target language as it is used outside the classroom. Authentic texts focus mainly on contents and meaning and not on linguistic forms or other structures. Authentic material can present the reader with cultural messages as well as prepare students for a so called “pleasure reading”. Generally, authentic materials do not entirely replace the textbooks but they can be used as a substitution for certain texts that might not be well-suited for classroom use.

According to the authors of the curriculum, authenticity was considered quite important within the curriculum document. The document paid great attention towards the notion of authenticity as well as applying authentic materials within the program, for example as one of the main principles of the program, it was explicitly stated that “the program would keep it in mind to use real and authentic contexts and texts” (INCTFL, p.16). On the other hand, concerning the ELT program as well as the textbooks, the situation is quite different. According to the participants (teachers and the author of textbooks), no attention is given towards such a concept within either the program or the course books. Dahmardeh (2006) also argued that the concept of authenticity is not being referred to within the textbooks which could be used in order to support what the teachers and author claimed in the current research. Moreover, Aliakbari (2004) in his study explained that reading passages with omitted identity are recognized as another flaws of the textbooks. He (2004) found that 28 per cent of 'Reading' passages lacked identifiable sources of reference. Whether the identity had been taken away prior to or through the adaptation and
modification processes is unknown. Such a process, which has been done with the intent of providing neutral passages, has resulted in senseless, artificial and untraceable texts. Thus, instead of genuine texts, pupils often meet imaginary artificial passages. Finally, it is commonly assumed, and not without good reason, that the textbook is the least authentic thing of all. Some argue that once we have a textbook that immediately makes it not authentic.

4. Chosen Topics

This section is going to discuss about the constraints in choosing the topics presented in the curriculum document, the textbooks and the ELT program as well as their suitability. Topics play an important role within every language and particularly CLT. As a result, planners are likely to design a utilitarian-oriented syllabus, one which encourage the development of communicative-type teaching materials. So, students in a program “will be able to converse effectively with a native speaker on topics of interest, will be able to read authentic materials for pleasure or professional needs, and will be able to correspond with friends, colleagues or business associates in the target language.” Dubin and Olshtain (1986, p.24 as cited in the same source).

Topics should relate to students’ interests and also take account of the teaching circumstances. They should all be adapted to suit students and teaching circumstances. With respect to the nature of topics, it could be argued that students maybe more motivated to work on topics which are directly related to their reasons for learning English. Certain topics will simply not work if the necessary raw material would be unavailable or inaccessible to students. Furthermore, Kumaravadivelu (2006) clarified that materials production above all demands creativity in presenting structural materials in a communicative interactive situation which has to be as natural as possible without giving the students the impression of being in an artificial setting.

The topics within the curriculum were chosen subjectively based on what the authors thought might be appropriate for students; hence, there was no query about what teachers or students might be interested in. However, they commented further that there were some constraints in this regard. For instance, two topics like tourism and music had no place within the previous ELT program in Iran and according to one of the authors since they were included in the new curriculum, it was one of the reasons that caused the whole project to be stopped and banned from publishing. On the other hand, concerning the textbooks the situation was quite different. According to the author, all the topics were given to him and he had no freedom of choice at all. This issue was further addressed by the author as one of the main shortcomings of the current educational system. Furthermore, when the teacher participants were asked for their comments regarding the introduced topics within the textbooks, the majority of participants (42 people) considered the topics less useful or not useful at all. From what has been said, it could be concluded that the textbooks failed to provide topics that would meet teachers’ expectation. Aliakbari’s findings (2004) can also be used to support the and the related fields within the Iranian ELT textbooks. It would have been quite efficient if the authors of curriculum would have enquired teachers’ comments about the topics prior to choosing them - something that seemed to be forgotten by the authors and program planners. Similarly, it seems that it would be better if the topics were updated to become more congruent with the fashions of the new generation which might be a bit different from that of the authors who designed the books at least ten years ago.

5. Role of Meaning and Form

As discussed in earlier chapters, one of the main features of CLT is communicative competence. Communicative competence entails knowing not only the language code or the form of language, but also what to say to whom and how to say it appropriately in any given situation (Kumaravadivelu,2006). A well-known description of communicative competence has been that it includes knowledge of what to say, when, how, where, and to whom. In effect, it takes in all of the verbal and non-verbal mechanisms which native speakers use unconsciously to communicate with each other. Having said that, it could be argued that both meaning and form are inseparable parts in CLT and therefore, there is a need for a program that would emphasize both of them.

Based on Dahmardeh’s findings (2006), the teachers’ views and the writer’s perspective , it can be argued that both ELT program and the textbooks were mostly concentrated on form and structure. It was further realized that the meaning and message were neglected mostly. Therefore, bearing in mind the importance of meaning and message in CLT as well as collected data, it could be argued that the textbooks were not communicative from this perspective.

6. Student’s Motivation
One of the main principles of CLT is student centeredness and motivation which plays a vital role within this principle too. According to Ellis (1994 cited in Richard and Rodgers, 2006) it has been called the most important variable in foreign language learning. Most teachers and researchers would argue that it has a very important role in determining success or failure in any learning situation. Student attitudes have an impact on the level of L2 proficiency achieved by individual students and are themselves influenced by this success. Thus, pupils with positive attitudes, who experience success, will have these attitudes reinforced. Similarly, pupils’ negative attitudes may be strengthened by lack of success. One of the reasons why CLT has become very successful and attractive is because it can provide realistic and motivating language practice. Moreover, it needs to be borne in mind that motivation is one of the reasons why the information gap, as one of the vital principles of CLT, is important.

To sum up, according to the facts and findings been mentioned above and many others that were touched upon, the motivation has a crucial role in ELT and since this factor was missing within the textbooks and ELT program, it could be one justification why Iranian students disliked or at some points hated to learn English, as the participants claimed. Therefore, this can be used as a support to why not consider the textbooks as communicative materials in this regard. From what was said by the author of textbooks as well as Dahmardeh’s findings (2006) as well as the author point of view, it could be argued that the textbooks did not take into account the motivational factor.

7. Student Centeredness

Another trend which has stemmed from CLT has been the development of student-centered approaches to language teaching in which, according to Kumaravadivelu (2006), information by and from students is used in planning, implementing and evaluating language programs. He argued that the idea is based on a belief that students will bring to the learning situation different beliefs and attitudes about the nature of language and language learning and that these beliefs and attitudes need to be taken into consideration in the selection of content and learning experiences. So it is rejected that there would be one universally right way either to teach or to learn and it is concerned in the first instance with the students being involved. Thus, the student centeredness seeks to work with human complexity and diversity and; therefore, cannot expect to find neat and pre-packed solutions; rather, it seeks to find local solutions to local problems in the light of the characteristics of each learning context.

Furthermore, a student-centered program has a variety of benefits. According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), giving students some control over their learning process has many benefits. It makes them feel confident; it puts some of the decision making in their hands; it puts the responsibility for learning in their hands; and over the long term it builds independence and self-reliance so that they can read on their own without being dependent on teacher direction and supervision. And finally, it activates the students’ own way of learning.

Based on what has been said so far and according to the teacher participants and the author of textbooks, the author’s own experiences as an English teacher, the ELT program in Iran was mainly designed based on the teacher centeredness and teachers were considered central to teaching and learning. There was no role for students in the process of teaching and learning and the students were considered quite passive (It was explicitly argued by the participants). So, it could be argued that due to the importance of student centeredness in CLT, as discussed earlier, and since this was missing within the ELT program, it might not be regarded communicative from this perspective.

8. Language Teachers

According to Breen and Candlin (1980) as cited in Kumaravadivelu (2006, p. 120) the teacher has three main roles in a communicative classroom. The first is to act as a facilitator of the communicative process, the second is to act as a participant, and the third is to act as an observer and pupil. There are also teacher factors to be considered, for instance Richard and Rodger (2006) believed the teacher should be able to use the target language fluently and appropriately and moreover, he/she needs to be familiar with the target language culture. One of the requirements of a language teacher according to principles of CLT is to be familiar with some aspects of the culture of some English speaking countries.

Based on Dahmaraeh’s findings and the author’s own experiences, it can be Concluded that most of Iranian English language teachers were not qualified enough to implement a communicative language teaching program. The majority of teachers in Iran cannot speak English fluently and accurately. Most teachers in Iran due to their low income had to work in many schools and they did not even have time to be prepared for their classes. They cannot travel to the US, the UK or other English speaking countries in order to be familiar with these people’s culture or expand their experiences and finally improve their oral ability.
9. The Balance in Presenting Language Skills

According to the advocates of CLT all four language skills have to be emphasized equally and worked on from beginning. Furthermore, according to McDonough and Shaw (2003) and many other Scholars cited in Dahmardeh2006, one of the main principles of CLT is regarded as presenting all language skills equally as well as an integration of them. According to Richard and Rodgers (2002) it is essential to reaffirm that each language skill reinforces all the others and that all of them are integrated in the actual communication of native speakers (the same source). According to Dahmardeh’s findings based on Iranian English teachers, EFL program, textbooks as well as the author’s viewpoint, reading, and grammar and to some extent writing and vocabulary are among the main activities that are emphasized and practiced within the program. However, listening and speaking are not referred to in the program at all. Bearing in mind the CLT’s principle about integration of skills, it could be argued that another principle of CLT again is missing and it could suggest that the ELT program at this stage failed to be communicative. On the other hand, the characteristics of GTM, grew up in the early to mid nineteenth century, presented by Larsen-Freeman (1986), Johnson (2001) and according to Dahmardeh (2006) and what has been said about the ELT program it could be suggested that this program is to a great extent similar to GTM. Therefore, it could be concluded that the course-books could not be referred to as communicative materials from this viewpoint. Concerning the textbooks designed for ELT in secondary schools, it is obvious that these course books are mainly concerned with reading and other skills are used instrumentally in order to help this skill to be improved and there is no sign of listening at all.

10. Time Limit

Concerning the portion of time that should be allocated to language teaching, different suggestions have been made by different scholars as well as researchers but it has to be borne in mind that the allocated time has to be compatible with the amount of teaching as well as portion of textbooks and also what teachers are expected to do. As for the time limit, a lot of discussions were made by all groups of the participants Dahmardeh (2006). Nearly all of them were unhappy about the time allocated to language teaching in secondary schools and they expressed the view that more time needed to be given to this subject. However, according to both teachers and authors the time that was given to the ELT in Iran must be increased since according to teachers they had not enough time to even cover textbooks in their entirety and according to the authors more time has to be spent on this subject in order to fulfill the requirements of a communicative curriculum.

The author, the English language teachers, and the textbooks designers believed that if teachers would have more time they could do very effective jobs even with current program and textbooks. They did believe that teaching and learning English based on CLT principles demands more word on both teachers and students and therefore, needs a lot of time.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Some possible solutions to the problems mentioned in the previous Sections, according to Koosha and Yakhabi (2013) are:

a) CMC can be brought into language learning and teaching

Insufficient access to the target language both inside and outside of the classroom in EFL contexts certainly is an obstacle that negatively affects students’ communicative need and motivation. With the advent of computer mediated communication technology (CMC), ways of communication and learning have been efficiently changed. Learning is no longer restrained in time and space, through the internet, learners are offered opportunities to communicate and learn collaboratively with learners worldwide. This new way of learning that engages learners in authentic social interactions can greatly expose learners to the target language and enable them to practice what they have learned in the classroom. Researches on computer-assisted language learning (CALL) propose that the integration of CMC into EFL learning can provide learners with more authentic input and more opportunities to participate in the target socio-cultural contexts; both linguistic and pragmatic knowledge can be promoted. The use of computer mediated communication tools both inside and outside of the classrooms certainly can benefit the learning and develop learners’ communicative competence to a certain extent.

b) More natural, real needs should be set for learners
Many EFL learners have the need to pass university entrance examinations, but this is a poor need to focus one's education on. It is artificial and temporary. So, it is better to help learners set more natural, real needs. As established earlier, many students will have to use English in their future careers. To make this fact more immediate and real to the students, perhaps the teaching materials should be changed to reflect these specific needs. Data could be gathered from real people who use English in their careers, and integrated into lesson plans in addition to travel, correspondence and other potential uses already recognized. Perhaps students themselves could be asked to consider what other possible uses they would have for language, and lessons could be shaped around their perceived needs. Usually conducting a needs analysis is the common practice for setting goals to identify what students' needs, wants and expectations are.

c) Teachers should be given the opportunity to attend regular training

English EFL teachers presently employed should be given the opportunity to improve their skills. In order for these teachers to make progress, they must be given what they need to make it work. Schools will have to make serious commitments toward giving teachers the time and opportunity to attend training regularly, and, if possible, sabbaticals to study abroad. In-service teacher training courses along with conferences, and workshops can greatly help EFL teachers to deal with the innovation and change of methodology. The educational system should also provide the teachers with enough opportunity to attend these in-service training courses because the majority of teachers do not attend such courses due to the lack of enough time. Moreover, teachers with greater English speaking skills and TESOL qualifications should be given priority in new hiring teachers.

d) Teaching methods appropriate to the local EFL context should be developed

The majority of EFL teachers are faced with the problems and contradictions when adopting CLT as it is a methodology mainly developed for western countries. Despite its initial claim to be appropriate as an approach for EFL situation, CLT seems to be more suitable for ESL situations (Ellis, 1994, 1996; Shamin, 1996; Valdes & Jhones, 1991) as cited in Koosha and Yakhahi(2013). To indicate this fact Kumaravadivelu (2006) points out that it seems necessary that rather than relying on expertise, methodology, and materials controlled and dispensed by Western ESL countries, EFL countries should strive to establish their own research contingents and encourage method specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that take into account the political, economic, social, and cultural factors and most important of all, the EFL situations in their countries. They should also devise teaching methods, appropriate to their learners, their colleagues, and their societies.

e) CLT should be adapted to the realities of the EFL context

EFL teachers who adopt CLT can justify their teaching to learners and the specific learning situation they are faced with. CLT cannot be seen as a panacea for the problems that have been. There is not a fix framework of CLT. As learners and the learning contexts are dynamic, when CLT is applied to a certain context, the adaptation and innovation of it is necessary (Blake, 2000 as cited in the same source). Li (1998 as cited in the same source) emphasizes the flexibility that CLT offers-contrary to popular misconception, he suggests, CLT is not defined and practiced within cautious perimeters. He recommends that EFL countries should adapt rather than adopt westernized forms of CLT, meeting the immediate needs and recognizing the local constraints.

f) Other solutions and suggestions in brief

1. Teaching English language should be started from primary school.
2. We need to consider the countries which have been successful in learning English as foreign language.
3. Equalizing educational level in each class since it is one of the major issues for teachers. Students need to be assessed at the beginning of each year and then they should be accommodated in classrooms based on their level of English.
4. Unfortunately, we cannot improve our program because the Iranian government has a very negative opinion and view of the English language.

As we were informed, in recent years, English language was going to be taught and started from primary schools and a lot of expenses have been spent on it, but because of political reasons the program was not carried out. We have a lot of experiences, professors, teachers and very interested university students to take such action but they do not have enough facilities, money and are not allowed to take proper measures in this field. I do believe that Iranians are very talented and intellectual and they deserve much more than what they have now.
5. Developing textbooks should be done by experienced teachers who are familiar with this course as well as its problems in our schools. Unfortunately, textbooks are designed by people who have no idea about English
language teaching and do not have even hour of experience in teaching in secondary schools.

6. First of all, we have to decrease the number of students in each class.

7. There should be cooperation among all English language teachers as well as teachers. Cooperation with teachers in Great Britain. Working and advertising learning English language by the ministry and government. Making students to study more instead of wasting their time with TV, satellite, sports and going out. Not allowing teachers to teach more than 30 hours per week in order to make their work more efficient instead of teaching so many classes without efficiency.

8. Adding a session as a book reading by using simplified English books. Teaching computer course in English.

9. Our education can be progressed only if we consider it as a valuable issue.

CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The aim of the present paper was to evaluate the problems that could lead to the failure of communicative language teaching in EFL context (Iran) and to provide some possible solutions for such problems. The main problems mentioned were related to the lack of compatibility of this method with the existing cultural values in Iranian context and EFL learners’ need and motivation. Considering the perceived difficulties in utilizing CLT demands and what the EFL situation in Iran allows, it can be concluded that such problems need to be resolved if CLT is to be successfully implemented in EFL context (Iran). Awareness of such problems can provide the curriculum writers and textbooks designers as well as EFL teachers and learners with insightful ideas about how to manage and, if required, to change their teaching and learning activities for the successful implementation of this method. The findings suggest that politics had a vital role within the Iranian educational system and ELT in particular. All the textbooks as well as the curriculum were written and affected by political issues and in most cases political understandings had limited the choices that the authors had and this constraint affected their decisions to a great extent. Furthermore, due to structure based system that was running within the schools, teachers had a very limited freedom in their teaching and they mostly tried to prepare students for the final and the national university entrance exam.

It was also believed that English language teachers were ill equipped to implement a CLT curriculum within Iranian secondary schools and they had to be trained accordingly. Lack of enough time, availability of resources and appropriate materials were among other issues that Iranian teachers as well as authors were quite concerned with. Having said that, it could be argued that within the Iranian ELT program as well as textbooks there was no emphasis on culture, listening, writing, speaking, authenticity, student’s motivation, student centeredness etc. Also, while principles of CLT emphasize presenting all language skills, according to the participants the ELT program and the textbooks did not include anything besides reading.

This study, like almost all studies done in the field of teaching English as a foreign language, is not free of limitations. There exist of course some other problems and possible remedies that have not been mentioned in this article. Basically, due to the eluding nature of CLT which is defined differently by different people one cannot claim to come to an absolute conclusion about the problems associated with using CLT in EFL contexts. Furthermore, there are two other factors that have determining roles within the Iranian society; culture and religion. The findings of this article suggested that many of the policy makers as well as course planners were quite concerned with these issues and they were trying to preserve Islamic and Iranian culture and religious values. Future research in this regard could be about how teaching and learning English affect these two values within the Iranian society.

REFERENCES

The author’s own ideas, insights, and his experiences in the field as an English language teacher, who has been teaching in various villages and cities in Kurdistan as well as Hamedan states.