

EFL Writing Instruction at the HSC Level for Achieving Curriculum Objectives: Reversing to GTM from CLTA?

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ABSTRACT : *The HSC English curriculum does not specify which specific method or strategy should be used by the English teachers, which makes it difficult for them to fulfill the objectives of the English language teaching and learning. However, employing CLTA in the classroom at the HSC level is encouraged by the curriculum learning outcomes and the design of the English textbooks for classes eleven and twelve. Consequently, CLTA is expected to dominate EFL writing instructions at the HSC level. It should be investigated whether the CLTA-based or GTM-based instruction could be more useful in this situation. The article uses secondary data in a review-based analysis. There has been a review of current research on teaching EFL/ESL writing globally. Through a review of pertinent literatures, the researchers have discovered that GTM is more successful in achieving the learning outcomes outlined in the HSC level English curriculum addressing learners' writing achievement. While teaching and learning EFL writing at this level, the teachers and students are still at ease with some GTM strategies for a variety of reasons.*

Keywords- : HSC curriculum, curriculum outcomes, writing instruction, CLTA, GTM.

I. INTRODUCTION

The current paper discusses the case of a teacher's experience of teaching EFL writing following two popular and well-recognized methods of English language teaching: *The Grammar Translation Method (GTM)* and *Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA)*. The case is based on two central objectives. First, the teacher investigated how GTM as a method of EFL writing instruction is effective and influential at the HSC level in Bangladesh. Second, he explored the influence and effectiveness of CLTA in teaching EFL writing at the HSC level in Bangladesh. Teaching a foreign language takes place step by step in which a number of factors play a direct role. At the higher secondary (HSC) level of education in Bangladesh, English is a compulsory subject to be studied. The National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NCTB) of Bangladesh design English curriculum, syllabus and textbook to ensure quality English education at this level. They also conduct a sophisticated public examination system to evaluate students' achievement in English language at the end of two years period of education of this level of students. The English curriculum describes that the learners will acquire competence in four language skills and be able to use the competence for effective communication in real life situation locally and globally at the intermediate level. Besides, the English

curriculum instructs that learner must acquire necessary grammar competence in English language for better accuracy and they will be able to use the language skills for higher studies and technical education. The curriculum of the HSC English also describes the learning outcomes in detail and suggests how to achieve those outcomes. EFL writing is the most important skill which is taught and tested at the HSC level in Bangladesh. This skill is considered as the most important skill because almost 60% score in the final English examination at this level depends on writing. Thus, to achieve the objectives of the curriculum, EFL teachers must emphasize on developing students' English writing skill.

Experts believe, to materialize the objectives of the English language teaching and learning curriculum, teachers need to choose the correct method or approach of teaching, but the HSC English curriculum does not clearly instruct which particular method or approach should be followed by the English teachers. However, the value of 'method or approach' for successful learning and teaching of a language is always a matter of debate. To one group of educationists, theorists and researchers, for the purpose of successful teaching and learning, selection of an appropriate method is essential in every language whereas the others deny its importance in language teaching and learning. According to Jewad & Verma, (2014) for language teachers, use of methods as a guiding principle is important as the method anchors the design of teaching plans, learning activities, instructional materials and evaluation techniques. Some of the researchers consider the role of methods in language teaching so important that even they value method as proportionate to the performance of the students, Joukoulian, (2016) for example, argue that discovering the methodology that suits students best is the most important element in the process of teaching especially when it comes to teaching English as a foreign language. On the other hand, some believe that methodology is not the sole solution. There are many different ways to learn and teach languages; the crucial determiner is the 'context', which includes learning needs, wants, styles, strategies, course books, local conditions, the classroom culture, social culture, and national culture (Bax, 2003). However, the curriculum learning outcomes and the instruction at beginning of the English textbooks for classes eleven and twelve inspire using Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA) in the classroom at the HSC level, but the teachers and the students, for various reasons, are still not comfortable with some techniques of CLTA for EFL teaching and learning at this level. Before adopting the present curriculum and textbook (before 2001), Grammar Translation Method (GTM) was used to teach English at the HSC level in Bangladesh. However, with the progress of time, the aim of teaching and learning English as a Second Language (ESL) or English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has changed and so do the approaches and methods in language teaching.

Different methods and approaches have emerged and replaced, have influenced or contributed to the emergence of new methods. Until the middle of the twentieth century, the Grammar-translation Method (GTM) was the dominant method for language teaching in most educational contexts. This method was derived from the learning of Latin and Greek, which were the classical languages taught in Europe. "The dominant method for much of the last century was the Grammar –Translation Method" (Nunan, 2003, p.5), the main emphasis of which was the mastery of language structure. About Grammar –Translation Method, it has been argued that this kind of teaching produces "structurally competent" students who are often "Communicatively incompetent" (Johnson, 1981, quoted in McDonough & Shaw, 2003), but we know communication is believed to be the primary purpose of learning a language. Communication is viewed as social interaction and therefore, dynamic and influenced by the cultural context, rather than being a fixed linguistic system existing in a vacuum. Thus, considering language as a tool for communication, a new approach in language teaching namely the *Communicative Language Teaching Approach (CLTA)* has emerged during the 1970s which emphasises meaning over form and fluency over accuracy. As writing is also a form of communication, EFL writing instructions at the HSC level is supposed to be dominated by CLTA. However, as an English teacher at this level I always wanted to know how the testing system and textbook topics influence the EFL writing instruction at the HSC level and whether the GTM based instruction or the CLTA based instruction could be more effective in this case. In doing so, I considered student's background knowledge, local culture, classroom environment, availability of

resources and materials, English language practice opportunity and attitude toward learning English language. To quench my thirst, I critically evaluated the teacher's experience of the application of GTM and CLTA in teaching EFL writing at the HSC level in Bangladesh. The observation of the teacher's case regarding teaching EFL writing, GTM and CLTA has been discussed in the following section.

II. METHODOLOGY

The article is a review-based investigation using secondary data. There has been a review of recent studies related to EFL/ESL around the world. These reviewed studies were gathered using keywords such as "EFL teaching," "teaching EFL/ESL writing" and "Methods in teaching EFL/ESL writing" to search resources including ScienceDirect, ERIC, ResearchGate, Google Scholar, peer-reviewed publications, and university websites. The sources from which the data were acquired are all properly credited.

III. DISCUSSION

Reversing to GTM from CLTA?

Initially, I would like to describe the writing items included in the textbook at the HSC level and the items that are tested in the examination at this level. Completing sentence and completing stories are two items where the students are given an incomplete sentence or incomplete story and they need to complete them. Students are also tested whether they are able to write and summarize texts or poems. The students also need to identify different genre of literatures and interpret the themes. Some other writing items included in the text or exams are content writing, letter writing, paragraph writing, email writing, report writing, easy writing, poster making, flow chart completing and making fact file. I conducted writing classes and made the students practice those items using both the techniques suggested by GTM and CLTA. I should say that the inherent characteristics of CLTA actually cover teaching speaking in a better way which is prime mean of communication. CLTA actually focuses on the use of language in everyday situations or the functional aspects of language and less formal structure (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011:14 & 115). Meanings are prioritized and less importance is given on grammatical rules and structures (Brown, 2007). Mistakes are avoided in case of language use (Harmer, 2007). These characteristics are suitable for speaking instruction, but writing instructions need some special arrangements. The performance in writing could no way be compared with the performance of other language skills. Writing needs high degree of accuracy, complex grammar devices, careful choice of vocabulary and sentence structure in order to create style, tone, and information appropriate for the readers (Hedge, 2005). Someone can explain that writing is a graphic view of spoken language (Brown, 2001), but writing is more complex than that; hence writing pedagogy should be significantly different from other form of pedagogical issues related other language skills (Brown, 2001).

It can be said that writing is as different from speaking as swimming from walking (Brown 2001). As an English language instructor I faced difficulties while teaching writing at the HSC level following CLTA, because I tried to avoid grammatical rules, but still expected from the student to produce correct sentence while writing practice. In that case, students frequently made mistakes and peer could not help them for their poor English language background. In the writing class, I noticed students' poor language background and the tendency of copying others' writing caused trouble while participating communicative activities. In that case, all of them were making the same mistakes. So, altering the class from teacher-centred to learner-centred class and arranging pair work and group work activities could not help me being successful in EFL writing instruction. Another issue caused me trouble is 'time constraints'. In Bangladesh class duration is normally 40 to 45 minutes (Nessar, 2019). In this short period of time, I had to check the homework given in the previous class and prepare classroom for the current class to introduce a new writing topic. As a result, forming pair or group seemed taking much time and effort. While the advantages of the GTM are: the target language is quickly explained in GTM and thus, it saves time. Any other method of explaining vocabulary items in the second language is found time consuming. Further, learners acquire some short of

accuracy in understanding synonyms in the source language and the target language. Teacher's labor is saved (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Besides, classroom environment issues should also be considered. Classrooms were not well furnished, and the sitting furniture was not appropriate for arranging pair work or group work. Due to excessive hot in summer, electric fans remained on, and their sound caused much trouble. Doors and windows of the classrooms remained open and sound from outside creates a chaotic classroom environment. When the writing activities were arranged centering the students, getting feedback from the students became very difficult. Thus, arranging writing classes following CLTA seemed ineffective to me as well as to the students. Moreover, students were not habituated to participating such communicative activities for their formal language learning, because their previous schools did not arrange such communicative activities in the 9th or 10th grade. As a result, following GTM while conducting EFL writing classes seemed effective to me and the students were much more comfortable. Some recent studies showed that GTM is an effective method in helping EFL students understand fully grammar points and reading materials, acquire and retain new vocabulary, and recognize the importance of accuracy for successful writing (e.g. Nam, 2010; Castro, 2010; Kim, 2011).

While following GTM, the class was teacher centred where I controlled everything. It is a commonly used in many EFL settings where students like a teacher-centered method that includes the *intensive study and memorisation of grammar rules* and vocabulary (Sapargul & Sartor, 2010). I used the students' mother tongue 'Bangla' to explain the writing topic elaborately and wrote the necessary vocabularies on the whiteboard and told the meanings of those words in Bangla. Student got clear ideas about the writing topic that they were going to write. I made them memorize the words related to the topic that were written on the board. I also explained some necessary grammatical that they were going to use to perform the written tasks. It is a common feature that within Grammar-Translation classes, the grammatical rules are presented and illustrated, a list of vocabulary items is presented in the form of isolated bilingual word lists, and translation exercises are drilled into and out of the target language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 7).

In that case the writing performance of the students was much better than that of the time I used CLTA to make them practice those writing tasks. Even, I inspired my students to memorize and essay or a paragraph at home and told them to write in the classroom. Majority of the students produced a good writing piece that time from their memory. In doing so, the students obviously memorized some sentence structure and vocabularies automatically which helped them produce similar type of writing later. In that way, students performed better in their writing examination as well. While using GTM for writing instruction, I controlled the whole activities and there was no chaos or confusion in the writing class. On the other hand, the use of English a medium of instruction while teaching writing created confusion among the students, and their writing performance got deteriorated. Furthermore, although the EFL textbook prescribed by the National Curriculum and Textbook Board (NTCB) includes a description at the beginning saying that the book has been designed to promote language classroom activities aligned with CLTA, to my experience they are not. The HSC English textbook is not perfectly aligned with CLTA and does not facilitate the student to use English language in real life situation while writing activities.

The writing activities have not been designed considering all contextual factors such as, classroom environment, students' needs, students' interest, students' language background, testing system, teachers' ability. Teachers' interest, class duration and so on. For this reason, many Asian students and nonnative EFL instructors prefer GT because it fits their culture mores (Amengual-Pizarro, 2007; Chen, 2003; Savignon & Wang, 2003). Despite its useful function in the profession, some scholars have argued that CLT approach has a negative effect on teaching, and they have consequently called for a paradigm shift away from the approach. CLT has always neglected as one key aspect of language, the context in which it takes place (Al-Asmari, 2015; Bax, 2003). CLT provides teachers with only one message: "communicative approach is the way to do it, no matter where you are, no

matter what the context” (Bax, 2003, p. 282). Bax (2003) also argued the implication is that the context in which we teach is marginalized, relegated, and sidelined. It has been evaluated that a new alternative is required for CLT. So, being specific and teaching to the test while giving writing instruction seemed more appropriate to me and for that reason GTM seemed to be the best option for writing instruction. Besides, GTM allowed me to arrange translation activities in which learners showed much interest. I used both Bangla to English and English to Bangla translation activities to ensure writing practice in the classroom and the technique was much more effective as student were able use their natural cognitive ability of mother tongue to be merged with the target language. They were also able to understand the difference the differences and similarities between two languages which enabled them to write correct English. Since the textbooks are taught through the medium of the mother tongue, the teacher may ask comprehension questions on the text taught in the mother tongue in writing classes. Pupils will not have much difficulty in responding to questions on the mother tongue. So, the teacher can easily assess whether the students have learnt what he has taught them. Communication between the teacher and the learners does not cause linguistic problems. Even teachers who are not fluent in English can teach English through this method. That is perhaps the reason why this method has been practiced so widely and has survived so long (Harmer (2007).

Although GTM has lost popularity as a method in some foreign language writing classrooms, it is still considered a good method for individuals who want to be translators and are not concerned with the knowledge of how to speak the target language (Wang, 2013). However, CLTA did not include the technique of using translation practice in the classroom while teaching writing. Another reason, I think CLTA failed to persuade me as an appropriate approach in the writing class is the economic inability of the institution and of the students. CLTA allowed me to modify the syllabus and teaching content to fit the needs of the learners, but arranging the requirements were difficult. The authority was unable to supply necessary teaching aids and teaching materials to conduct communicative activities to facilitate EFL writing for the learners. The students were also unable to collect additional or supplementary materials required for the arrangement of communicative classroom because of poverty. On the other hand, arranging a GTM based writing classroom was cheap, easy going and convenient.

Based on the discussion, I conclude that GTM could be the better option in teaching EFL writing at the HSC level in Bangladesh. However, the language class is not only for teaching writing. So, it is suggested that, in order to gain better teaching results, it would be better to balance explicit and implicit grammar instruction within meaningful, authentic and communicative context, combine them together and use them flexibly in foreign language teaching. Many guidelines have been offered, models have been proposed, and lesson plans have been created for combining communicative techniques with techniques of grammar translation or infusing the former into the later in EFL writing classroom (Kirkpatrick, 1985; Jones, 1995; Weschler, 1997; Zeng, 2004; Li & Song, 2007; Hu 2010; Sapargul & Sartor, 2010).

IV. CONCLUSION

The English curriculum emphasizes on the development of the students studying at the HSC level in English listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. The curriculum describes that the learners will acquire competence in four language skills and be able to use the competence for effective communication in real life situation locally and globally at the intermediate level. The curriculum of the HSC English describes the learning outcomes in detail and suggests how to achieve those outcomes. Experts believe, to materialize the objectives of the curriculum, teachers need to choose the correct method or approach of teaching. The curriculum does not clearly instruct which particular method or approach should be followed by the English teachers. However, the curriculum learning outcomes and the pattern of the English textbooks for classes eleven and twelve inspire using CLTA in the classroom at the HSC level, but the teachers and the students, for various reasons, are still comfortable with some techniques of EFL teaching and learning at this level, especially in the case of writing instruction. The teachers still believe in the traditional teaching system following GTM for

teaching English writing. That is why, the researcher, in this discussion purposively wanted to explore whether GTM or CLTA is more effective for in achieving the learning outcomes of HSC English curriculum in relation to teaching writing. The researcher evaluated the textbook and found that GTM is more aligned with the writing tasks in the English Textbook. The researcher also found that the curriculum outcomes actually promote CLTA based EFL writing teaching and learning in the classroom. Besides, the public examination is more consistent with GTM than CLTA. In short, the researcher has found through the result of discussion that GTM is more effective to achieve the learning outcomes prescribed in the curriculum regarding learners' writing achievement.

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