

Integrate Local Culture into the Design of CLT Curriculum

Yue Zeng

Zhaoqing University, China

Abstract

This study addresses the issue of undervaluing local culture in curriculum design and examines the imperative of integrating local culture into the development of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) curricula. The analysis is conducted from various perspectives, including cultural views, World English, English as an international language, the principles of CLT practice, and the theory of postmodernism. The study provides suggestions and implications for educators and curriculum developers, aiming to enhance the understanding and application of local cultural integration within CLT practices.

Keywords

Integration of Local Culture; CLT; Curriculum Design.

1. Introduction

Communicative language teaching (CLT) have been introduced to China for several decades, which is an effective way to improve communication in English since it aims to improve learners' communicative competence. Other countries, such as Japan, also introduced this teaching approach into their teaching contexts because of its advantages for second language learners (Tanaka, 2009). Despite its advantages, the implementation of CLT faces challenges due to its incompatibility with local educational contexts. In China, for instance, students' reticence to communicate stems from a lack of interaction skills, attributed to an insufficient understanding of communicative rules and content. Holliday (cited in Abbas, Aslam, & Yasmeen, 2011) argues that neglecting learners' cultural backgrounds can lead to unintended consequences in language classrooms. Tanaka (2009) identifies the clash between CLT and Japan's curriculum design, exam-oriented system, and large class sizes as the primary challenges. These issues are all linked to the undervaluation of local culture in CLT curriculum promotion. In the following sections, the author will explore the rationale for incorporating local culture into CLT curriculum design from various perspectives and propose suggestions for integrating local culture with CLT curriculum design.

2. Perspectives

2.1. Culture

Culture is defined as a dominant power that can predictably impact learners' thinking. Different aspects of culture can predictably impact the transmission of educational theories and approaches across different countries. Achren and Keovilay (1997) made use of four dimensions of culture labeled as Individualism, Power Distance, Masculinity, and Avoidance to analyze the difficulty of conducting CLT in Lao culture. The result implies that teaching practice should be based on the cultural norms and teachers should adapt CLT to meet their cultural expectations based on teaching contexts.

In addition, culture of learning can have a significant impact on teaching and learning, which includes various aspects such as values and beliefs of learning, cultural background hidden in curriculum, teachers' and students' role, and the nature of education. Cortazzi and Jin (1996)

compared the difference in the culture of learning between China and western countries, characterizing them as mental activity focused on thinking versus verbal activity focused on communication, respectively. The result suggests a proposal of culture synergy, which means that blending Chinese and western learning cultures can enhance the comprehension of culture and further improve language acquisition. Similarly, Hu (2002) examined the Chinese learning culture and its impact on the conduction of CLT in Chinese classrooms. His study focused on analyzing factors such as educational assumptions, teacher and student roles, and learning strategies. He concluded that integrating Chinese pedagogy with CLT is beneficial for language learning.

Butler (2011) investigated the difficulties in the implementation of CLT in the Asia-Pacific region and identified the obstacles as three aspects, namely contradiction in values, classroom practices, and societal issues. He advocated for adapting CLT to local cultures in Asian countries to facilitate its smooth development and suggested a contextual interpretation of CLT.

2.2. World English

From the perspective of World English, cultural content should not be ignored in the design of the CLT curriculum. The concept of World English emerged in the 1960s from discussions about the international and intranational dimensions of English. The word 'Englishes' reflects World English in terms of various ways such as variation in function, sociocultural contexts, and language creativity. This indicates that English has been embedded with the cross-culture features. Kachru (1992) stratified English into the inner circle, outer circle, and expanding circle, which illustrates the variation and diversity in English. An example of 'bilingual creativity' showcases the interaction between English and other languages, characterized by two phenomena: nativisation and acculturation. This suggests that English has been endowed with identities that reflect local cultural and linguistic traits (Kachru, 1992). Consequently, communication in English should be adept at navigating the variety of Englishes that are imbued with local cultural nuances.

2.3. English as an international language (EIL)

Incorporating local culture is essential in teaching English as an International Language (EIL). McKay (2004) supports this notion by highlighting the extensive spread of English, which qualifies it as an international language. This perspective asserts that when learning EIL, it's crucial to equip learners with the ability to express their own opinions and culture.

McKay discussed how culture interacts with language learning, particularly in Asian contexts, in terms of teaching materials and methodologies. He emphasized that English teaching should not adhere strictly to one approach based on a specific culture but should be flexible to meet local cultural expectations. This flexibility allows for a teaching methodology that is both satisfying and appropriate to the local context.

Conclusively, McKay argues for the integration of local culture into language learning. He suggests that language teaching methodologies should be adopted and adapted by local teachers to align with the understanding of the local environment, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of EIL education.

2.4. Culture and CLT practice

The goal of CLT is to improve four types of communicative competence, namely grammatical competence, strategic competence, discourse competence, and sociocultural competence (Abbas, Aslam, & Yasmeen, 2011). It means that language teaching should not merely focus on grammar teaching, however, it should be given more concern on communicative function based on a broader social matrix. Abbas, Aslam, and Yasmeen (2011) argued that the function of communication has a relation to the specific culture, which presents particular features in different cultures. They conducted a study to explore how cultural elements obstruct the path

for the successful promotion of CLT, in which an interview was arranged by him to ask participants questions of how local culture relates to CLT and communicative competence. The findings indicated that local culture significantly influences sociocultural and strategic competence, and learners must understand local cultural norms to facilitate their language learning. The researchers further concluded that CLT should be acculturated to the local context, integrating local culture into teaching materials, skills, and content. Additionally, the criteria of CLT, especially Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), highlight the necessity of incorporating local culture. Willis and Willis (2013) described the criteria for tasks that rely on learners' resources and real-world activities enriched with cultural features. If CLT or TBLT can provide more insights into local cultural elements, it could significantly increase students' motivation to learn the language.

2.5. Theory of postmodernism

Fahim and Pishghadam (2011) illustrates that postmodernism believes that there is no fixed idea, in which the truth is built on the group and social construction. This perspective encompasses the concepts of constructivism, localism, relativism, and subjectivism. They also commented that TESOL is situated in a modern era with the idea that language teaching is to find the best way of practice that aims to produce a good learning outcome in a basis of making a standard procedure for learners. However, Pennycook (as cited in Fahim & Pishghadam, 2011) claimed that language teaching pedagogy should be connected with the social problems. This implies that CLT should be concerned about the local culture because social issues are often intertwined with cultural norms. Fahim and Pishghadam (2011) further argued for the trends that practice should be flexible, which is beneficial for the individual students with the adoption of various theories that are useful for language learning. Therefore, CLT should not be regarded as the doctrine of language teaching, however, it should be adapted to the local culture or aligned with local learning values. As a result, the adapted CLT would be more acceptable to local students and maximize their learning effectiveness.

3. Conclusion and implication

To sum up, the author discusses the problem of cultural appropriateness of CLT based on a large context. Different theories are used to illustrate the rationale of integration of local culture. This discussion leads to several implications for language teaching approaches.

Firstly, although CLT is regarded as an influential way of language teaching, it should not be taken for granted as the best way because language teachers should consider to what extent this approach is suitable for the learners. The designers of CLT curriculum should consider the culture of learning in their context. Therefore, adaption of CLT design, which could be better fit into the local cultural background to improve students' language acquisition, would be a wise approach.

Secondly, language teachers should raise their awareness of local culture. As World English suggests, this language has been endowed with intercultural features. Teachers should go beyond the understanding of standard English to regard English as a global language, which can be applied to absorb world culture and spread local culture to the world. Therefore, teachers can be trained to improve the ability to discover the local culture content that accords with the requirement of curriculum and appropriately embed them into the CLT curriculum development. For example, teachers can refer to certain local cultural phenomenon as the case to trigger more discussion related to the topic. In this way, students could not only acquire the content that the curriculum requires, but also be encouraged to use the familiar cultural content to express their opinions. More importantly, their intercultural communication skills could be enhanced.

Thirdly, teachers should realize the era of postmodernism where there is no fixed approach in language teaching, and consider TESOL as a practice with the assumption of critical pedagogy. Language learning should be constructed based on teachers' guidance and students' experience. Any localized culture and experience should be welcomed to establish the language learning environment as long as they could help students to engage in learning. As a result, the teaching method should be flexibly adjusted according to the teaching context.

References

- [1] Abbas, F., Aslam, S., & Yasmeen, R. (2011). Communicative language teaching: a modified version. *Language in India*, 11, 4.
- [2] Achren, L., & Keovilay, B. (1997). Communicative language teaching and cultural difference. In *Language in development: Access, empowerment and opportunity. Proceedings of the Third International Conference on Language in Development*, Langkowi, Malaysia.
- [3] Butler, Y. G. (2011). The implementation of communicative and task-based language teaching in the Asia-Pacific region. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 36-57.
- [4] Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). Cultures of learning: Language classrooms in China. *Society and the Language Classroom*, 169(206), 42.
- [5] Fahim, M., & Pishghadam, R. (2011). Postmodernism and English language teaching. *Iranian Journal of Applied Language Studies*, 1(2), 27-54.
- [6] Hu, G. (2002). Potential cultural resistance to pedagogical imports: The case of communicative language teaching in China. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 15(2), 93-105.
- [7] Kachru, B. B. (1992). World Englishes: Approaches, issues and resources. *Language Teaching*, 25(1), 1-14.
- [8] McKay, S. L. (2004). Teaching English as an international language: The role of culture in Asian contexts. *The Journal of Asia TEFL*, 1(1), 1-22.
- [9] Tanaka, T. (2009). Communicative language teaching and its cultural appropriateness in Japan. *Doshisha studies in English*, 84, 107-123.
- [10] Willis, J., & Willis, D. (2013). *Doing task-based teaching-Oxford handbooks for language teachers*. Oxford University Press.