

## BENEFITS OF COMMUNICATIVE METHOD OF TEACHING GRAMMAR IN A BHUTANESE HIGHER SECONDARY SCHOOL: A QUALITATIVE STUDY

### **Abstract**

The effective method to teach grammar to students has been a point of disputation between advocates for language acquisition and linguistics. The study investigated the benefits of the Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar (CMTG) in a Higher Secondary School under Thimphu Thromde. The study was based on the constructivist paradigm and adopted a qualitative case study research design. The study involved twelve students and three English teachers selected purposefully from a Higher Secondary School in Thimphu. The data was collected through one-on-one interviews, Focus group discussions (FGDs), and lesson observations. The data collected was analysed employing the thematic analysis procedure of Creswell & Creswell (2018).

The findings revealed the benefits of CMTG. The results showed that the benefits of CMTG included enhancing speaking abilities, fostering creativity, comprehensible input, and the ability for effective communication.

This study recommends that English teachers pursue professional development in the Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar (CMTG) and maintain an average class size of 20 to 25 students. This study also suggests providing classrooms with a sufficient variety of technologically advanced instruments. The CMTG should be used to teach grammar to students, and relevant stakeholders in education should provide policy recommendations on how to train in-service and pre-service teachers on its use. The benefits of CMTG could be thoroughly investigated in future studies utilizing a quasi-experimental design.

**Key words:** *Communicative, grammar, method, benefits teachers, students.*

### **1 INTRODUCTION**

Various methods for teaching English as a second language have emerged during the past 50 years and helped to advance this discipline (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The majority of language teachers and students today prefer Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) over other English teaching methods because of the comprehensive information and abilities it provides students (Nguyen, 2021). Grammar is recognised as one of the linguistic means to achieve the communicative goals (Nassaji, 2000).

Initially English grammar was taught through the traditional methods such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM), The Direct Method, The Audio-lingual Method, and Presentation Practice and Production (PPP) Method. Traditional methods of teaching grammar focus on the learning of grammar rules and structures. Learners are taught grammatical rules to master sentence patterns (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Therefore, the traditional methods of teaching grammar, despite its facilitative effects stand less chance of impacting on language acquisition. As such, the ever-growing need to fill in the insufficiencies of these earlier methods gave rise to the teaching of language through the Communicative Method (Suemith, 2011).

The introduction of CLT changed the way teachers teach grammar in English language learning (Loewen et al., 2009). The CLT gained popularity in the 1970s and prevails in language-teaching methodological theory to this day. Consequently, CLT is interpreted and applied in a variety of ways (Criado & Sanchez, 2009).

In the context of Bhutan, English plays a vital role in the Bhutanese education system. The role of language in education, in general, and English, in particular, is a key factor that impacts the overall effectiveness of Bhutan's system of government-run education (Royal Education Council, 2012). (Tajasanant & Robinson, 2014). Therefore, it was made mandatory to teach all the subjects in English except Dzongkha. In addition, teaching-learning of English in Bhutan was guided by a 2002 policy document issued by Ministry of Education (MoE) entitled, '*The Silken Knot: Standards for English for Schools in Bhutan*' (Centre for Educational Research and Development, 2002). The method of teaching grammar in the Higher Secondary Schools in Bhutan continued to be guided by "*The Silken Knot*" till 2005.

One of the major transformations in the field of Bhutanese education system was the revision of English curriculum in 2006. The revision of the English curriculum brought many changes in terms of teaching English to the learners of English language in the Higher Secondary Schools such as grammar. The CMTG was introduced in the Higher Secondary Schools when the National Curriculum Framework was launched in 2006. It focused on teaching grammar through the context, which is referred to as the CMTG in this study.

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

According to the Curriculum Framework for English, the teaching and learning of grammar in the Higher Secondary Schools should be focused on its functionality and usage (English Curriculum Framework, 2006). The Curriculum framework for English further mandates the teaching of grammar to be integrated with the teaching of literary texts. Teaching grammar through literary texts is one of the strategies of CMTG. However, as an English teacher in a Higher Secondary School for the past seven years observed that some English teachers do not strictly adhere to the CMTG to teach grammar to the learners. Consequently "Students were found to be poor at grammar usage both in speaking and writing" (Choeda, et al., 2020, p.24). Grammar is an essential component of English language learning. The method employed by teachers to teach grammar to the students is critically important for meaningful learning. Numerous studies have investigated beliefs and attitudes of teachers in teaching grammar (Dhendup, 2020; Dorji, 2018), Strategies and approaches to teach grammar (Tshomo et al., 2019), and Bhutanese Teachers' conceptualization of Communicative

Language Teaching (Dorji & Puntai, 2015; Dorji, 2017). In addition, several studies report that grammar instruction in English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms is still based on the traditional methods (LaPrairie, 2014; Nunan, 2003; Tshomo & Sherab, 2017). However, these studies have focused on the conceptualization, attitudes and practices of teaching grammar in general and very little is known about the effective method of teaching grammar, the Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar. There is lack of research on CMTG in the Bhutanese context. As a result, the existing literature on CMTG is inadequate for teaching grammar to the students for life-long learning in the Higher Secondary Schools in Bhutan. Teachers, therefore, find themselves unaware and ill-equipped with the appropriate skills and knowledge to teach grammar communicatively to the students. Furthermore, researchers recommend teachers to explore more creative, innovative and enjoyable approaches to teach grammar (Wangdi & Chalermnirundorn, 2019).

Thus, this study was intended to address the literature gap by providing adequate literature to motivate teachers to adopt the most effective method of teaching grammar. As a result, the students will be able to enhance their written and spoken proficiency in English.

This study aimed to explore the benefits and challenges of Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar (CMTG) in a Higher Secondary School (HSS) under Thimphu Thromde.

### **Research question**

What are the benefits of Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar in a Higher Secondary School under Thimphu Thromde?

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

Since grammar is one of the most essential aspects of language, the approach to teaching grammar also corresponds to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT first appeared in the late 1960s (Nagalakshimi & Rajaram, 2016). It was Hymes who proposed the concept of communicative competency. He further defined "communicative competence" as what is necessary for a speaker to know to enable him/her to communicate with others (Hymes, 1972). In addition, Sreehari (2012) asserts that CLT was then further developed in the early 1980s by Canale and Swain.

According to Liu and Shi (2007) the CLT aims to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching through activities related to actual communication and perform meaningful tasks. In addition, Richards (2005) opines that CLT is a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kind of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. Also, Richards and Rogers (2001) state that language learning is best served when students interact, complete a task, learn content or resolve real life issues as the goal of language is to develop communicative competence. The method of teaching grammar can be thoroughly examined only if it is positioned in a broader conceptual framework, i.e., language (Khuong, 2015).

Therefore, the concept of CMTG, in this study is defined based on the four interconnected characteristics given by Brown (2007).

- (1). Classroom goals focus on all of the components of communicative competence and is not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
- (2). Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic,

authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

(3). Fluency is considered more important than accuracy in order to keep learner meaningfully engaged in language use.

(4). In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts (p. 241).

Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar focuses on the enhancement of the fluency of the learners rather than on the accuracy of the learners while communicating in English in a variety of situations.

The concept "benefit" in this study refers to the advantages that learners gain as a result of the CMTG employed by the teachers in grammar. CMTG makes use of a communicative rather than the structural approach to the learning of English grammar. Firstly, according to Littlewood (2007) since the 1990s, national language education policies in ESL countries have shifted toward CLT to increase the number of learners who can effectively communicate in English. Therefore, it demonstrates that this method of teaching grammar enhances the learners' fluency. Next, the meaning-focused communicative grammar instruction in classroom allows learners to communicate effectively in different context (Abdullah & Shah, 2015; Chung, 2005; Gutowska, 2017; Mammadova, 2016; Subramaniam & Khan, 2013; Thornbury, 2019). Here too, the literature reveals that the ability to communicate effectively is the advantage learners' gain when grammar is taught through the Communicative Method (CM).

In addition, context-oriented and significant grammar learning has an extraordinary effect on language instructors and with this new pattern, students ought to get an opportunity to utilize language they learned in a genuine setting with native English speakers (Borg, 2003). This is true because teaching grammar through the communicative method helps learners to use language correctly in real-life situations, express and justify their ideas, views, and emotions, use language and their imagination to represent and explore the human experience.

A similar outcome is also evident in the manner in which grammar is taught in a Higher Secondary School in Bhutan. The study on "*Beliefs and practices of Bhutanese teachers in teaching English as a second language in Bhutan regarding grammar instruction*" by Dhendup (2020) establishes that the positive development in English language is observed with the implementation of new English curriculum. The implementation of new English curriculum by the teachers is an indication that teachers teach grammar to their learners through the communicative method. Eventually, learners can develop their written and spoken proficiency in English language and enable them to convey their thoughts, feelings, and experiences in an effective and appropriate manner in a variety of contexts.

Furthermore, the communicative approach of grammar instruction emphasizes "task-oriented, student-centred" language teaching practice and gives students a thorough understanding of how to communicate in English (Richards, 2005). Additionally, the CMTG incorporates the comprehensible input-based approach by Krashen (1981). According to Krashen (1981), instead of learning about language, studying the rules, and memorization of terminology, we receive understandable input in a low anxiety scenario. Teaching grammar through the communicative method does not require the

students to memorize grammatical items and grammatical rules. Therefore, learners will have no or low anxiety, which in turn will lead to meaningful learning of grammar.

By contrast, teaching grammar through the traditional methods focuses on accuracy. It mandates the learners to memorize the forms and rules of grammar items thereby causing anxiety in the learners. Consequently, learners will be unable to make text-to-life connections.

However, in the CMTG, efficient communication and comprehensible pronunciation are important aspects of the communication. Furthermore, Wangmo (2021) discusses that the main aim of teaching grammar communicatively is to provide hands-on learning experiences to enhance “students’ grammatical skills and communicative competence, consequently making the learning and teaching of grammar fun, interesting, and meaningful” (Wangmo, 2021, slide.2). It indicates that the infusion of authentic texts into learning situations, allows learners to focus on the learning process and they attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside of the classroom. As such, the CMTG emphasizes the target language communication. In addition, Krashen (1981) claimed that more contextual and interactive books and procedures allow teachers to teach grammar in a meaningful manner. Likewise, teaching grammar through stories stimulates the creativity and imagination of the students (Sentürk et al., 2020).

Therefore, it is evident from the above reviews of literature that CMTG engages learners in communicative activities. The main objective of learning a foreign language is not only the knowledge of the language but is also the ability for language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) and it is the ability to use it in communicative situations. In the teaching and learning situation, it is significant to facilitate the progression from the acquisition and use of vocabulary and grammar to communicate in an efficient manner. Hence, enhancing the communicative competence of the learners (Loewen, 2014; Widodo, 2006).

Consequently, there are numerous benefits of CMTG such as it increases the learners’ proficiency in the target language, stimulates learners to think critically and it allows learners to be more confident when interacting with others. Thus, learners will enjoy communicating with others in English.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

This study is based on the constructivism paradigm with the goal to find the benefits of CMTG in a Higher Secondary School under Thimphu Thromde. The qualitative research approach was chosen for this study because Creswell and Creswell (2018) point out that qualitative research is an approach to explore and understand the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem. Hence, to understand how the participants make meaning of CMTG and to collect valuable and relevant data for the study, the researcher adopted the qualitative research approach. Furthermore, to get an in-depth understanding of the CMTG and to establish a credible platform to investigate the benefits of CMTG, this study was based on exploratory qualitative case study design.

#### **Sampling strategies**

A purposive sampling strategy was used over random sampling to collect the data needed for the study. Since the aim of the study was to identify the benefits of CMTG in a HSS, the researcher purposefully selected six students from class XI, six students from class XII and three English

teachers of classes XI and XII to collect the most relevant data for the study. The student participants comprised equal number of male and female students from classes XI and XII. The teacher participants consisted of two male teachers and a female teacher.

### **Data collection method**

To fetch the required data for the study, the researcher primarily used semi- structured interviews and lesson observation as the data collection tools.

#### ***Interviews***

This study adopted the semi-structured interview because it is one of the primary tools of the constructivist worldview. The questions that are asked of the participants in a semi-structured interview are not predetermined; rather, they are decided by the conversation between the researcher and the participants. The interviews generated the benefits and experiences of teachers and students with regards to CMTG. The researcher followed the interview protocol of Creswell and Creswell (2018) and posed general, open-ended questions to one or more participants and recorded their responses. The data was subsequently transcribed for analysis.

#### **One-on-one-interview**

One-on-one interview allows the researcher to obtain a deeper insight to specific enquiries (Marshall, 2016). As such, the researcher conducted one-on-one interview with three English teachers of classes XI and XII (two from class XI and one from XII) to identify the benefits of CMTG. The two English teachers teach English in class XI and one English teacher teaches English in class XII. As such they represent all the English teachers of the HSS of the research site. The semi-structured interviews questions for the teacher interviewees comprised eleven guiding questions.

#### **Focus group discussion**

The researcher conducted focus group discussions (FGDs) with two groups of six members each from classes XI and XII to collect data regarding the CMTG. The FGDs comprised equal number of male and female students. The semi-structured interview questions for the FGDs contained eight guiding questions.

#### ***Lesson observation***

In order to obtain the data about the grammar instructional practice of English teachers, the researcher observed classroom teaching. A total of three lesson observations was done: two observations in class XI and one observation in class XII. The lesson observations were done after the semi-structured interviews and the FGDs. The teacher respondents for semi-structured interviews and lesson observations were same. The researcher conducted observation as non-participant. The researcher tried to avoid/minimize bias during the process by following the observational protocol of (Creswell, 2012).

#### **Data analysis procedure**

The data collected through interviews and class observations were analysed thematically following the thematic analysis procedure of (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

To identify themes for discussion, data from semi-structured interviews and lesson observations were recorded, compiled, transcribed, coded, and categorized into themes using colour

coding. The researcher then examined the codes, discovered patterns among them, and came up with the themes.

For anonymity and confidentiality, the participants were coded as:

Teacher 1: T1

Teacher 2: T2

Teacher 3: T3

Focus group discussion 1: FGD1S1 to FGD1S6

Focus group discussion 2: FGD2S1 to FGD2S6

The data collected from the interviews were recorded and transcribed using the otter. ai app. To confirm the transcription accurately captured what the interviewees stated in response to the interview questions, the researcher repeatedly played the audio, listened to it and cross-checked with the transcription. To familiarize with the data, the researcher read and reread the transcription multiple times, colouring specific data points to identify prospective points that were relevant to the research questions. Through coding, the researcher started the data's systematic and latent analysis. A feature of the data that might be pertinent to the study question was identified and given a label using coding for the entire transcription. The data relevant to each code was collated and categorized under various categories. The various categories were then combined together if they appeared to have a common theme, in order to represent and depict a meaningful pattern in the data. The combination of various categories was given names and formed the sub themes of the study. The researcher reviewed the sub themes in relation to the complete dataset and the research questions. The sub themes were further combined and categorized to depict the major findings.

#### **Ethical consideration**

The researcher sought prior permission from the research team of Samtse College of Education, Ministry of Education, Chief Thromde Education Officer of Thimphu, school administration of the participating school, research participants and fulfilled the ethical codes of conduct to carry out the process of study. Prior to each participant's participation in this study, an informed consent letter was sent outlining the study's ethical considerations. The consent letter was designed to ensure that the participants had access to enough information to understand the study's objectives and decide whether or not to participate voluntarily. The participants were informed about and offered consideration for the issues relating to confidentiality and anonymity. All participants were coded to ensure confidentiality and safeguard the participants. The researcher's laptop contains password-protected databases that contain all of the data sources, including lesson observation forms, fieldnotes, audiotapes, transcriptions, and other papers. These documents can be accessed by the researcher and the supervisor only. The Ethics committee at Royal University of Bhutan (RUB) has designated a deadline after which these data will be destroyed.

#### **4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

In the context of this study, the term "*benefits*" refers to the advantages that learners gain as a result of the CMTG employed by the teachers in grammar lessons. One of the key findings of the study was the benefits of CMTG. The findings exhibited enhancement of speaking skills, fostering creativity, comprehensible input, and the ability to communicate well as the benefits of CMTG. The

key elements that contributed to the positive outcome of the CMTG were evident in the analysis of the findings from the one-on-one interviews with the teachers, FGDs with the students, and lesson observations.

The findings of the study revealed the enhancement of speaking skills as one of the benefits of the CMTG. During the one-on-one interviews with the teachers, all the teacher interviewees reported that CMTG helps students to become fluent in English and enables the students to speak effectively in English. Similarly, the enhancement of speaking skills was pointed out as one of the benefits of CMTG by the student participants during the FGDs. For example, FGD1S4 said, “It makes us fluent in English. We can express our ideas well and we can speak well when we sit for job interviews.” In addition, FGD2S6 expressed, “Through the communicative method of learning grammar we learn how to use grammar correctly while speaking with others.” The lesson observations also demonstrated that the CMTG enhanced the speaking skills of the students. During the lesson observations, when the students were directed to construct and tell sentences of their own using grammar items such as figurative language, transitive and intransitive verbs and different kinds of sentences, they were able to use the grammar items in sentences of their own. This finding indicates that CMTG provides opportunities for students to practice and apply the knowledge of the grammar learned. This in turn enables them to speak fluently in English. This finding is consistent with the studies that pointed out that meaning-focused communicative grammar instruction in the classroom allows learners to communicate effectively in a different context (Abdullah & Shah, 2015; Chung, 2005; Gutowska, 2017). Further, the finding also confirms that learning grammar that focuses on the functional purposes enables learners to speak fluently in English (Loewen, 2015; Mammadova, 2016; Subramaniam & Khan, 2013; Thornbury, 2019; Widodo, 2006). However, the lesson observations revealed that the enhancement of speaking skills was demonstrated by a few talkative and confident students in the class. Therefore, it is crucial for the teachers to find remedial measures to encourage all the students to participate in the class to enhance their speaking skills.

The finding of the study showed that fostering the creativity of the students is another benefit of CMTG. The results of the interviews revealed that when grammar is taught to students using the communicative method, students become creative. Teachers claimed that when they (teachers) teach grammar through the communicative method to the students, the students become creative and analytical. They also admitted that students can apply critical thinking and apply what they have learned when writing their essays or when conversing with others. . For instance, T1 pronounced:

When we use this method, students can think when and where to use grammar items like idioms and figures of speech they have come across while reading stories or poems. They can think critically and use what they have learnt in their own write-ups or while making conversations with others.

Likewise, several of the students noted that when they study grammar using the communicative method, they develop critical thinking and context-analysis skills. For example, FGD1S4 stated:

The benefits of learning grammar through the communicative method would be because of this communicative method, many students will be encouraged to learn and develop interest in playing with words and creating our own poems and stories.

These findings indicate that the CMTG makes the students creative and analytical. These findings are supported by prior research which showed that teaching grammar through the context stimulates the creativity and imagination of the students (Sentürk et al., 2020). However, during the lesson observations, the creativity of the students was found to be limited to the context in which they were taught to use the grammar items. As such, it is pivotal for language teachers to create a more authentic context for students to use the knowledge of grammar learned in class.

Furthermore, the finding of the study demonstrated comprehensible input as one of the benefits of CMTG. The finding of this study aligns with the theory that CLT focuses on "task-oriented, student-centered" language teaching practice and it provides students with comprehensive use of English for communication (Richards, 2006). Comparably, CMTG incorporates the comprehensible input-based approach (Krashen, 1981). Krashen (1981) asserts that in a low-anxiety situation, we get comprehensible input rather than learning about language, studying the rules, and memorizing terminology. Therefore, this study validates that students can understand and learn more about the functional purposes of grammar through the CMTG.

In addition, the findings also exhibited the students' ability to use English in real-life situations as one of the benefits of CMTG. Most of the teachers articulated that when the teachers teach grammar through the communicative method, students can use English spontaneously in a variety of situations. This notion is represented in the quote by T3:

The communicative method places a strong emphasis on the capacity to master English language. Students can combine classroom instruction with practical application. They will be able to express well in different context such as sitting for job interviews or attending international conference etc.

Concurrently, the students opined that the CMTG provides them the platform for authentic context. For example, FGD2S3 said, "When we learn grammar through the communicative method, it is very beneficial for the students as each and every student can improve their effective methods of communications. We can communicate well in different situations."

This finding is in line with the study by (Abdullah & Shah, 2015; Chung, 2005; Gutowska, 2017; Mammadova, 2016) which revealed that the CMTG allows learners to communicate effectively in a different context. Similarly, Wangmo (2021) opined that the main aim of CMTG is to provide hands-on learning experiences to enhance "students' grammatical skills and communicative competence. Thus, the finding of this study establishes that the use of CMTG enables learners to communicate well in real-life situations. Therefore, it is imperative for teachers to teach grammar through the communicative method.

Hence, the findings indicated that using CMTG helps students to improve their speaking abilities, promote their creativity, assist them in learning more, and enables them to communicate effectively in real-life circumstances.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

This study revealed that there are several benefits of Communicative Method of Teaching Grammar (CMTG) in a Higher Secondary School.

The findings indicated that one benefit of the CMTG is the enhancement of the speaking abilities of the students. This shows that CMTG allows students to put their newly acquired grammatical knowledge to use. They can then speak fluently in English. However, the lesson observations revealed that only a few vocal and confident students in the class demonstrated an improvement in speaking abilities. Therefore, teachers must come up with corrective strategies to motivate all students to participate in class to improve their speaking abilities. Another significant finding of CMTG is the advancement of student creativity. This finding implies that the CMTG fosters students' creativity and analytical thinking. Nevertheless, it was revealed that the students' enhancement of creativity was restricted to the context in which they were taught to utilise the grammatical items during the lesson observations. As a result, English language teachers must develop more realistic contexts in which students can use the grammar they have learned in class. Furthermore, the findings demonstrated that one benefit of CMTG is comprehensible input. It suggests that through the CMTG, students can better comprehend and gain knowledge of the functional uses of grammar. In addition, the findings displayed Students' capacity to use English in real-life situations in a range of contexts as one of the benefits of CMTG. Thus, teachers must teach grammar using the communicative method.

### **5.1 Limitations**

Although this qualitative case study enabled me to acquire insights into the benefits of CMTG in a Higher Secondary School, the study is susceptible to some limitations, which are described below.

The findings are limited to one school under Thimphu Thromde. It is restricted to the academic year 2022 and lesson observation was employed for the data collection.

In addition, the results of this study cannot be generalised to larger populations with the same degree of assurance as quantitative analyses. This is so because the study employed a qualitative case study with only three types of data collection tools such as one-on-one interviews, focus group discussions and, lesson observations.

### **5.2 Recommendation for future research**

This study highlighted the benefits of CMTG. The findings demonstrated the enhancement of students' speaking skills and fostering creativity in students as the benefits of CMTG. However, the study is limited to one school and the topics taught during the lesson observations. Hence, research using a quasi-experiment design could be conducted to examine the benefits of CMTG in greater detail. In addition, research on CMTG across all levels in the schools is recommended to encourage teachers to adopt this method to teach grammar to the students.

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UNDER PEER REVIEW

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