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## REVIEW ARTICLE

### AN EXPLORATION OF TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN TEACHING VOCABULARY VIA COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH: HOBICHA BADA SECONDARY AND PREPARATORY SCHOOL IN FOCUS

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#### ABSTRACT

The main purpose of the study is An Exploration of Teachers Perceptions in Teaching Vocabulary via Communicative Language Teaching Approach: Focus on Hobicha Bada Secondary and Preparatory School. The researcher employed descriptive research design in order to gather the needed data. All of eight teachers were selected for this study through convenience sampling technique. To collect valuable and relevant data, interview and focus group discussions used to collect data. The semi-structured and focus group discussions data transcribed and transformed into textual data form. The study divulged that majority of English language teachers' had a negative perception towards teaching vocabulary using CLT. Finlay, bearing in mind that divulged in the findings, the respondents listed different factors that affect teaching vocabulary through the CLT. Hence, the concerned bodies should capacitate the teachers' create awareness through different workshops in order to secure a positive attitude towards the importance of vocabulary in the communicative approach. In connection to this, all participants of the study should be given attention and should take care of the importance of the vocabulary for communication purpose.

#### INTRODUCTION

According to Borg (2003) teacher's perceptions regarding vocabulary lessons through communicative language teaching is one of the most influential factors on what is done in classrooms and in the end on what students learn. There is now agreement in general in language education that teaching is a cognitive activity in which teachers' 'perceptions greatly impact their instructional decisions in the classroom (Harmer, 2001; Richards and Lockhart, 1997). Within second language education, teaching vocabulary is also viewed as complex cognitive and psycho-motor activities (Borg, 2003). The same author advocates that teachers are active, and thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized, and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts, and beliefs (Borg, 2003:81). Indisputably, research has indicated that teachers have a vast collection of complex beliefs about pedagogical issues including perception about teachers' and students' thought processes and classroom practices (Berliner, 1987; Borg, 2003; Burns, 1992; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). These beliefs are alleged to form a structured set of principles and are derived from a teacher's prior experiences, school practices, and a teacher's individual perceptions (Borg, 2003).

Furthermore, Hall (2005) suggested that what teachers do in the classroom is governed by what they perceive to work best and these perceptions often serve to act as filters through which instructional judgments and decisions are made. Borg (2003), Grabe; (2008), Singhall (2001), Farrell (2001), Breen, Hird, Milton, Oliver, & Thwaite, (2001) point out that there is need to understand; and give account for the underlying belief systems of language teachers while teaching vocabulary through CLT and the impact of these have on their classroom practices in order to improve instructive practices. Every nation today, including Ethiopia, pursues scientific progression. This means there is need for instructive learners to appropriate vocabulary practices in order to facilitate their development of word power expertise expected of them as they build their professional career communicatively. The nature of communicative language teaching and its concerns of creating an interaction while teaching vocabulary, in the field of language learning and teaching which has been assigned by the Ethiopian ministry of education. However, students are seen not well in vocabulary and most students fail to express their selves effectively. This is the researcher has seen in his long years' experiences of teaching vocabulary using communicative language teaching approach. Thus, the researcher was inspired to exploring teachers' perceptions of teaching vocabulary skill using communicative language

teaching approach at Hobicha Bada Secondary and Preparatory School.

**Statement of the Problem:** Some researchers point out that teachers have some problems in implementing CLT in ESL vocabulary contexts such as teachers problems with the size of the classes as these classes are not large enough to implement vocabulary by means of CLT, and most of the teachers are eager to take form based and knowledge based examinations which conflicts with the principals of CLT (Anderson, 1993; Li, 1998; Little wood, 2007; Liao, 2003). Cohen and Teller (1994) pointed out that perception of the teachers and students can play a very important role in their implementation of an approach, so teachers' and students' perception regarding the importance of vocabulary for effective communication. Alemu (2003) investigated the importance of implementation of CLT by the teachers on the students interest in language learning in the context of Ethiopia, at the end of the research he came up with the conclusion that teachers' classroom practices in CLT can affect student's performance to a high extent; results of this study reflected this point that Ethiopian students are eager to do form based activities rather than communicative ones.

To a large extent in Ethiopia, vocabulary teaching in English is essential for learners' academic success because English is the medium of instruction in all formal settings put aside the other languages. However, in many situations where English is learnt as a second language (L2), learners usually experience the lack of vocabulary teaching strategies which are essential for them to read competently and overcome the challenges in the classroom when dealing vocabulary within communicatively designed exercises, (Pressley, 2006; and Block and Pressley, 2002).

Communicative language teaching approach was introduced as a main language teaching approach in our country Ethiopia before two decades. Conversely, the reading skill of our high school students is not as expected at their level. For example; sometimes students fail to use basic words for communication and even they cannot express themselves clearly because of lack of reading proficiency. Local research done by Surafel (2002) shows that large class size, in adequate background knowledge of the students, scarcity of textbooks, absence or scarcity of supplementary materials (for listening reading) and exam practice are some common problems English language teachers face while they are trying to implement the CLT approach. Amare (1998) in his article, 'Teachers' Perceptions of Educational Problems in Ethiopia,' has identified the following problems: overcrowded classes, shortage of instructional materials, heavy teaching loads, etc. He further mentions that teachers' attitudes are another source of problems in the teaching learning process in Ethiopia. So far, it seems that no research has been conducted about challenges of teaching reading skill using CLT in the Ethiopian context of language teaching and learning, and as a result of this, it is difficult to know what secondary school English language teachers perceive about communicative language teaching in EFL reading classroom. Besides, as CLT was spread around the world to contexts different from that it was developed (believed to be developed in Europe and America), it is essential to document the prevalent constraints in our context of language teaching and learning. However, current research was focus teachers' perceptions in teaching vocabulary using CLT at Hobicha Bada Secondary and Preparatory School.

Thus, this research aimed to answer the following question: what is teachers' perception of the importance of vocabulary for communication.

### **Objectives of the Study**

**General Objective of the Study:** The general objective of the study was to explore teachers' Perceptions of teaching vocabulary through communicative language teaching approach.

**Specific Objectives of the Study:** Specifically, this study intended to achieve the following objective:

1.To identify the perception of teachers on the importance of vocabulary for communication.

**Delimitation of the study:** The study focused on the teachers' perceptions of teaching vocabulary through the communicative language teaching approach. In addition, the study was limited to find out the possible constraints that teachers face in teaching vocabulary through the communicative language teaching approach in the Ethiopian context. To keep the study manageable, the study is delimited only to grade ten English language teachers of Hobicha Badda Secondary School. Accordingly, participants of the study were teachers and their students enrolled in 2010 E.C are the setting of the study.

### **Research Design and Methodology**

**Research Design:** For this study, the researcher employed descriptive research design in order to gather the needed information and in order to achieve the stated objectives and answer the research questions. This research project is intended to explore teachers' perceptions of teaching vocabulary using CLT in Hobicha Badda Secondary School. The activities to be performed in this study are descriptive in their nature. For this reason, descriptive research design was used to conduct this study.

**Research Setting:** This study was conducted at Hobicha Badda Secondary. It is located in South Ethiopia, Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples Regional State, Wolaita Zone, Humbo Woreda. It is located about 430 km away from Addis Ababa (capital city of Ethiopia) in the southern direction. The major reason why the researcher selected this school to conduct his study was this school is newly opened. So, the extent to which CLT was used to teach vocabulary was not yet studied known. Further, the challenges that teachers were encountering are not studied. Thus, the researcher took interest to investigate the teacher's perceptions of teaching vocabulary using CLT.

**Participants of the Study:** As stated above, Hobicha Badda Secondary School was selected as a research setting. Thus, the participants of the study were English language teachers. There were eight English language teachers in the selected school. All eight English language teachers were selected for this study; the teachers were practically engaged in the teaching of vocabulary. Thus, it was believed that they could provide the data needed for this study. These eight participant teachers had experience in the teaching of English as a foreign language. Their experience ranged from one up to thirty years of age. All of them were first degree holders in English language.

**Sampling Techniques:** The teachers were selected in the convenience sampling technique. According to Dorney (2007) convenience sampling is convenient for the researcher to get information. The teachers are implicit to have ample information on practice, perception and strategies of vocabulary teaching via the CLT and student's level of performance of vocabulary in communication and in their actual classroom practice. Thus, all of them were selected for this study through convenience sampling technique. Convenience sampling is particularly purposeful, which means that besides the relative ease of accessibility, participants also have to possess certain key characteristics that are related to the purpose of the study (Dorney, 2007:84). Therefore, eight of them who were supposed to provide adequate and necessary data for this study were selected using convenience sampling technique to achieve objectives of the study.

**Data Gathering Instrument:** This research sought to understand the practice, strategies and challenges of teaching vocabulary through the communicative language teaching approach. To collect valuable and relevant data, three important instruments of data collection were employed. These were focus group discussion, semi-structured interview and non-participant observation. The interview and focus group discussion were developed primarily to meet the objectives of the study.

**Semi-Structured Interview:** Interview is relevant to get information concerning attitude, perception, or emotion and practice to certain questions which is not possible through focus group discussion and classroom observation (Selinger & Shohamy, 1988). Among types of interview, the researcher employed semi-structured interview. Semi-structured interview according to Merriam (1988), gives ample opportunity to probe for clarification and ask questions appropriate to the respondents' knowledge status. Merriam added that the advantage of semi-structured interview is that it enables researchers to capture the practical and psychological challenges of the teachers.

**Focus Group Discussion (FGD):** According to Wamahi and Karagu (1995) focus group discussion is very useful to understand issues with consensus and variation among members of the discussion group, to obtain group attitudes and perceptions by prompting the participants for active discussion. Based on this advantage FGD was used to gather data to assess teachers' perceptions about the importance and challenges of vocabulary teaching via the communicative approach. The attendants to this focus group discussion were eight English language teachers of Hobicha Badda Secondary School. The FGD was organized by the help of the English department head; based on consent of the participants.

**Methods of Data Analysis:** Merriam (1988) considers the timing of analysis as a major point that distinguishes descriptive research design from others. She considers descriptive analysis as ongoing activity that takes place during data collection, devising of categories and the formulation of theory. With regards to the approaches of qualitative analysis Tesch (1990) in Gall et al (1996) categorized it into three: interpersonal, structural and reflective. She described interpersonal analysis "a process of examining descriptive study data closely in order to find constructs, themes, and patterns that can describe and explain the phenomenon being studied".

Thus, the researcher used the interpersonal analysis approach for this study since the objectives of this study are to know the techniques and challenges of vocabulary teaching via CLT; especially the perception of teachers about the importance of vocabulary to improve communication and practice of teachers teaching vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach. The data collected via semi-structured interview and focus group discussion was analyzed as follows:

**Analysis of Semi-structured Interview Data:** The semi-structured data transcribed and transformed into textual data form. Analysis was done primarily with thematic expressions of the words; using crosscheck between quantitative and qualitative data. Closed ended questions data were analyzed through using number and open ended question data were analyzed using words and supplement quantitative data. The researcher read the transcribed data considering the objectives of the study. The data that appeared to be relevant to achieve the purpose of this study were selected for analysis. The selected data were categorized according to related themes. Then, themes were used to describe the perception, practice, strategies and challenges of teaching vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach.

**Analysis of Focus Group Discussion Data:** The data analysis and interpretation of the FGD depends on the emergent of the results. Transform the recordings into a textual data form. Besides, codifications of the themes were made through looking for patterns and making interpretation. The analysis of the data was using phrases of the analytical process such as:

- Transcribing the data
- Pre-coding and coding of the data
- Growing ideas, perceptions, profiles and other forms of data display
- Interpreting the data and drawing conclusions
- The analysis focused on the four important thematic areas such as: teachers' perception towards the importance of teaching vocabulary for communication.

**Analysis and Discussions of the Results:** In order to answer the research question and collect the necessary data, semi-structured interview and focus group discussion were used. Besides, eight English language teachers of Hobicha Badda secondary school were involved in this study. In this chapter, data collected through close ended question items were presented using number and responses obtained from open ended question items are described and discussed in its thematic relationships and units.

**Teachers Perception of Teaching Vocabulary for Communication:** It is said that once perception can affect the practice of an individual on certain activity. Similarly, the perception of teachers can affect their teaching of vocabulary. Thus, an attempt was made in this study to find out the teachers perception towards the teaching of vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach. EFL teachers were asked to reply whether they believe or not are it possible to teach vocabulary using CLT, in reply to this, T1, T4 and T3 responded that it is possible to teach vocabulary through CLT. However, their explanation about how apply vocabulary teaching through the communicative language teaching approach was not clearly rationalized. This means that they replied, it is possible to apply focusing on grammatical knowledge rather than focusing on the function of language.

On the other hand, five of the teachers (T2, T5, T6, T7 and T8) responded that teaching vocabulary via the CLT is difficult activity to practice. They rationalized that teaching vocabulary means solely teaching the meaning of words by using translation of foreign language into mother tongue and it is not possible to practice CLT in vocabulary lesson. In FGD, almost all teachers of the school reported that vocabulary taught through CLT is not known in their teaching experience and it is untried trend. From the responses of the teachers, it is possible to wrap up that the majority of teachers thought that the teaching of vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach is easier said than done and new teaching approach to practice in the classroom context and they have misunderstanding about the concept of vocabulary teaching through the communicative language teaching approach. In item 2, teachers were asked whether or not they think that the teaching of vocabulary promotes effective communication. In response to SSI, two (T6 and T7) teachers replied that vocabulary teaching promotes effective communication in the target language. But they asked how it important and their justification was not that much plenty. This means that they replied vocabulary teaching promotes effective communication simply by saying yes and there was not any justification. In FGD three teachers reported that vocabulary teaching promotes effective communication. On the other hand, the majority of teachers (6) replied that the teaching of vocabulary does not promote effective communication in the target language. The teachers rationalized that the teaching of vocabulary means knowing literal meaning of words. From the above data, it is possible to deduce that the majority of the teachers wrongly perceived the importance of teaching vocabulary for communication. As a result, they don't clearly know the role of vocabulary teaching to promote effective communication.

Regarding item 3, teachers were asked whether or not they believe that having adequate vocabulary promotes effective communication. In reply to this, three of the teachers responded that having adequate vocabulary promotes effective communication. They forwarded their idea saying that having adequate vocabulary promotes effective communication in the target language without any communication barrier. Additionally, the teachers reported that sufficiency of vocabulary results in valuable communication and they have idea about the importance of vocabulary teaching for effective communication. However, the majority of the teachers (5) stated that having adequate vocabulary does not promote valuable communication exchange in the target language. They justified their idea stating that, to communicate effectively one has to have the knowledge of grammar which is an advisable skill in language learning. Consequently, the majority of the teachers have misunderstanding of the concept having adequate vocabulary to promote effective communicative exchange in the target language. This finding disagrees with Wilkins (1976). In line with this result, Wilkins (1976) stated that in adequacy of vocabulary results in foreign language communication failure or barriers. In item 4, English Language Teachers were asked that deficiency of vocabulary results in communication failure. In response, three teachers responded that lack of vocabulary knowledge results in failure of communication in the target language (SSI). In reply to FGD, five teachers said that the deficiency of vocabulary knowledge results in communication barrier or failure. They added that without vocabulary knowledge teaching-learning process cannot effectively and efficiently be performed.

The teachers of English language forwarded that to teach the target language effectively, adequacy of vocabulary knowledge is the corner stone for communication and other linguistic knowledge. On the other hand, three of the teachers replied that the deficiency of vocabulary does not result in communication failure or barrier. In addition, they reported that communication barrier or failure is the result of lack of grammar competence rather than function of language. Accordingly, they perceived that teaching of vocabulary should focus only on grammar translation based strategy and grammar teaching is a primary issue to teach in vocabulary lessons. From the above data, it is possible to conclude that the majority of the teachers believed that deficiency of the vocabulary results in foreign language communication barrier or failure. This conclusion agrees with what Wilkins (1976) noted. Wilkins (1976) stated that without the mediation of vocabulary, no amount of grammatical or any other linguistic knowledge can be employed in foreign language communication. In item 5, EFL teachers of Hobicha Bada Secondary and Preparatory school asked to rejoiner whether they believe or not that teaching of vocabulary means only teaching of words. In response to this, all eight EFL teachers of the school both in SSI and FGD believed that the teaching of vocabulary means only teaching of words. They also said that to teach vocabulary means to teach literal meaning of words. The majority of the teachers perceived that teaching vocabulary means only teaching direct meaning of words. However, two teachers responded that teaching of vocabulary means teaching of words form. Besides, they forwarded that teaching of vocabulary can include the teaching of spelling, pronunciation, function and structure of language. They also suggested that the teaching of vocabulary is beyond solely teaching of words. Teaching vocabulary means teaching major skills and sub skills of language such as, listening, speaking, reading and writing and teaching of grammar, spelling and pronunciation.

Generally, it can be said that the majority of the teachers wrongly perceived the teaching of vocabulary. That is, all eight teachers perceived that teaching vocabulary means teaching solely words. This finding disagrees with what Wallace (1982) reported. With regard to this conclusion, Wallace (1982) pointed out that teaching vocabulary means teaching aspects of a word such as the form of a word, its use, its pronunciation and its function. In item 6, teachers were asked whether or not communicative language teaching approach is suitable for teaching vocabulary. In connection to this, two teachers responded that CLT is suitable for teaching of vocabulary lessons. They added that CLT is the basic tool to teach vocabulary. However, the majority of the teachers responded that the communicative language teaching approach is not suitable to teach vocabulary. Besides, they replied that teaching of vocabulary means giving the mere definition of words and translating words into vernacular language. Furthermore, the teachers of English language replied that the communicative language teaching is solely applicable in the speaking class and it centers on the spoken part of foreign language teaching rather than other aspects of linguistic knowledge like vocabulary and others. This is to mean that the majority of teachers were giving less attention for communicative language teaching approach to teach vocabulary lessons. In general from the data presented in table 5, the majority of teachers wrongly perceived the availability of communicative language teaching approach to teach vocabulary lesson.

Thus, the majority of the teachers do not believe that suitability of teaching the communicative language teaching approach to teach vocabulary lessons. Hence, this finding says the opposite to Widdowsen (1978). With regard to this conclusion, Widdowsen (1978) pointed out that the communicative language teaching approach is suitable to teach vocabulary effectively. Regarding item 7, the English language teachers asked whether or not how vocabulary teaching via CLT applicable in the Secondary School context. In response to FGD, six teachers reported that teaching vocabulary through CLT in the EFL classroom is difficult to carry out. Based on their experience, they reported that teaching vocabulary through CLT is an immense task and it is not advisable to teach at secondary level education. And they suggested that vocabulary teaching through the CLT is suitable and applicable at tertiary level education program rather than at secondary level education. According to the perception of the teachers, vocabulary teaching through CLT is impossible to implement in the real life teaching- learning context with reference to Hobicha Badda Secondary School. As a result, the majority of the teachers considered teaching vocabulary via the CLT as a problematic and impossible to practice in their classroom contexts. From the teachers' response, it is possible to understand that the respondents' misunderstood teaching vocabulary via the CLT at secondary level education and it is impossible to practice at Secondary School level. As a result of this, the majority of the teachers are misconceived on CLT to teach vocabulary lessons at the secondary education level. In connection to teachers' perception, it can be generally conclude that the respondents have misconception towards CLT approach to teach vocabulary lessons.

They felt that Communicative language teaching approach is the only suitable approach to teach speaking lesson rather than to teach vocabulary. Besides, they consider vocabulary teaching via CLT is suitable for tertiary level education rather than for secondary level education. Teachers thought that teaching vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach as a time consuming. Therefore, almost all teachers have wrong the perception of teaching vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach. In line with this finding, Boreg (2003) noted that perceptions affect ones' teaching practice. So, their perception affected their teaching strategy in the communicative language teaching approach to teach vocabulary. Thus, vocabulary is the heart of foreign language teaching and it promotes effective and efficient communication in the target language. However, the majority of the teachers have misconception of vocabulary teaching to promote effective and efficient classroom communication in the target language. On the other hand, some of the teachers believed that teaching of vocabulary promotes effective and efficient classroom communication in the target language. From above findings of data, it is possible to deduce that the majority of the teachers have negative perception on the importance of teaching vocabulary for communication. This finding is disconfirmed by the scholars' findings on the importance of teaching vocabulary for communication. For example, Harmer (2001), Richards (2000), Thornbury (2002) and Wilkins (1976) noted that without adequate knowledge of vocabulary; we cannot express ourselves appropriately even if we master the grammar of the language.

### Summary, Conclusions and Recommendation

This study was conducted to divulge the teachers' perceptions towards teaching of vocabulary through the communicative

language teaching approach focusing on Hobicha Badda Secondary and Preparatory School. Specifically, the study was intended to achieve the following specific objective:

**To identify the perception of teachers on the importance of vocabulary for communication:** Based on the analyses of the collected data, the following summary, conclusions, and recommendations were made. Hence, this chapter intended to enlist the summary of the major findings, conclusion and recommendation.

**Summary of the Major Findings:** Different findings were obtained from the analysis of data. The findings of the study were organized and grouped according to the objectives of the study. Thus, in this subsection, the summary of the major findings is presented according to the objectives of the study.

### A) Teachers' Perceptions towards Teaching of vocabulary for Communication Purpose

Regarding teachers' perceptions towards teaching of vocabulary through the CLT the following findings were derived:

- The study revealed that the majority of the English language teachers thought that the teaching of vocabulary via CLT is difficult and problematic to practice in the classroom context. In contrast, some teachers replied that it is possible to teach vocabulary via the CLT. However, it was practically observed that the majority of English language teachers do not use the CLT approach in the classroom context for the teaching of vocabulary items. Thus, the teachers did not positively perceive the practice of teaching vocabulary via the CLT.
- It was also disclosed that the majority of English language teachers had misunderstanding about vocabulary teaching via the communicative language teaching approach.
- The findings of the study indicated that the majority of the English language teachers perceived that the teaching of vocabulary is important for effective communication. Nevertheless, in classrooms English language teachers do not usually practice vocabulary teaching via CLT and they had misconception regarding the teaching of vocabulary through the CLT.
- The study also divulged that the majority of English language teachers believed that having adequate vocabulary promotes effective communication and deficiency of adequate vocabulary results in communication barrier or failure. However, there is mismatch between the responses of teachers and their practice. It was noted that the teachers were not using the CLT approach to teach vocabulary.
- As the findings of the study showed, the majority of English language teachers replied that the communicative language teaching approach is not suitable at the secondary level education for the teaching of vocabulary lessons. Thus it can be said that majority of the English language teachers wrongly perceived on the suitability of CLT approach for the teaching of vocabulary.

### Conclusion

Owing to the analysis of data and the major findings of the study, the following conclusions were derived.

It is said that one's perception can affect the practice of an individual on certain activities. Accordingly, the perception of teachers can affect their teaching of vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach. Thus, an attempt was made in this study to identify the teachers' perception towards the importance of teaching vocabulary for communication. Teaching vocabulary through communicative language teaching is important to promote effective communication in the target language. To make vocabulary teaching effective, various strategies were designed and there are numerous challenges that English language teachers faced while teaching vocabulary via the communicative language teaching approach. In this regard, the majority of the teachers had a negative attitude towards the teaching of vocabulary through the communicative language teaching approach.

**Recommendation:** Based on the findings obtained and conclusion made, the following recommendations are forwarded:

Teaching vocabulary through the communicative language teaching approach is important to improve students and teachers communication exchange in the target language. Specifically, it should get great attention from SNNPRS Education Bureau, Wolaita Zone Educational Department, Humbo Woreda Education office and Hobicha Badda Secondary School. The Woreda government and education office should capacitate the teachers' and create awareness through different workshops in order to secure a positive attitude towards the importance of vocabulary in the communicative approach. The school principals and English department heads should create awareness for English language teachers about the importance of the teaching of vocabulary for communication. In connection to this, all participants of the study should be given attention and should take care of the importance of the vocabulary for communication purpose. Finally, since this area of study is a new phenomenon in the Ethiopian context, the researcher would like to suggest further research to be carried out in different aspects and levels of the same topic at various levels of education.

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