

Models of Communicative Competence:

Implications for Language Teachers and Teacher Educators

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چکیده

با اجرای سند تحول بنیادین آموزش و پرورش، بر اساس سند برنامه درسی ملی، هدف آموزش زبان‌های خارجی در ایران عبارت است از: آموزش و رشد مهارت‌های چهارگانه زبانی از طریق رویکرد ارتباطی آموزش زبان. می‌دانیم که آموزش زبان از طریق رویکرد ارتباطی که در پی پرورش توانش ارتباطی می‌باشد خود به معلمانی با مهارت‌ها و توانایی‌های خاص نیاز دارد. لذا این مقاله به بررسی مدل‌های مختلف این توانش می‌پردازد و برخی از انتظاراتی را که از معلم زبان می‌رود متذکر می‌شود. همچنین این مقاله به بیان مشکلات معلمانی می‌پردازد که به روش‌های تدریس سنتی خو گرفته‌اند و ممکن است در تدریس با رویکرد ارتباطی مواجه شوند. بالاخره آموزه‌های تغییر در رویکرد آموزش زبان به رویکرد ارتباطی برای دست‌اندرکاران دوره‌های پیش از خدمت و ضمن خدمت آموزش معلمان نیز در این مقاله مورد بحث قرار می‌گیرند.

کلیدواژه‌ها: توانش ارتباطی، رویکرد ارتباطی آموزش زبان، مدرسان زبان، تربیت معلم

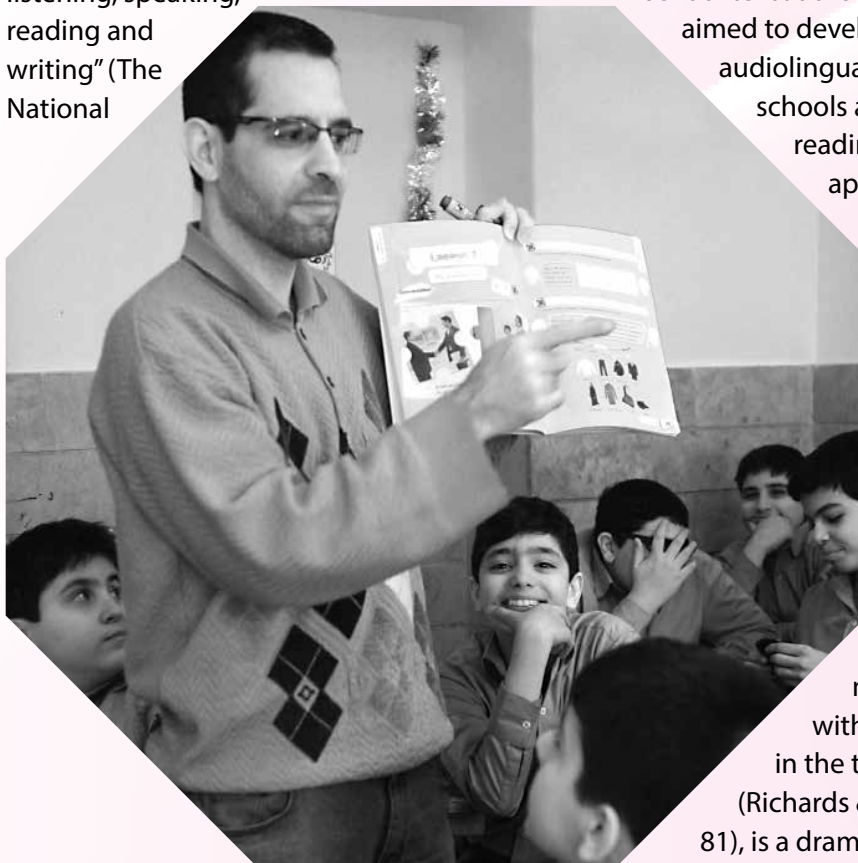
Abstract

With the implementation of the Fundamental Reform in Education in Iran, and development of the National Curriculum, foreign language education in Iran aims to develop four language skills through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, CLT, which aims to develop communicative competence, make certain demands on teachers in terms of teaching skills and competences. This papers reviews the major models of communicative competence in the literature of CLT, and in the light of these models, clarifies some of the expectations from CLT teachers. It also pinpoints the difficulties teachers accustomed to traditional methods may have. Implications of the change in the system of language education are also highlighted for teacher educators in pre-service and in-service programs.

Key Words : communicative competence, CLT, teachers, teacher educators

Introduction

One of the turning points in the history of foreign language teaching in Iran is the development of the National Curriculum (2012), based on the Fundamental Reform Document in Education, in which foreign language teaching has found a position. It is a turning point because while previously the goals and objectives of foreign language teaching had never been stated in any formal document (Safarnavadeh, Asgari, Moosapour & Anani Sarab, 2009), in the National Curriculum, two pages (pages 37 and 38) have been devoted to the domain of foreign language teaching and learning. There, it is clearly stated "Language teaching lays emphasis on communicative ability and problem solving so that after instruction, the individual is capable of conveying and interpreting meaning using all language skills including listening, speaking, reading and writing" (The National



Curriculum, p. 37), or on page 38 it is stated "The approach of foreign language teaching is an active and self-relying communicative approach". And based on these guidelines of the National Curriculum, the Bureau of Textbook Compilation has developed an 88 page curriculum framework for the Foreign Language Teaching Program at High School which is yet to be formally approved.

Although the aim of the previous language teaching program was not stated clearly in formal documents, content analysis of the textbooks implies that the aim was to teach language components or structures (Safarnavadeh et al. 2009) or these components and the skill of reading comprehension (Vosoughi, 1992). In a recent interview, Birjandi, who was the main author of the Iranian school textbooks maintained that he aimed to develop books based on audiolingualism for junior high schools and books based on reading comprehension approach for high schools (Anani Sarab, 2012).

Therefore, it can be claimed that the change toward a Communicative Approach Program or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which "marks the beginning of a major paradigm shift within language teaching in the twentieth century" (Richards & Rodgers, 2014, p. 81), is a dramatic change, which

demands different responsibilities from the teachers and students.

Communicative Approach or Communicative Language Teaching seeks to help learners develop and operationalize the notion of communicative competence in the foreign or second language (Brown, 2014; Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) and to accomplish this aim, teachers are first and foremost required to be familiar with the core concepts of communicative competence.

Models of Communicative Competence

The phrase “communicative competence” was first coined in 1967 by the American sociolinguist and anthropologist Dell H. Hymes (1927-2009) in reaction to Chomsky’s notion of linguistic competence. He defines communicative competence as what “enables a member of the community to know when to speak and when to remain silent, which code to use, when, where and to whom, etc. (Hymes, 1967, p. 13). Since then, the concept has developed over years and different models of communicative competence have been offered by different scholars. Major models of communicative competence can be listed as follows:

- Hymes’ model (1967, 1972)
- Canale and Swain’s model (1980)
- Canale (1983)
- Bachman’s model (1990)
- Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell’s model (1995)
- Littlewood’s model (2011)

In what follows, each of these models is described and in the rest of the paper, the implications of these models for language teachers and teacher

educators are stated.

Hymes’ model of communicative competence

Before explaining the concept of communicative competence as presented by Hymes, the word “competence” itself requires some clarification. The word competence or linguistic competence was first used by Chomsky (1965) to refer to knowledge of language as different from performance which he sees as the actual use of language. Although this dualism between knowledge and use of language was not new and it was already noticed by the Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure (1817-1913), who distinguished *langue* “the linguistic competence of the speaker as a member of a speech community” and *parole* “the actual phenomena or data of linguistics” (Robins, 1997, p. 225), Chomsky is known for “reinterpreting in a psychological context the comparable sociological distinction that de Saussure had drawn between *langue* and *parole*” (Howatt, 1986, p. 270).

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More explicitly, Chomsky’s competence is concerned with “an ideal speaker–listener, in a completely homogeneous

speech community who knows its language perfectly and is unaffected by such grammatically irrelevant conditions as memory limitations, distractions, shifts of attention and interest, and errors" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3). In other words, Chomsky's competence is a decontextualized notion and the ideal speaker-hearer he is talking about, is

"an artificially constructed idealized person; not an actual language user" (Kumaravadevilu, 2006, p. 6).

Hymes (1972), while accepting the superiority of Chomsky's terminology over de Saussure's, contends:

"Such a theory of competence posits ideal objects in abstraction from sociocultural features" (p.271).

A linguistically competent person, who is master of fully grammatical sentences, is at best a bit odd because "some occasions call for being appropriately ungrammatical" (p.277). Hymes adds, in addition to knowledge of grammatical sentences, a person should acquire the knowledge of appropriate sentences that is, he or she should know "when to speak, when not, and as to what to talk about with whom, when; where, in what manner". He continues, "There are rules of use without which the rules of grammar would be useless" (p.277). Grammatical competence described by Chomsky, Hymes believes, is only one sector of communicative competence, the other ones mentioned by Hymes are the

psycholinguistic (i.e., implementational feasibility), sociocultural (contextual appropriateness) and de facto (i.e., actual occurrence) sectors. In summarizing Hymes' model, Munby (1978) maintains the goal of the model is "to show the ways in which the systematically possible, the feasible, and the appropriate are linked to produce and interpret actually occurring cultural behavior" (p. 16).

Canale and Swain's model of communicative competence

Another model of communicative competence was presented by the two Canadian applied linguists, Michael Canale and Merrill Swain in 1980 in the first issue of Applied Linguistics. Referring to the weak or neural and strong versions of Chomsky's competence recognized by Campbell and Wales (1970), Canale and Swain agree with Hymes' criticism of Chomsky's notion of competence –performance distinction in that it "provides no place for consideration of the appropriateness [emphasis is original] of sociocultural significance of an utterance in the situational and verbal context in which it is used" (p.4). Furthermore, referring to two views regarding the relationship between grammatical competence and communicative competence, they advocate Munby's (1978) stance which sees grammatical competence a subpart of communicative competence and not something separate from it. They emphasize: "Just as Hymes (1972) was able to say that there are rules of grammar that would be useless without rules of language use, so we feel that there are rules of language use that would be useless without rules of grammar" (p.5). However, they believe their notion of communicative competence is different



from that of Hymes because first, unlike Hymes, they do not incorporate the notion of ability for use into their definition of communicative competence.

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Reviewing theories of basic communication skills, sociolinguistic perspectives on communicative competence, and integrative theories of communicative competence, Canale and Swain, suggest five guiding principles for a communicative approach. These include:

1. Communicative competence is composed minimally of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and communication strategies, or what we will refer to as strategic competence.
2. A communicative approach must be based on and respond to the learner's communication needs.
3. The second language learner must have the opportunity to take part in meaningful communicative interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, i.e. to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations.
4. Particularly at the early stages of second language learning, optimal use must be made of those aspects of communicative competence that the learner has developed through acquisition and use of the native language and that are

common to those communication skills required in the second language.

5. The primary objective of a communication-oriented second language programme must be to provide the learners with the information, practice, and much of the experience needed to meet their communicative needs in the second language. (pp. 27-28)

Then, taking these principles into account, Canale and Swain propose a model of communicative competence which includes three main competencies of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence includes "knowledge of lexical items and



of rules of morphology, syntax, sentence-grammar semantics, and phonology". Sociolinguistic competence is made up of sociocultural rules of use as well as rules of discourse. Sociocultural rules of use help language users to produce and understand appropriately language data based on the speaking components of communicative events outlined by Hymes (1967). Rules of emerging discourse include cohesion and coherence principles which focus on communicative functions of the combination of utterances.

Strategic competence also is made up of verbal and nonverbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence.

Reviewing the major models of communicative competence in the literature shows that despite some slight terminological differences, they share the same general concepts and with the passage of time, researchers have tried to enhance and develop the models proposed by previous scholars

Canale's model of communicative competence

Three years after the communicative competence model proposed by Canale and Swain, Canale (1983), based on the work carried out at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE), revised the

model and proposed a four-component framework.

Prior to introducing his new model, Canale reminds the reader that in the communicative competence model, communication is meant to be "the exchange and negotiation of information between at least two individuals through the use of verbal and non-verbal symbols, oral and written/visual modes, and production and comprehension processes" (p.4). The four components of the revised framework are grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence.

Grammatical competence, as in the previous model, is concerned with "features and rules of the language such as vocabulary, word formation, sentence formation, pronunciation, spelling and linguistic semantics" (p. 7). Sociolinguistic competence in this model, unlike the Canale and Swain's model, which addressed both sociocultural rules and rules of discourse, "addresses the extent to which utterances are produced and understood appropriately in different sociolinguistic contexts depending on contextual factors such as status of participants, purposes of the interaction, and norms or conventions of interaction" (p. 7), appropriateness of both form and meaning. Appropriateness of meaning also includes kinesics and proxemics. Discourse competence concerns mastery of how to combine grammatical forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres, achieved through cohesion and coherence. Strategic competence in this model has expanded to include mastery of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action

not only to compensate for breakdowns in communication but also to enhance the effectiveness of communication.

Canale believes this theoretical framework is not a model of communicative competence, because a model “implies some specification of the manner and order in which the components interact and in which the various competences are normally acquired” (p.12).

Bachman’s model of communicative competence

Another model of communicative competence or a “theoretical framework of communicative language ability” as he puts it, is the one proposed by Bachman (1990), which has been presented for measurement purposes. This framework includes three components of language competence, strategic competence, and psychophysiological mechanisms. Language competence includes organizational and pragmatic competences. Organizational competence, in turn includes grammatical and textual abilities or competences, which are involved in producing and comprehending language. In other words, textual competence correspond to discourse competence in Canale’s model. Pragmatic competence is concerned with “the relationship between utterances and the acts or functions that speakers (or writers) intend to perform through these utterances” (Bachman, 1990, p. 89). Pragmatic competence in Bachman’s model encompasses illocutionary competence and sociolinguistic competence. Illocutionary competence entails knowledge and skill in using language functions proposed by Halliday (1970) such as ideational, manipulative,

heuristic, instrumental, regulatory and imaginative functions. Similar to Canale’s conceptualization, sociolinguistic competence, as Bachman puts it “is the sensitivity to, or control of the conventions of language use that are determined by the features of the specific language use context; it enables us to perform language functions in ways that are appropriate to that context” (p.94), and it includes sensitivity to differences in dialect or variety, to differences in register and to naturalness, and the ability to interpret cultural references and figures of speech.

The second major component of communicative competence in Bachman’s framework is strategic competence. Unlike Canale and Swain’s and Canale’s model, where strategic competence is at the same level as grammatical and sociolinguistic competences, in Bachman’s model, strategic competence is a major component at the same level as language competence. The reason, as Bachman states, is that previous models imply that communicative strategies are necessarily linguistic or verbal ones but his model shows that strategic competence is a competence at the level of language competence not a subpart so it may include strategies which are not linguistic. Moreover, he believes strategic competence is “an important part of all communicative language use, not just that in which language abilities are deficient and must be compensated for by other means” (p. 100).

Celece-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell’s model

Celece-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1995) propose another model of communicative competence, which as they maintain, is the continuation of

Canale and Swain's (1980) and Canale's (1983) work. Their model includes five competences of linguistic competence, strategic competence, sociocultural competence, actional competence and discourse competence. This

CLT teachers need to have good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary as well as good pronunciation. In other words, a CLT teacher needs to be a skillful proficient teacher who can serve as a model of communicatively competent speaker for the learners

addition to morphology and syntax. The second difference is their use of the term "sociocultural competence" instead of "sociolinguistic competence" so that they can better distinguish it from actional competence. The reason they give is that Hymes used the term "communicative competence" to challenge Chomsky's (1965) notion of "linguistic competence" from a sociolinguistic perspective, and therefore "originally the sociolinguistic dimension of language proficiency was associated with everything that was missing from linguistic competence" (p.

model intended to elaborate sociolinguistic competence, which was separated from discourse competence and Celce-Murcia et al. divide it into two competences of sociocultural and actional competence.

As Celce-Murcia et al. indicate, there are two terminological differences between their model and Canale and Swain's. The first is that they prefer the term "linguistic competence" to "grammatical competence" to indicate clearly that this component also includes lexis and phonology in



10). So, all other competences are derived from sociolinguistic dimension.

Linguistic competence comprises the basic elements of communication i.e.,

the sentence patterns and types, the constituent structure, the morphological inflections, and the lexical resources, as well as the phonological and orthographic systems needed to realize communication as speech or writing.

Discourse competence concerns the selection, sequencing, and arrangement of words, structures, sentences and utterances to achieve a unified spoken or written text with components such as cohesion, deixis, coherence, generic structure, and the conversational structure inherent to the turn-taking system in conversation, which is believed to be highly relevant to communicative competence and language teaching.

Actional competence is defined as competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent, that is, matching actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry illocutionary force (speech acts and speech act sets). Celce Murcia et al. emphasize that their conceptualization of actional competence is mainly restricted to oral communication; rhetorical competence would be the parallel of actional competence in written communication. They maintain the motivation for adding actional competence to the Canale & Swain's model was the fact that they were not able to include the functional taxonomies developed by CLT theoreticians logically under any of the four traditional constituent competencies. In their view, actional competence is divided into two main components, knowledge of language functions and knowledge of speech act sets.

Sociocultural competence refers to the speaker's knowledge of how to express messages appropriately within

the overall social and cultural context of communication, in accordance with the pragmatic factors related to variation in language use.

Strategic competence in this model is the knowledge of communication strategies and how to use them. This conceptualization follows that of Canale and Swain (1980); but the focus of this model is on communication strategies because these have been described most explicitly and also because they are most relevant to communicative language use and CLT.

Littlewood's model of communicative competence

The final and the most recent framework or model of communicative competence reviewed here is the one presented by Littlewood (2011). He also takes Canale and Swain's (1980) and Canale's (1983) model as the initial model and develops it by adding a fifth component as well as adapting the terminology. The components of communicative competence in Littlewood's model are as follows:

- Linguistic competence includes the knowledge of vocabulary, grammar, semantics and phonology that have been the traditional focus of second language learning.
- Discourse competence enables speakers to engage in continuous discourse, e.g. by linking ideas in longer written texts, maintaining longer spoken turns, participating in interaction, opening conversations and closing them.
- Pragmatic competence enables second language speakers to use their linguistic resources to convey and interpret meanings in real situations, including those where they encounter problems due to gaps in their knowledge.

■ Sociolinguistic competence consists primarily of knowledge of how to use language appropriately in social situations, e.g. conveying suitable degrees of formality, directness and so on.

■ Sociocultural competence includes awareness of the cultural knowledge and assumptions that affect the exchange of meanings and may lead to misunderstandings in intercultural communication.(p.547)

This last component introduces psycholinguistic aspects of second language proficiency that are not included in the Canale and Swain's framework but are fundamental to communicative language use.

Implications of Communicative Competence Models for Teachers and Teacher Education

Reviewing the major models of communicative competence in the literature shows that despite some slight terminological differences, they share the same general concepts and with the passage of time, researchers have tried to enhance and develop the models proposed by previous scholars. One of the competences which is shared by all models is grammatical or linguistic competence. While in Canale and Swain's (1980), Canale's (1983) and Bachman's (1990) models it is called grammatical competence, Celce-Murcia et al. name it linguistic competence "to indicate unambiguously that this component also includes lexis and phonology in addition to morphology and syntax" (p.11). Littlewood also uses the term linguistic competence. The important point is that all models agree that communicative competence includes a grammatical or linguistic component, which entails knowledge of syntax, morphology,

phonology and vocabulary or lexis. Therefore, a CLT teacher who aims to help learners develop communicative competence, should first and foremost have already developed these components of his or her communicative competence. That is to say, CLT teachers need to have good knowledge of grammar and vocabulary as well as good pronunciation. In other words, a CLT teacher needs to be a skillful proficient teacher who can serve as a model of communicatively competent speaker for the learners. This is important because there exists a misconception among some teachers that CLT deals only with speaking and the focus is no meaning not form, and therefore, grammar is not important in CLT (Thompson, 1996; Wu, 2008). In addition to grammar knowledge,





CLT teachers are required to have a good command of vocabulary. This is something felt by many teachers and some, despite admitting the necessity of wide storage of vocabulary, believe they need help to do it in in-service training courses (Hassanabadi, 2013). Some other studies have also shown that teachers feel they need general English in-service classes to improve their language competence (Birjandi & Derakhashan, 2010; Hashemian & Azadi, 2014; Kazemi & Ashrafi, 2014; Razi & Kargar, 2014). Littlewood (2011) also refers to various

Another common feature of these models of communicative competence is that they all include a discourse or textual component. This textual or discourse component implies that a CLT teacher should have the ability to produce and comprehend cohesive and coherent texts both oral and written and should help his students to develop such a competence too

studies done in the Asian context and maintains that among common themes in all studies are “teachers’ own lack of confidence in using English” (p. 551). This also has an implication for pre-service teacher education programs in that they need to take this necessity into account and design and handle general English courses of prospective teachers more seriously.

Another common feature of these models of communicative competence is that they all include a discourse or textual component. This textual or discourse component implies that a CLT teacher should have the ability to produce and comprehend cohesive and coherent texts both oral and written and should help his students to develop such a competence too. This is important again, because another misconception among some teachers is that CLT is about speaking and listening (Thompson, 1996; Wu, 2008) and therefore reading and writing are not important. This is at odds with what, Widdowson (1978) has mentioned “What the learners need to know how to do is to compose in the act of writing, comprehend in the act of reading, and to learn techniques of reading by writing and techniques of writing by reading” (P. 144, cited in Wu, 2008). Moreover, paying attention to discourse competence means that teachers should provide opportunities for learners to develop unified coherent texts in the form of creative and innovative dialogs or in higher levels, write creative compositions. This is important because some teachers even in CLT classes emphasize memorizing the dialogs as an end in itself. This, in addition to ignoring the development of discourse competence leads to students’ dissatisfaction (Hasanabadi, 2013).

Sociolinguistic or sociocultural competence is another common competence in different models. This competence requires CLT teachers to possess a high level of cultural awareness of both L1 and L2 cultural norms and rules, so that they can help learners to develop such competence. This competence implies that a good CLT teacher is not one who only possesses a good grammatical and discourse competence. A CLT teacher needs to have good intercultural competence too. The National Curriculum also emphasizes that the purpose of foreign language education is to enable learners “to communicate with other communities at regional and international levels” (The National Curriculum, 2012, p. 37). The point is how CLT teachers in a foreign language context can develop their sociolinguistic and sociocultural competence. This is an issue which should be taken into consideration by teacher education programs.

Strategic competence which has been named differently in different models is another component of communicative competence. Literature on learning and communicative strategies also indicate the significant role of strategy instruction in helping learners to be good strategy users. Therefore, CLT teachers themselves also need to know and be familiar with a range of active communicative strategies, which are essential to the communicative competence.

These requirements are in addition to other roles which a CLT teacher should adopt such as needs analyst, counselor, group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). All these indicate that CLT teachers have numerous responsibilities which might be overloading for teachers who are accustomed to teach through

traditional methods. Shifting from teacher-centered to student-centered CLT pedagogy is in fact a “quantum leap”, as Littlewood (2011) calls it using Chow and Mok-Cheung’s (2004) words. He summarizes the changes that CLT teachers in Asian contexts are expected to comply with as follows:

- change their views about language teaching from a knowledge-based one to a competence-based one;
- change their traditional role as a knowledge transmitter to a multi-role educator;
- develop new teaching skills;
- change their ways of evaluating students;
- develop the ability to adapt the textbooks;
- use modern technology; and
- improve their own language proficiency. (p. 551)

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Concluding Remarks

Teaching CLT requires certain capabilities and skills. Teachers who have taught through traditional teacher-fronted methods, most often a form of modified grammar translation method, need to develop many competences to

teach CLT effectively. Therefore, teacher education programs should also undergo a change to prepare prospective teachers for the hard task they have ahead of them and inservice programs also should be designed more judiciously taking into account the needs of CLT teachers and support these teachers in teaching through the newly adopted paradigm in the country. If this is not taken into account, the experience of other eastern countries might be repeated where teachers report they “comply with government recommendations while continuing to practise examination-oriented classroom instruction” (Shim and Baik, 2004, p. 246, cited in Littlewood, 2011).

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