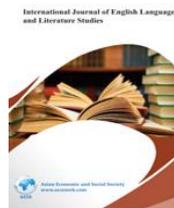




International Journal of English Language and Literature Studies

ISSN(e): 2306-0646/ISSN(p): 2306-9910

URL: www.aessweb.com



THE IMPLICATIONS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS IN THE SPOTLIGHT

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ABSTRACT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to teaching language, and it can be understood as a set of principles: How learners learn a language better, the kinds of activities that facilitate the process of learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. The main purpose is to focus on communicative competence much more than grammatical competence which means developing the ability of learners to communicate with each other. This review aims at reporting EFL teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching, exploring teachers' reasons for their attitudes, and reporting the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs towards CLT and their practice in the class. It is indicated that majority of teachers held positive attitudes toward principles of CLT, but they had difficulties in implementing CLT in their classes, and they did not really practice what they preach or belief in. A little gap was seen in teachers' beliefs and their practices in the class. The present review paper brings to the fore teachers' attitudes towards CLT which can be beneficial for English teachers, learners, and materials developers.

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Keywords: Communicative language teaching, Principles, EFL teachers' attitudes, Communicative competence.

Received: 31 January 2015 / Revised: 24 June 2015 / Accepted: 30 June 2015 / Published: 20 July 2015

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DOI: 10.18488/journal.23/2015.4.4/23.4.203.211
ISSN(e): 2306-0646/ISSN(p): 2306-9910
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Contribution/ Originality

The present review paper highlights the importance of Communicative Language Teaching Approach, with regard to teachers' attitudes, as one of the revolutionary approaches in English language teaching.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many different methods applied to foreign language learning such as, Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Direct Method (DM), Audio Lingual Method (ALM), Situational Language Teaching (SLT), and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) (Ansary, 2012). Each of them had their own problems. In ALM, learners were tired of repetition and imitation. In GTM, the roles of teachers and students are traditional. The teacher is the authority in the class, and there is little interaction among students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In other methods, there were other weaknesses, but no one can claim which one could be the best or more practical methods. Perhaps one of the most attractive and effective methods among teachers and students could be communicative language teaching (Richards, 2006).

CLT could be the product of teachers who were not satisfied with old methods that had their own disadvantages. Communicative language teaching is a prominent theoretical model in English Language Teaching that uses the situations students are likely to encounter in real life. The main purpose is to enable learners to communicate in a second language context and develop learners' communicative competence which involves knowledge of the language and the ability to use the knowledge in context. In recent decades, teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have been encouraged to implement CLT to help them develop students' abilities to use English appropriately in context (Chang, 2011).

It is clear that teachers have a crucial role in the classrooms, so their beliefs and attitudes about CLT are important to make a decision on their practices and they are responsible for applying and implementing CLT principles in context of classroom. However, what teachers express cannot guarantee whether they practice what they think or preach (Mowlaie and Rahimi, 2010).

Few studies have focused on teachers' attitude towards CLT in a particular EFL setting in Iran and other countries. Karavas-Doukas (1996) stated that the mismatch between beliefs and practices may contribute to the neglect of examining teachers' attitudes, therefore the report of their attitudes serves as a starting point to identify the possible contradiction between teachers' beliefs and CLT principles.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language teaching has seen many changes during the last 50 years, and CLT caused a rethinking of approaches to syllabus design and methodology. As Richards (2006) mentioned, we may group trends in English teaching into three phases:

“Phase 1. Traditional approaches (up to the late 1960s)

Phase 2. Classic communicative language teaching (1970s to 1990s)

Phase 3. Current communicative language teaching (late 1990s to the present)” (p . 6).

2.1. Traditional Approaches

Traditional approaches gave priority to grammatical competence. They believed that grammar could be learned through direct instruction and through a methodology. The approaches to the teaching of grammar were deductive and inductive. In deductive approach, students are taught grammar rules and then given opportunities to practice using them. In inductive one, students had examples which contained grammar rules and asked them to work out the rule for themselves. It was assumed that language learning meant building large numbers of grammatical sentences and patterns to produce these quickly in the appropriate situation (Richards, 2006).

2.2. Classic Communicative Language Teaching

In the 1970s, a reaction to traditional approaches began and soon it fell out of fashion. The priority of grammar in language learning and teaching was questioned, and it was argued that language ability needed communicative competence much more than grammatical competence (Richards, 2006). “The concept of communicative competence was proposed by Hymes, who claimed that the study of human language should place humans in a social world” (as cited in Chang (2011)). Communicative competence means what or how to say according to the situation, participants, their roles and their attentions. When CLT appeared for the first time as a new approach in the 1970s and 1980s, it brought great excitement among teachers around the world and they soon began to rethink their teaching, syllabuses, and classroom materials. In planning language courses in CLT approach, the place of grammar was not the starting point (Richards, 2006).

The communicative approach could be said to be product of educators and linguists who were not satisfied with traditional approaches. They thought that learners did not know how to communicate using appropriate social language, gestures, or expressions (Galloway, 1993). They believed that they required communicative competence more than linguistic competence.

In order to evaluate teachers’ attitudes toward communicative language teaching, many researchers considered CLT principals that consist of:

1. Place/importance of grammar
2. Group/pair work
3. Quality and quantity of error correction
4. The role of teacher in the classroom
5. The role and needs of learners in the learning process

Finocchair and Brunfit investigated other main features of CLT according to their interpretation:

1. Meaning is paramount.
2. Dialogues, if used, center around communicative functions and are not normally memorized.
3. Contextualization is a basic premise.

4. Effective communication is sought.
5. Drilling may occur, but peripherally.
6. Comprehensible pronunciation is sought.
7. Any device that helps the learners is accepted-varying according to their age, interest, etc.
8. Attempts to communicate may be encouraged from the beginning.
9. Judicious use of native language is accepted where feasible.
10. Translation may be used where students need or benefit from it.
11. Reading and writing can start from the first day, if desired.
12. The target linguistic system will be learned best through the process of struggling to communicate.
13. Linguistic variation is a central concept in materials and methodology.
14. Sequencing is determined by any consideration of content, function, or meaning that maintains interest.
15. Teachers help learners in any way that motivates them to work with the language.
16. Language is created by the individual, often through trial and error.
17. Fluency and acceptable language is the primary goal: Accuracy is judged not in the abstract but in context.
18. The teacher cannot know exactly what language the students will use.
19. Intrinsic motivation will spring from an interest in what is being communicated by the language. (Finocchiaro & Brunfit, as cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001))

2.3. Place/Importance of Grammar

The most important part of learning English is learning the grammar but in CLT classes it is not the starting point. Teachers should be taught grammar through materials in the environment such as pictures and other visual aids to communicate effectively. They should review the necessary explanation about grammar once as a whole in the class not to waste along time (Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu, 1999). It was better to teach grammar indirectly.

2.4. Group/Pair Work

Group work activities increase interaction among learners, and they provide opportunities for cooperative relationships among them. Furthermore, group work allows the learners to control their own experiences. It also helps learners cooperate with their friends. Teachers should provide activities to bring real situations in the classroom. By this way, learners gain more confidence in using the target language (Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu, 1999).

2.5. Quality and Quantity of Error Correction

“It is widely considered that the correction of grammatical errors will not result in imperfect learning” (Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu, 1999). Errors are thought to be a normal part of learning and

teachers should not waste a lot of time on error correction. “Teachers should correct the learners’ mistakes, unless they may cause communication breakdown” (Mai Ngoc and Iwashita, 2012).

There are different kinds of feedback which are as follows:

1. Explicit Correction
2. Recasts
3. Clarification Request
4. Metalinguistic Feedback
5. Elicitation
6. Repetition
7. Translation (Lyster & Ranta, as cited in Zangoie and Derakhshan (2014))

2.6. The Role of Teacher in the Classroom

There are two main roles for teachers in CLT classes. The first one is to facilitate the process of learning among the students, and between the students and the different activities. The second one is acting as an independent participant or monitor within the learning process (Ansary, 2012). Teachers talk less, and listen more in CLT classes. They provide opportunities for students to bring them in context through activities such as explanation, writing and giving examples. “We have to admit the point that none of these roles will be taken by the teachers if they do not believe in them” (Mowlaie and Rahimi, 2010). It is also important to consider teachers’ belief towards CLT. There are different definitions of beliefs that identified by many experts: For Hosenfled beliefs are mini theories. For Omaggio belief is the knowledge we have towards something, and for Clark it is implicit theories (As cited in Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010)). Richards considers these factors as teachers’ belief: “(a) their own experience,(b) personality factor, (c) their experience of what works best, (d) established practice, (e) principles derived from approaches or methods, and (f) insight based on research-based principle” (as cited in Mowlaie and Rahimi (2010)).

2.7. The Role and Needs of Learners in the Learning Process

Students in these classes are more active. They leave their seat to complete a task, so the classroom is not quiet during a communicative activity. They negotiate among themselves about the learning process and the objective learning. They should learn in an independent way (Ansary, 2012)

Teachers or researchers reported difficulties in implementing CLT in their classes. The differences between the weak and strong version of CLT is distinguished. The weak version which is practiced in the last ten years, involves providing a situation for learners to use English for communicative purposes, and tries to put these activities together into a wider program of language teaching. The strong version can be obtained through communication, but it is not simply a question of activating and existing, but it is the matter of inert subconscious knowledge and simulating language enhancement. The weak and strong versions can be described as learning to

use English, and using English to learn it respectively (Hotwatt, as cited in Richards and Rodgers (2001))

These difficulties consist of: “(a) lack of administrative support, (b) lack of resources, (c) lack of sufficient English language knowledge, (d) wider curriculum, (e) large class size, (f) discrepancy between CLT syllabus and nationally administered exams, (g) teachers holding on to traditional methods, and (h) lack of authentic learning materials”(as cited in Jamali *et al.* (2014)).

2.8. Teachers' Attitudes towards CLT

Researchers have investigated teachers' attitudes towards CLT in Iran and other countries. In Australia, the findings showed that teachers held moderate attitudes towards five principles of CLT, and the highest score belonged to the section of learner role (Chang, 2011). In Razmjoo and Riazi's study, teachers held positive attitudes towards CLT principles in the area of grammar role and teacher role. In Italy, teachers showed positive attitudes towards CLT in the area of pair work activities, and they pointed out that CLT improved communicative skills and learners' motivation. Liao evaluated high school English teachers' attitudes towards CLT in China. The results showed teachers expressed favorable view about CLT (Razmjoo, Riazi, & Liao, as cited in Chang (2011)). These research findings show that many EFL teachers hold positive attitudes toward CLT. However, a number of studies report the teachers' concerns about CLT (Chang, 2011). Hawkey pointed out that Italian teachers of English believed the correction of grammar is necessary. Li reported that teachers thought that they should give feedback to learners when they produce the target language (Hawkey & Li, as cited in Chang (2011)).

Chang (2011) study in Taiwan identified the universities in southern Taiwan that implement CLT into the curriculum. A mixed method was used in the study. It was a two-phase research design, starting with quantitative data collection, followed by qualitative data collection. A random sample is selected from the universities and colleges. All the teachers in the selected schools made the sample that included fifty-five Taiwanese college teachers. The first-phase was conducted in two selected colleges in Southern Taiwan, and the second-phase interviews aimed at explaining the first one. An attitude scale developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996) was used to investigate participants' attitudes toward principles of CLT. The research questions guiding the first-phase and the second-phase were: 1. What are Taiwanese college teachers' overall attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching? 2. What are the reasons underlying the teachers' attitudes toward CLT? According to findings, the reasons behind the positive attitudes can be summarized as: 1. CLT considers form and function together 2. CLT develops the ability of learners to use the target language 3. CLT pays attention to affective variables in the process of less learning 4. CLT increases learners' confidence in learning process (Chang, 2011).

In Vietnam, many changes have been occurred during the last decades including the necessity of English as a foreign language and the acceptance of CLT. But despite great efforts on teachers' education programs, the quality of English teaching and learning in Vietnam is not desirable, and still is a concern for many educators (Le, Pham, & Sullivan, as cited in Mai Ngoc and Iwashita

(2012)). Le revealed two essential factors encouraging teachers to use CLT in Vietnam: The support of government policy and positive view of Vietnamese teachers (Le, as cited in [Mai Ngoc and Iwashita \(2012\)](#)). A new curriculum was accepted according to communicative skills in 2006, and it was implemented from grade 6 to 12. However, after a long period of learning English, most Vietnamese learners still cannot use CLT to communicate with each other effectively, and we can conclude that CLT is not being implemented successfully in Vietnam (Pham, as cited in [Mai Ngoc and Iwashita \(2012\)](#)). The deficiencies that militate against the implementation of CLT in Vietnam are the academic curriculum, EFL context, less learner motivation, the size of the classroom, teachers' low proficiency, and examinations which are based on grammar ([Mai Ngoc and Iwashita, 2012](#)). Besides these limitations and difficulties, there are deeper issues, such as discrepancy between Western and Vietnamese cultures and values, which cause serious challenges for Vietnamese teachers in implementing CLT (Ellis & Sullivan, as cited in [Mai Ngoc and Iwashita \(2012\)](#)).

Thompson represented four misconceptions about CLT among ELT practitioners, 1. CLT pays attention to grammar 2. CLT means teaching speaking rather than writing 3. CLT considers pair work and group work through activities like role plays, and 4. CLT asks too much from teachers in terms of skills, time, and energy (Thompson, as cited in [Mai Ngoc and Iwashita \(2012\)](#)).

In [Mai Ngoc and Iwashita \(2012\)](#) study, a questionnaire was administrated to thirty-seven in-service teachers and eighty-eight first-year learners who came from two universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. Due to the low knowledge of students in English, a version of translated Vietnamese questionnaire was administrated, so they could choose the English or the Vietnamese one. The research question was: Do learners and teachers hold the same attitudes towards CLT? Findings showed that learners and teachers held favorable attitudes towards CLT, but the section of teacher participants had more positive attitudes than learners for all the principles of CLT, except group and pair work.

Implementing CLT in Bangladesh was confronted many difficulties such as, the teacher, the students, the educational system, and CLT itself. Despite showing keen interest in change and being eager to use CLT in class, teachers are not hopeful about the complete adoption of CLT, and they think that only by overcoming these difficulties, they can benefit from CLT in their English classrooms. The first difference was teachers' perspectives on students' motivation to learn spoken English rather than grammar. They felt that their students did not have an interest in oral language skills. Second difference was the size of the class. In public schools, there were more than thirty students in a class on average, so individual attention to each student is not possible by the teachers. On the contrary, teachers who were working in private schools could pay attention individually to students. It seems to be easier to implement CLT in these schools. The third one is related to the lack of funding and resources. Both teachers in public and private schools mentioned that they had sufficient equipment such as computer, multimedia projectors, audio resources, and photocopiers for use, which play an essential role in implementing CLT in English teaching. A major concern in Bangladesh is the issue of large classes ([Ansary, 2012](#)).

In Zangoie and Derakhshan (2014) study, a sample including 108 EFL teachers were selected in order to evaluate their preferences of corrective feedback, and their attitudes toward CLT. Findings showed that different teachers chose different kinds of CF. Those whose CLT scores are high prefer to employ Elicitation, Metalinguistic CF, and Repetition, and teachers with low CLT, prefer to use Translation, Recasts, and Explicit types of CF.

In Ansary (2012) study, a mixed method was used. Participants were thirty English teachers at primary and secondary levels. The data collection consisted of questionnaire and informal interviews. It may be concluded from the findings that a number of limitations have made it difficult for CLT to be implemented in English teaching classrooms in Bangladesh. The main reason is lack of time and energy according to 80% of the respondent. It was observed that 63% teachers mentioned that the resources are not enough. 60% of the respondent stated that there is emphasizing on grammar-based examinations.

In Jamali *et al.* (2014) study, a mixed method was used in order to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes toward CLT. It was a three-phase design, starting with quantitative data followed by two qualitative data. The first one was through a questionnaire, and the second one was through interviews and observation. The participants were thirty teachers who were teaching at language institutes in Kermanshah. All of them were selected randomly. The results indicated that EFL teachers held positive attitudes towards CLT principles, and considered these factors in their beliefs and practices.

3. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The present review compared teachers and learners' attitudes, their reasons, and beliefs towards principles of CLT in Iran and other countries. Their comparisons showed that most of the teachers and learners held positive attitudes towards CLT. However, there were difficulties in implementing CLT principles in the classroom which should be considered by teachers. It was found that the teachers were tired of using traditional methods that required the learners to memorize grammar rules, so they leaned towards this approach. In addition, CLT considers four skills: Listening, reading, writing and speaking which should be taught in a communicative way together. It provides such an environment for learners to lower their anxiety and stress in the class. It increases learners' confidence to use a language in the context.

Finally, in CLT, the role of teachers and learners are different from those in traditional approaches. Teachers act as an independent participant or referee in the class. Instead of waiting for the teacher to make decision, learners themselves can explore knowledge and find the answer (Chang, 2011).

Although CLT has its own difficulties, it can be implemented as one of the appropriate methods in language learning. The self-confidence of the learners is a main factor which is emphasized by CLT through activities such as, role play, group, or pair work. Comparing to traditional methods, teachers do not have the authority over the students in class. They just provide a situation in class for learners to communicate and share their knowledge. It is good to consider

teachers' beliefs towards CLT which have been neglected in different studies. There are many teachers who claim that they practice CLT in their own classes, however, they actually apply their own experiences and beliefs. Few studies have been done towards the importance of this factor in language teaching.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Contributors/Acknowledgement: All authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

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