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Teachers' Attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan

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Abstract

The need of good communication skills in English plays a pivotal role in developing ELL' overall performance. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been introduced to develop communicative ability using techniques which focuses on learner centeredness as opposed to teacher centeredness. This study examined the attitudes of 15 English lecturers in Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan towards implementing CLT in the classroom and the rationales underlying their attitude towards CLT. The questionnaires and interview sessions were conducted and findings revealed that most of the respondents realized this technique is an effective tool to develop learners' abilities to communicate in the second language as it pays attention to grammar, develops language abilities through use and developed learner-autonomy in the learning process.

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Keyword: - CLT, Communicative, Teacher, Attitude

Introduction

The ever-growing need for good communication skills in English has created a huge demand for English teaching around the world. The worldwide demand for English has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching and language teaching materials and resources. Learners set themselves demanding goals. They want to be able to master English to a high level of accuracy and fluency. Richards (2006) states that, Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom. It is suggested that one reason of the mismatch between the theory of certain methods, such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and their actual practice is rooted in teachers' attitudes (Karavas-Doukas, 1995; Carless, 2003). Some teachers expressed their apprehensions on the students going astray during the process of learning. Their argument was based on the cultural tradition in Asian classrooms where the teacher has long been regarded as a master, next to a father figure in levels of respect. If the system is changed into a total student-centered classroom, some students may feel a dearth in teachers' patronage (Ahmad & Rao, 2000).

Many EFL teachers believe that overemphasizing the oral skills at the cost of the written skills is not a realistic goal of teaching and learning English as a foreign language (Carless, 2007). Thompson (1996) argued that, the misconceptions that lead to negative perception of the approach need to be eradicated in order for CLT to be implemented effectively. Noor Azina Ismail (2011:97) concludes: "Good grades did not guarantee employment for Malaysian graduates. They must have a good command of English and other soft skills." Due to this concern, colleges all over Malaysia has the responsibility to use the communicative language teaching method to produce graduates that have all the criteria needed for the job market. Rahimi & Naderi (2014) believed that factors such as: lack of enough support from administration, lack of authentic materials, incompatibility of traditional view towards teachers and learners' role with CLT, ineffectiveness of large classes for experiencing CLT, and negative impact of grammar-based examinations on the use of CLT, are the major impediments in using CLT. This study is based on Ming Chang.

Literature Review

Communicative Competence

The idea of communicative competence is first derived from Chomsky's distinction between competence and performance. Competence denotes the shared knowledge of the ideal speaker-listener set in a homogeneous speech community

which enables the users to produce and understand in that language. Performance on the other hand indicates the process of applying the underlying knowledge to the actual language use.

Hymes, however, finds Chomsky's mentioned distinction narrow to describe language behavior as his idea of competence is too ideal and not applicable in a heterogeneous speech community due to socio-cultural speeches (Ohno, 2002). For example, students are taught in British English in educational institutions in Malaysia however; when it comes to production there are some who use American English and a purely localized version of it. Hymes defines communicative competence as what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate in a speech community (Chang.M, 2011). It involves knowledge of the language and the ability to use the knowledge in context. There are four aspects of communicative competence which includes if something is possible, feasible, appropriate and done (probability of actually occurring). Knowing all the language and grammar rules are not suffice as when one communicates socio-cultural elements should be taken into consideration as well to produce speech and utterances that can be comprehended. Communicative competence hence is the balance of linguistic and socio-cultural understanding.

Characteristics and Principles of CLT

When communicative language teaching (CLT) was first developed in the 1970s, it was broadly seen as the response to the shortcomings of previous approaches and the communication needs of a globalized world (Littlewood, 2013). It is a shift from teacher centered approaches to a student-centered one in which communicative competence is given utmost importance. According to Brown (1994), it permits learners a sense of "ownership" of their learning which in return enhances their motivation (Chang, 2011). Learners, instead of relying on the teacher, take control and this state gives them a sense of accomplishment as they progress from one activity to another. The role of the learners in this approach is as the negotiator between the self, learning process and the object of learning. Learners are actively engaged in negotiating meaning by trying to make them understood and in understanding others during the lesson (Chang.M, 2011). The mentioned allows them to contribute and at the same time gain in an interdependent manner.

Teacher in this approach plays roles as a facilitator who facilitates the communication process between participants and also as the co-communicator who engages in communicative activities with the students (Freeman, 2007). Hence, it gives opportunity for learners to take charge of their own learning instead of being spoon-fed or excessively drilled. Since CLT is a movement away from traditional lesson formats where the focus was on mastery of different items of grammar and practice through controlled activities such as memorization of dialogs and drills, it encompasses the use of pair work activities, role plays, group work activities and project work (Richards, 2006). In CLT classes, accuracy and fluency are taken into consideration. However, the aim is still to build learner's fluency in the target language (Chang.M, 2011).

Teacher's Attitudes toward CLT

People hold a set of beliefs about something and these beliefs serve as the foundation that shapes their attitude towards something. Therefore, attitudes are deemed to hold an influence on behavior. With that mentioned, only promoting CLT and trying to convince teachers of its effectiveness cannot alter their existing beliefs about language learning and teaching Ngoc K.M, (2012) in his comparative study on Vietnamese learners' and teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of four factors: grammar instruction, error correction, group and pair work, and teachers' role found that both groups had favourable attitudes towards the approach. In addition, the teacher participants had shown more positive attitude than learners for all the mentioned factors. However, the researcher sustained that successful implementation of CLT also requires efforts from administrators, parents and society as a whole and not solely the teacher.

Similarly, in a study by Karim (2004) which investigated tertiary-level EFL teacher's attitudes towards CLT in Bangladesh, he found that most teachers showed positive attitudes towards the application of CLT. Plus, in his study he has stated that Bangladeshi EFL teachers have "reported practicing major communicative activities in their classes" (Karim, 2004).

Methodology

The main purpose of this study is to replicate Chang (2000) study and compare its results. Therefore, this study is to examine the attitudes of Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan's English lecturers' towards CLT and the rationales underlying their attitude towards CLT. Similar to Chang (2000) study, an explanatory mixed method research was conducted. The first-phase quantitative study investigated teachers' attitudes towards CLT while the second-phase qualitative study explored the reasons underlying the teachers' attitudes toward CLT. The two phases of the research occurred sequentially where the qualitative data were used to explain quantitative data (Creswell & Plana Clark, 2007)

The research questions for this study are:

1. What are the Politeknik English lecturers' overall attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching?
2. What are the reasons underlying the teachers' attitudes toward CLT?

Research Settings and Participants

During the research, the researcher first identified the institution that integrates CLT into the curriculum. The study was conducted in Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan located in Pasir Gudang, Johor. The sample consists of 15 English teachers who have at least 3 years of experience in teaching. Since Malaysian education system has adapted the CLT approach for many years, various different opinions can be derived from tertiary institution teachers.

Questionnaire

In an effort to understand language teachers' attitudes towards communicative approach, an attitude scale was developed as part of a large study (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). The questionnaire used in this study was taken from Chang's (2000) study which is an attitude scale to investigate the participants' attitudes toward principles of CLT. It was originally developed by Karavas-Doukas in 1996 with five-point scales in the Likert format.

The Interviews

Similar to Chang (2000) study, face to face interviews were conducted in order to investigate the complexities of the participants' perceptions and experiences. During the interviews, the researcher asked the interviewees predetermined, open-ended questions, but allowed flexibility concerning follow-up questions. 3 from 15 lecturers have agreed to be interviewed.

Analysis of Data

Findings on Survey

Demographic

Table 1: Demographic Data for Survey Participants

Participant	N	%	Gender
Male	3	20	
Female	12	80	
Age			
20-30	6	40	
30-40	8	54	
40-50	1	6	
50-60	0	0	
Teaching Experience			
1-5	7	47	
5-10	4	27	
10-15	3	20	
15>	1	6	
Highest Level of Education			
Degree	10	66	
Master	5	34	

The questionnaire aimed to understand the respondents' attitudes toward CLT. An attitude scale originally developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996) to investigate the lecturers' attitudes toward principles of CLT was given to 15 full-time English lecturers who agreed to participate in the study compared to Ming Chang's study where her respondents were teachers from Taiwanese College with a total of 54 participants. The participants were asked about their degree of agreement with the statements in the attitude scale and participants' background information. The researcher collected all 15 questionnaires from the lecturers who completed the questionnaires. The lecturers' overall attitude score was computed with the method used by Karavas-Doukas (1996). Most of the participants possess a degree in teaching English as a Second Language and the number of years teaching in the field are more than 3 years.

Table 2: Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses towards CLT (N = 15)

No	Item	SA	A	SD
1.	Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged	26%	33%	8%
2.	Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students	60%	33%	0%
3.	Grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end in itself	26%	54%	0%
4.	Since the learner comes to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of the language, he/she is in no position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her	7%	33%	20%
5.	Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is futile since learners are not used to such an approach	6%	48%	14%
6.	For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teacher's feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not the linguistic form of the students' response	33%	40%	0%
7.	The teacher as "authority" and "instructor" is no longer adequate to describe the teacher in the language classroom.	26%	40%	0%
8.	The learner-centered approach to language teaching encourages responsibility and self-discipline and allows each student to develop his/her full potential.	60%	40%	0%
9.	Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some control of their own learning. It is therefore an invaluable means of organizing classroom experiences	33%	66%	0%
11.	It is impossible in a large class to organize your teaching so as to suit the needs of all	46%	54%	0%
12.	Knowledge of the rules of a language does not guarantee ability to use the language	46%	40%	0%
13.	Group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time	6%	6%	34%
14.	Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.	0%	0%	7%
15.	The Communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners.	6%	60%	6%
16.	The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of the lesson.	33%	60%	0%
17.	By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker.	20%	46%	13%
18.	For most students language is acquired most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct or explicit way	26%	53%	7%
19.	The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing and example	60%	40%	0%
20.	Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them	13%	53%	0%
21.	Students do their best when taught as whole class by the teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but it can never replace sound formal instruction by a competent teacher.	13%	53%	0%
22.	Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor students' performance and prevent from using their mother tongue.	6%	20%	20%
23.	Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively.	13%	16%	7%

24	A textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students. must supplement the text book with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the students	40%	53%	7%
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In this study, the questionnaire was taken from Chang (2000) study which is developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996). From the questionnaire, it is apparent that majority of the teachers from Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan agree that the role of teacher in the classroom is the most prominent principle of CLT to be used in their classrooms. Item no 16, 19 and 24 shows high percentage where the teachers believe the role of teacher is not the traditional way but more towards facilitating the students to develop learner autonomy. One of the main factors of these high percentages on the view of the role of teachers in the classroom is that they believe in order to make the Communicative Language teaching method to become successful in the classroom, it is important the teacher must be involved in the activities which are going to be used in the classroom. The teacher helps students and facilitates them in order for them to understand and able to use the target language.

In addition, the role of students also shows high percentages especially in item 8, 18, 21. In these items, the English Language teacher of Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan believes the role of students in the classroom is one of the important things in the principle of Communicative Language Teaching. They believe that, learner autonomy should develop during CLT as it is the main principle. Students should play a big role in the class where they will do the activities in the class and engage in the lesson. By doing this, the level of understanding and proficiency of students on target language will be increased.

Discussion

Table 3: Teachers' Attitudes toward the five principles of CLT (N=15)

Principles	M	SD
Place/importance of grammar	2.73	3.87
Group/pair work	2.73	3.08
Quality and quantity of error correction	0.73	10.27
The role of the teacher in the classroom	2.81	4.15
The role and contribution of learners in the learning process	2.80	4.39

The items were grouped according to five subscales or in other word are the principles of CLT. The main focus of this questionnaire is to investigate the teachers' attitudes toward the five principles of CLT, the same descriptive statistics used by Chang (2000) were utilized to calculate the mean and standard deviation of each principle. In favourable items, the scale ranges from 5 to 1, with 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree". The unfavourable items were recoded, so the positive end of the scale was 5. That is, the closer the mean is to the value of 5, the more favourable the teachers' attitude. The results of the teachers' attitudes toward the five principles in the questionnaire are presented in Table 3.

With the range from 5 "strongly agree" to "1" strongly disagree", table 2 suggests that the teachers' as a group agreed with the five principles of CLT. Among the five principles, the principle with the highest mean was the role of the teacher (M=2.81) similar to Chang (2000) study. The second highest mean for this study was the role and contribution of learners in the learning process (M=2.80) however compared to Chang (2000) study, the second highest mean falls on the role of grammar followed by the role of learners. The third highest mean for this study refers to both importance of grammar and group work (M=2.73). Apparently, both studies produced the same result regarding quality and quantity of error correction as it indicated the lowest mean among the five principles. This may be due to the requirement of the institution which needs the lecturers to teach English using Outcome Base Education (OBE) and this approach falls under the CLT method.

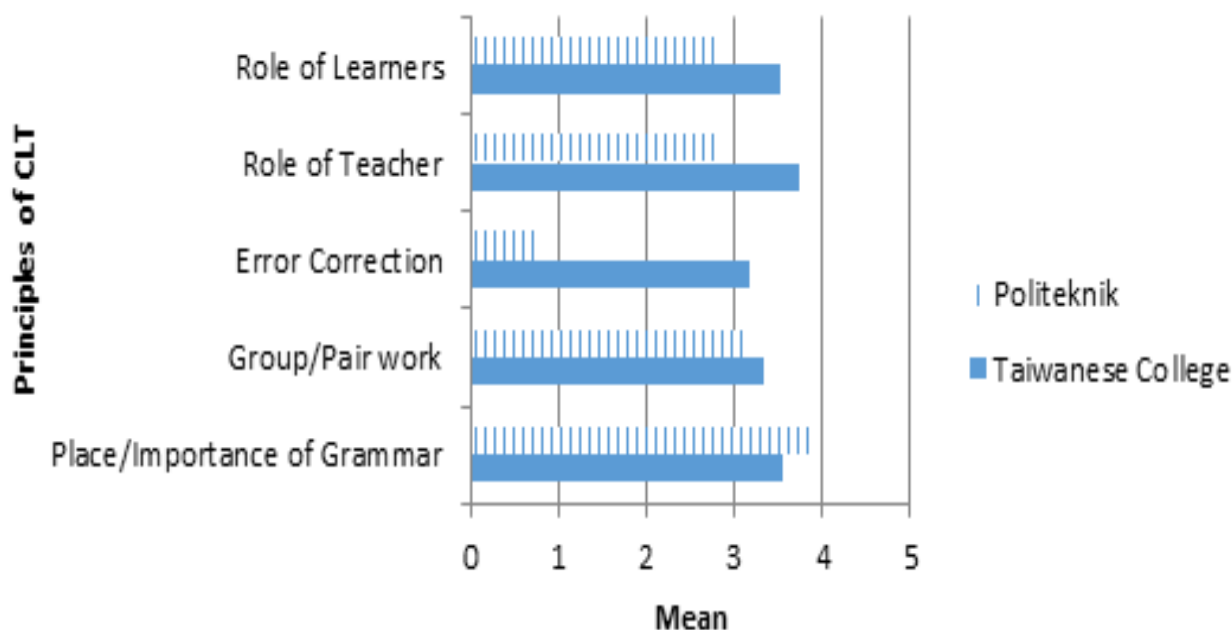


Figure 1: Mean Comparison between Politeknik and Taiwanese College

When comparing the results between these two institutions (Figure 1), it is apparent that quality and quantity of error correction is the least preferred principle. Based on the study, communicative courses emphasize more on the role of the teachers and learners during CLT. Error correction is used minimally because if it were used extensively throughout class especially during the students practice of communication, communicative breakdown may occur which can defeat the whole purpose of them developing their communicative skills. Freer speaking involves more choice, therefore more ambiguity, and less teacher intervention especially on quantity of error correction. The important aspect is for the students to communicate and deliver their message and to be understood by others.

Findings from Interview

Similar to Chang (2000) study, follow-up interviews were done. The interviewees further elaborated in their own words regarding their attitudes toward CLT. Based on the findings generated from the interviews, the reasons behind the interviewees' favorable attitudes toward CLT can be summarized as follows:

CLT pays attention to grammar

Based on the findings of this study, the English teachers of Politeknik Ibrahim Sultan support CLT because CLT is helpful to develop students' communicative competence. Based on the interview, they partially agree that CLT pays attention to grammar because most learning activities done in class (OBE oriented) are focused on building students' communicative ability and grammar rules is less emphasized. This is probably due to the English course syllabus of Politeknik where grammar has never been taught explicitly but should be incorporated in the learning activity. However, contrary to Chang (2000) study, the respondents believe that CLT pays attention to grammar as it serves as a basis for communication to take place efficiently. Nevertheless, teachers from both institutions did not exclude teaching grammar. The teachers' perceptions echo a number of researchers' claims that there is value in a communicative approach which involves grammar teaching (Fotos, 1998; Littlewood, 1974; Medgyes, 1986; Nunan, 2004; Nunan & Lamb, 1996; Savignon, 1997, 2001; Thompson, 1996). These studies indicated that communicative language teaching will not exclude the teaching grammar rules but there may be some limitations on implementing in the classroom.

CLT develops language abilities through use

Similar to the findings of the Chang's (2000) study, the interview indicated that teachers from both institutions are in favor of CLT because CLT focuses on the development of the students' abilities to use the target language. The teachers believed that it is essential to expose the students to the target language in order to acquire the language. To accomplish this goal, group or pair work activities are carried out to promote communication in the classrooms. Communicative activities can create authentic situations where communication takes place. They also believe that by implementing CLT in the classroom,

students can focus and improve their communicative skills.

CLT develops learner-autonomy in learning process

Drawn on the findings from the study, the teachers believed that CLT can help develop learner-autonomy. The teachers in this study addressed the importance of learner-autonomy in the language learning process. CLT enables learners become autonomous when they take charge of their own learning. Similar from the study that we carried out; teachers believe that learners need to know how to take charge of their own learning. This will boost their confidence in communicating with others while learning from peers with the assistance of the teachers.

Conclusion

Based on the comparison of this study and Chang (2000), it goes without saying that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method is the most preferred technique used by both institutions. Most of the respondents realized this technique as one of the most effective tool as it advocates teaching practices that develop learners' abilities to communicate in the second language. Further, CLT creates a non-threatening language environment that lowers the learners' anxiety and make class input comprehensible. In the classroom where CLT is applied, the students can develop their language as well as social skills when they work together with their group members to achieve a common goal.

Recommendations

Based on the study that have been conducted and Chang (2000), there are some recommendations that can be carried out in the future. First, this study is based on teachers' self-report. Future studies are recommended to examine how teacher's beliefs influence their practice towards CLT. Communicative Language teaching is well used and most preferred in this institution. Most of the respondents realized the used of this approach so it is really important to provide teachers extra courses where they can enhance their understanding and make full use of this methodology in their teaching and learning sessions.

A part from that, the syllabus of English Language Teaching in this institution needs to be revised in order to make it jive with Communicative Language Teaching. There are some aspects in the syllabus that needs the teacher to employ the traditional chalk and talk, where the teacher will do most of the talk and the students have to listen. The engagement on the lesson will not happen so the students learning might be ineffective. Finally, the teachers need to be proactive when implementing CLT because understanding their role as a facilitator is essential for CLT to take place in class. Providing extra activities related to CLT which will trigger students' interest to learn the target language. It is really crucial because using CLT, the involvement of students in the classroom activities will decide whether the lesson is successful or not.

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