



Using Communicative Language Teaching among English Teachers at A Senior High School in Riau

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and listening, to find out the teachers' understanding of CLT, and to identify any problems in the use of CLT in the teaching of English as a foreign language. The major findings showed that there was a broad use of most elements of CLT in the classrooms. Teachers were not yet able to conduct the production stage-communicative activities. They designed pair or group activities that reflect only parts of the practice stage in which activities are more controlled by the teachers than the learners. They recognized that their difficulties in adopting CLT is due to their unfamiliarity of the new concept of language teaching embedded in CLT and their limited proficiency in English. The main problem to using CLT was students' reaction and attitudes, specifically during pair and small group work. Other problems included students' lack of confidence in their speaking ability, embarrassment, and inability to express their opinion, ask questions, and be innovative during conversation practice.

Key words: CLT, Language Teaching, Language Learning

INTRODUCTION

In Indonesia, English language is a compulsory subject taught at secondary schools, *Sekolah Menengah Tingkat Pertama* and *Sekolah Menengah Tingkat Atas*. How English was chosen as the main foreign language taught in secondary school has a long history. During the period of the country's independence in 1945, education escaped the central government's attention, including foreign language education. In 1950, Indonesia's political situation was relatively more stable and steady and thus the government was also ready to choose a foreign language to be taught in schools.

In the Indonesian National Curriculum 2004 is clearly stated that

the English language teaching uses the communicative competence that is formulated by Celce-Murcia, Dornyei and Thurrell (1995). The latest English language curriculum's objectives of English instruction are as follows:

1. Communicative competence covers the skills of speaking, listening, writing and, reading.
2. Raise awareness of the importance of English as a foreign language as the main tools in learning.
3. Develop understanding of the interrelation between language and culture as well as widen the perspective of culture. It is hoped that the students would have good perspective of intercultural relationships and involve themselves

in multicultural community. (Depdiknas 2004)

Language teachers in the senior high schools seem not to apply effective approaches based on the Communicative Language Teaching or Communicative Approach.

The research questions are as follow:

1. How is CLT used by the teachers in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and listening?

2. What are the teachers' levels of understanding of CLT?
3. What are the problems faced by the teachers in using CLT?

Conceptual Framework: According to Locke, Spirduso and Silverman (1987), the conceptual frameworks are created based on the reviewed studies and the purpose of the study, and it “represents the most important single opportunity for the application of original thought”.

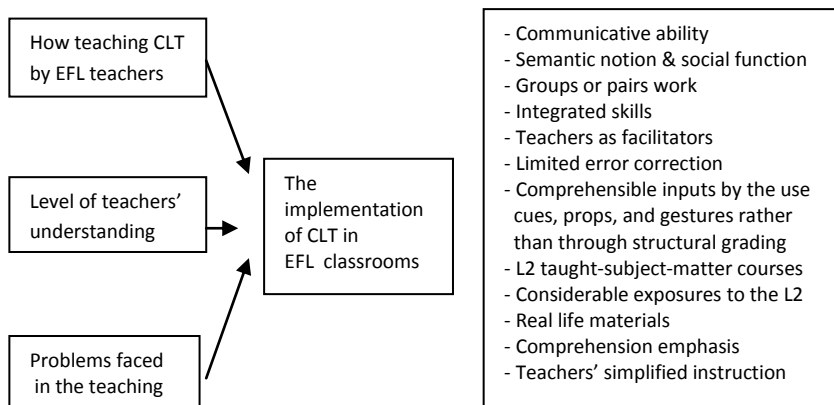


FIGURE 1.1 The conceptual framework of the study

METHOD

1. Participant

The participants of this study are English language teachers teaching at State Senior High Schools 1 (*Sekolah Menengah Atas Negeri 1, SMAN 1*) Pekanbaru, Riau, Indonesia. As the number of the English teachers is small, only 5 teachers, I do not have to select the population of this study. All English language teachers at this school became the focus of my research. Population in a research according to Frankel and Wallen (1996) is a group of persons (students, teachers, or other individuals) who possess certain characteristic.

2. Location and Time

This study is conducted to examine how CLT is implemented in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and listening, is used, find out the teachers' levels of understanding of CLT, to identify any problems in the use of CLT in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language in SMAN 1 Pekanbaru, Riau. The time of this study from February until March 2008.

3. Data Collection

In this study, researcher wanted to examine how CLT is implemented in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and listening, is used, find out the teachers'

levels of understanding of CLT and to identify any problems in the use of CLT in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language. To get the data for this study, three different instruments were elicited through the use of questionnaire, class observation and interviews on the teachers.

4. Procedures

According to Seliger and Shohamy (1989), data is often collected by means of procedures used simultaneously, within one piece of data leading to the next. The data of this study was collected through questionnaires, observation, and interview. The questionnaires were distributed to be filled in by the participants then followed up by class observation and in-depth, open-ended interviews. The interviews was tape-recorded and transcribed.

On February 25, 2008 the researcher began doing the study at the school. A briefing with the respondents (five English teachers) was held. The briefing was to explain about the study. The next thing to do was class observation. Only one respondent was observed. She was purposely chosen. The class observation was conducted on March 6, 2008 at Grade 12. The class observation lasted 90 minutes. After getting the data from the questionnaires and the class observation, an interview was done. One teacher was interviewed on March 12, 2008. The interview was conducted in *Bahasa Indonesia*. (I used *Bahasa Indonesia* here to avoid any misinterpretation on the questions given).

Best and Khan (1998) also affirm that interviews are the most effective way to gather information regarding an individual's experience and knowledge; his or her opinions,

beliefs, and feelings. Fontana and Frey (1994) maintain that interview can expose the understanding of an individual or a group perspective. Referring to Cohen and Manion (1994), there are four kinds of interviews that may be used specifically as research tools: the structured interview, the unstructured interview, the non-directive interview, and the focused interview.

Procedures of Data Analysis:

Verma and Mallick (1999) recommend that questionnaires and interviews for data collection can be used in the same study with different research approaches; qualitative and quantitative, as the object of questionnaires is to produce quantitative data, while interviews are normally used to obtain qualitative data. The data collection used through questionnaire in this study was analyzed qualitatively. Citing Brenner (1981), Verma and Mallick (1999) argue that the questionnaire providing that what are often called the 'hard data', and the interview making it possible to explore in great detail and in depth some particularly important aspects covered by the questionnaire (supplementary) or related topics which do not lend themselves to the questionnaire approach (complementary). The interview method also forms a significant part of the ethnographer's repertoire of investigative approach.

The data collected through questionnaires from the participants' responses is presented in a table, and the results of the data are drawn descriptively. The data collection through interviews about how the teachers of English implement CLT in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and listening, how is the teachers'

understanding of language teaching and learning which inform this approach, and the barriers the teachers face in implementing approaches to language teaching based on this approach, which are audio-taped, were transcribed and synthesized into coherent descriptions, identifying patterns which are common across the responses.

A. Findings and Discussions

This research presents’ findings from the questionnaires filled by the teachers, the class observation and interview conducted. All the instruments were used to get data from the respondents concerning with to how the teachers of English implement CLT in the teaching of English as a foreign language, specifically in speaking and

listening, the teachers’ of understanding of CLT and the problems faced by the teachers to the use of CLT. Besides the instrument also was used to get data about the respondents’ profiles.

1. Profiles of Respondents

The participants of this study were all English teachers of one Senior High School in Pekanbaru. There were five English teachers at the school-all women. The researcher took all five teachers as respondent as it was mentioned before.

To have complete picture of the five English teachers, their gender, educational background and teaching experience is shown in the following table:

TABLE 4.1: The Personal Background of Participants

Respondent	Gender	Educational Background	Program of Study	Name of University	No. of Year Teaching English
R 1	F	Bachelor Degree	English Language Teaching (ELT)	University of Riau	2 years
R2	F	Bachelor Degree	ELT	University of Riau	16+ years
R3	F	Bachelor Degree	ELT	University of Nomensen Medan	5 years
R4	F	Bachelor Degree	ELT	University of Nomensen Medan	16+ years
R5	F	Bachelor Degree	ELT	University of Riau	16+ years

2. The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching

To examine how teachers implement CLT in the teaching of English as a foreign language, statements directly pertaining to the features of the approach were used. Various statements about each element of the approach were devised to test consistency in response. The frequency of the answers on the Likert scale was calculated on a frequent basis. In the following analysis, item numbers from the second part of the questionnaire appear in subject heading. The analysis was also based on the class observation and the interview conducted to have data from the respondents.

Focus on Meaning: The first thing discussed in this part is focus on meaning. Emphasizing the conveyance of meaning in communication is a fundamental tenet of the CLT, and in this study some teachers are, in fact, valuing meaning. Five or all of the teachers indicated they use over 50 percent of class time on communicative activities. Furthermore, four of the teachers indicated that they do not spend a large part of the class period having students repeat phrases. Only one of the teachers was neutral to the use of repeating. Repeating is a rote memory exercise that is not part of CLT.

Emphasis on Grammar: Emphasis on grammar is one of the topics being explored from the respondents. The correct use of grammar increases understanding between participants and gives the listener the impression that the speaker is well educated. If, however, learners of English as a foreign language do not try to communicate meaning for fear of

using incorrect grammar, they will not be able to improve communicative skills. The tenet of using grammar to construct understandable utterances seems to be accepted and used by teachers at the school.

Students-centered Classroom: There are positive indications that some teachers are trying to be facilitators and have student-centered classrooms. Four of the teachers strongly agreed and one disagreed that their classes are more student-centered than teacher-centered. Having student-centered classrooms is also evident by the fact that all of the respondents strongly agreed that their main role in the classroom is to be a facilitator. All of the teachers noted that pair work and small group exercises are part of the classroom activities.

Pair and Small Group Activities: Pair work is not really as effective as it could be. With three teachers agreed and two were neutral to the statement *It is difficult to allow a great deal of time for pair and small group exercises because the students tend to not use the target language*. Clearly, there are obstacles to the smooth use of pair and small group use, as discussed in the hindrances section.

Role-play: When students role-play without a script, it can be a stimulating exercise for the learners. Because of the usefulness of role-play, it is fortunate that more teachers utilize it more. The greatest number of the teacher, four respondents, indicated agreed, and only one was neutral.

Authentic Materials: All of the teachers indicated that they use authentic materials when appropriate—two strongly agreed and two agreed. As one of the main elements of CLT, this is a positive indication that

elements of the approach are being used at SMAN 1 Pekanbaru.

Understanding the Target Language Culture: Presumably, these teachers believe that teaching cultural points along with the language is important. Three of the teachers agreed, one neutral and the other one disagreed that differences in culture inhibit the learning of second languages.

Pronunciation: Good pronunciation is important to being able to communicate. If learners are interrupted in the middle of an utterance or in the middle of an exchange, the natural flow of conversation is disrupted. If this occurs often, the joy of communication will be lost. When learners of a foreign language can make themselves understood in the target language, there is usually a sense of great accomplishment. This accomplishment gives learners the motivation to continue to try to improve communication.

3. Teachers' Understanding of CLT

The analysis below is also based on class observation and interview conducted.

All of the responding population of the teacher agreed to the statement, *Communicative competence is both linguistic knowledge and the skill in using this knowledge*. It is clear that teachers believe that in order to communicate, an individual must have not only a good understanding of grammar but also knowledge about when and how to use the grammar appropriate to the situation. When the teachers were asked if it was the first time they had heard of the term, "communicative approach", four of them strongly disagreed and one disagreed. All of the teachers indicated that they

understand CLT. When asked how they learned about CLT, three of them said it was from a course, two responded that they learned from other teachers. That is because the two are considered new teachers at the school. Regardless of whether or not the teachers have a complete understanding of the approach, the fact remains that many of the teachers use features of CLT. Furthermore, when the teachers were asked what approach, both in theory and in reality, is best for teaching a speaking class, CLT was chosen most frequently in both cases.

4. Analysis of Problems in the Use of CLT in the Teaching English

1. Analysis of Teachers' Problems

To determine some of the hindrances to CLT, statements asking for the teachers' opinions were used. The frequency of the answers to items on the Likert scale was calculated on a percent basis. In the following analysis, item numbers from the second part of the questionnaire appear in brackets after each subject heading.

1. Emphasis on Grammar
2. Oral Proficiency
3. Textbooks
4. Class Size
5. Proficiency Tests

2. Analysis of Students' Problems

To determine the students' Problems, the researcher used 5 components: 1. Pair and Small Groups, 2. Embarrassment, 3. Expression of Opinions, 4. Students Asking Questions, 5. Creating Conversations

Most of the tenets of CLT are supported. It is evident that the teachers believe that conveying

meaning is an important goal in teaching English. Teachers who are facilitators help students actively use the target language to convey meaning. All teachers strongly agreed that their role is as a facilitator. Furthermore, all teachers indicated that their class is more student-centered than teacher-centered, the teacher is just as a facilitator in the classroom. All of the teachers are emphasizing not only grammar but also communicative competence through the use of pairs and small groups. Authentic materials are being used, and cultural aspects of the target language are viewed as important in the learning process. There may be a tendency by two of the teachers to over-emphasize pronunciation, but this is not directly preventing CLT from being used. Role-play is utilized by the teachers as a great deal in their class.

As with any approach to teaching English as a foreign language, there are some aspects of CLT that work well and some that do not function as well as they could. Most of the Indonesian teachers of English feel they have adequate speaking ability. As this is the case, non "native speaking ability is not prohibiting CLT. The teachers, as a whole, did not indicate that CLT is limited by grammar instruction. Additionally, current textbooks and proficiency tests do not detract from CLT. The teachers indicated that class sizes are too large, but there is no determination that large class sizes are directly inhibiting the approach. Smaller class sizes would be helpful but barring that the teachers' choices of activities appropriate to large groups are important.

All teachers have ever heard CLT. Three teachers have learnt CLT from courses and the other two learnt it from the senior teachers. Regardless of whether or not the teachers have a complete understanding of the approach, the fact remains that many of the teachers use features of CLT. Furthermore, for teaching a speaking class both in theory and in reality, CLT is the best and it was chosen most frequently.

The largest challenge the teachers seem to face is the students' reactions and attitudes, specifically during pair and small group work. The teachers help the students learn, but the students also play large roles in the classroom. The students need to accept an active role in order for the classroom experience to be meaningful. The teachers believe that the students are embarrassed to make mistakes. Furthermore, the approach and pair and small group work are limited because students either do not have opinions or are unwilling to express them for fear of offending others or for fear of being considered wrong. The teachers perceive the first hear students to lack confidence in speaking English, which is another hindrance to pair work and to CLT. Finally, the teachers noted that students do not actively participate in class by asking questions and by creating new dialogues. This passivity is limiting the effectiveness of CLT. By helping students to overcome these problems, when possible, the teachers will increase the effectiveness of CLT-oriented classes.

CONCLUSION

There are countless well-known approaches, tasks and strategies that can be employed at different stages of lesson. No single method is the best way of teaching a foreign language. Varying the approach and the task is a feature of effective teaching (Cajkler and Addelman 2000). They see the phenomena nowadays that recent practice of English teaching has been dominated by communicative competence which put the emphasis on communication, seeking to engage learners in genuine use of the language in authentic situation. It is probably fair to say that applications these approaches (despite many disputes about the identity of communicative methods!) have led to greater enjoyment and motivation. Communicative approaches have offered ways forward in language teaching, though we do not wish to suggest that all classroom exercises and activities can and must be communicative.

This study actually addresses two main issues. Firstly, the study finds out the implementation of CLT in the teaching of English as a foreign language at SMAN 1 Pekanbaru, Riau, specifically in speaking and listening courses. On average, the teachers supported principles of CLT. Most of the elements of CLT are being utilized by a majority of the teachers. Role-playing, however, needs to be implemented more often by more teachers. Furthermore, a minority of the teachers has not implemented a few of the tenets of CLT, such as the use of pair and small group activities.

Secondly, the study discovers some of the hindrances to the use of CLT in these institutions. The awareness of problems is the first step to improvement. Although the teachers are not limiting the approach, the

teachers' perceptions of the students indicate that the students are hampering the effective use of the Communicative Approach. Of course, these students are not consciously attempting to do this. Unfortunately, several of these obstacles are based on cultural values, and they will be quite difficult to overcome. As motivation varies between students, the teachers must determine what motivates their students and use learning opportunities the students create. By doing so, the teachers can work to overcome obstacles, such as a lack of confidence and the fear of making mistakes, so that the students become more active participants in the learning process.

Different teachers have different experiences, and there is no definitive answer as to how to make CLT more effective in every situation. Furthermore, as human beings, nothing can be 100 percent effective. Teachers may need to persevere for a period of time before the students accept CLT, accepting the fact that their teaching will not be as smooth as might be desired. Perhaps more than anything else, adaptability to various groups of students is required to effectively use CLT.

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