



EFL Teachers' Attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) advocates teaching practices that develop learners' abilities to communicate in a second language. It represents a change of focus in language teaching from linguistic structure to learners' need for developing communication skills. In recent decades, many English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms have adopted CLT into their curricula. The study is motivated by the review of previous literature showing that although teachers' attitudes play a crucial role in revealing their thinking about CLT and their implementation of CLT in the classrooms, few studies have focused on teachers' attitudes toward CLT in a particular EFL setting, Taiwan. The study aimed at investigating Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT and the reasons behind attitudes the teachers held toward CLT.

An explanatory mixed method was used in the study. It was a two-phase research design, starting with quantitative data collection and analysis, followed by qualitative data collection and analysis. The qualitative phase was used to explain the results of the quantitative phase. The results of this study indicated that the teachers held favorable attitudes toward principles of CLT and displayed characteristics of CLT in their beliefs. Also, the results demonstrated that Taiwanese college English teachers believe CLT can make English teaching effective and meaningful.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Communicative Approach, EFL, Teachers' attitudes

Introduction

In recent decades, teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have been encouraged to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to help develop students' abilities to use English appropriately in context. CLT advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence

in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To improve students' abilities to use English in real contexts, CLT has been adopted in the settings of EFL colleges (Littlewood, 2007). However, the theories and practices of CLT have faced various challenges in many EFL contexts (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Takanashi, 2004; Yu, 2001).

It is clear that teachers' attitudes are important in their decision to implement CLT.

The reason for the mismatch between CLT theory and practice may be teachers' attitudes (Karavas-Doukas, 1995). Since teachers' attitudes reveal teachers' thinking about teaching language, the investigation of teachers' attitudes serves as a starting point to identify the possible contradictions between teachers' beliefs and CLT principles. Littlewood (1981) suggests that the idea of the communicative approach may conflict with EFL teachers' existing thoughts about teachers' roles and teaching methods. Thus, to implement the relatively new communicative approach in Taiwan, it is important to investigate Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT.

Literature Review

Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence was proposed by Hymes, who claimed that the study of human language should place humans in a social world. The definition of "communicative competence" is what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate in a speech community (Hymes, 1972). For example, in the real world, not only would a speaker produce a grammatical sentence, but he/she should consider the situation in which the sentences are used. According to Hymes (1972), competence should be viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses" (p. 13). That is, the concept of communicative competence involves knowledge of the language and the ability to use the knowledge in context.

Hymes (1972) proposed four sectors of communicative competence. First, "whether or not something is formally *possible*" refers to the notion

of grammatical competence. It is concerned with whether an utterance is grammatically correct. Second, “whether something is *feasible*” deals with its acceptability in addition to being grammatically possible. For example, some grammatical sentences cannot be part of competence because of the restricted ability of human information processing. Third, “whether something is *appropriate*” means that a sentence should be appropriate to the context in which it is used. Finally, “whether something is in fact *done*” implies that a sentence may be grammatically correct, feasible, appropriate in context, but have no probability of actually occurring (Hymes, 1972, p. 14).

Communicative competence is a complex notion that involves linguistic as well as sociocultural sectors. From proposed definitions, it can be concluded that communicative competence consists of knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and strategies to cope with for the use of language.

The Historical Background of CLT

The emergence of CLT occurred at the time when language teaching was looking for a change (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Due to the unsatisfactory traditional syllabus that failed to facilitate learners’ ability to use language for communication, linguists attempted to design a syllabus to achieve the communicative goals of language teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Wilkins’s (1976) notional syllabus had a significant impact on the development of CLT. To support the learners’ communicative needs, Wilkins (1976) included communication function in a notional syllabus. Notions refer to concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, and frequency. Communicative functions refer to language functions such as requests, denials, offers, and complaints (Wilkins, 1981). Based on the notional syllabus, a communication language syllabus consisting of situations, language activities, language functions, notions, and language form was developed. As a result, the design of foreign language syllabus focused on a learner-centered and communication-oriented language instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Characteristics and Principles of CLT

CLT has been popular and widespread in second and foreign language teaching. It highlights a radical change of the traditional structured teaching methods which have lived through history. Contrary to the teacher-centered approach, in which teachers are regarded as knowledge givers and learners as receivers, CLT reflects a more social relationship between the teacher and learner.

The learner-centered approach gives students a sense of “ownership” of their learning and enhances their motivation (Brown, 1994). CLT emphasizes the process of communication and leads learners to different roles from the traditional approach. The role of the learner is negotiator between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning. Learners are actively engaged in negotiating meaning by trying to make themselves understood and in understanding others within the classroom procedures and activities. In this way, they contribute as well as gain in an interdependent way (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Teachers take particular roles in the CLT approach. First, the teacher facilitates the communication process between all participants in the classroom. The teacher is also a co-communicator who engages in communicative activities with the students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In addition, the teacher acts as analyst, counselor, and group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Rather than emphasizing the explicit explanation of grammatical rules, CLT pays less attention to the overt presentation of grammar (Brown, 2007). However, CLT does not exclude grammar. CLT suggests that grammatical structure might be better understood “within various functional categories” (Brown, 2007, p. 242). In CLT classes, both accuracy and fluency should be taken into consideration in language teaching, but the aim is to build fluency. However, fluency should not be built at the expense of clear communication (Brown, 2007). During fluency-based activities, errors are considered natural and tolerable (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Conceptual Framework of Attitudes

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) propose a conceptual framework of attitude construct which consists of four categories: cognition, affect, conation, and behavior. In the framework, attitudes are a function of beliefs. In other words, beliefs have causal effects on attitudes. Typically, a person learns a number of beliefs about an object by direct observation or information from outside sources. People hold a set of beliefs about the object, and these beliefs serve as the basis that determines their attitudes. (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

In the framework, attitudes are viewed to have influence on behavior. Specifically, a person's attitude toward an object affects the person's intentions to perform behaviors relating to that object (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). However, the relation between attitude and behavior depends on particular conditions. That is, when the person thinks he/she has more resources and fewer obstacles, he/she is more likely to perform the behavior according to his/her intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Fishbein and Ajzen (1975) indicate that behavior can be determined by intentions; intentions are the results of overall attitude, and attitudes are a function of salient beliefs. However, these causal effects not only work in one direction. Performance can provide new information that changes beliefs, attitudes and intentions (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975).

Teachers' Attitudes toward CLT

Karava-Doukas (1996) suggests that the mismatch between the beliefs and practices may contribute to the neglect of examining teachers' attitudes before implementing any new approach. That is, only promoting the approach and trying to convince the teachers of the effectiveness of CLT does not successfully change the teachers' existing beliefs about language learning and teaching. Researchers (Mangubhai et al, 1998) investigated language teachers' attitudes toward CLT in Australia. The results showed that teachers held moderate attitudes towards five factors relating to CLT, role of grammar, group work, error correction, learner role, and teacher role. The highest scores fell in the area of learner role. This suggests that the teachers think that the learners can contribute to their own learning.

Similarly, in the study of Razmjoo and Riazi (2006), the teachers as a whole expressed positive attitudes toward the five principles of CLT. The teachers held strong views about CLT in the areas of grammar role and teacher role. Karim's (2004) survey study examined university-level EFL teacher's attitudes toward CLT in Bangladesh. The findings showed that most teachers displayed positive attitudes toward the basic principles of CLT. Also, the teachers were aware of the features of CLT and their perceptions of CLT corresponded with their reported CLT practice (Karim, 2004).

In Italy, Hawkey (2006) applied both survey and face-to-face interviews to investigate whether teachers agreed with the advantages of the communicative approach in language teaching. The teachers stated positive views about CLT such as "CLT improving learner motivation and interest", and "CLT improving communicative skills" (p. 247). In addition, teachers' interviews suggested that the teachers were motivated to use pair-work activities to meet the learners' communicative needs (Hawkey, 2006).

Liao (2003) investigated high school English teachers' attitudes toward CLT in China. The first-phase survey study reported most Chinese teachers are supportive of the implementation of CLT. The findings indicated that among 302 participants, 94% responded favorably toward CLT and were willing to practice it (Liao, 2003). In the second-phase interview study, four interviewees were selected from survey participants who displayed favorable attitudes toward CLT. The teachers expressed their agreement with CLT such as, "the teacher should take into account the students' need", and "the aim of the class is to enable students to communicate easily in real life situations" (p. 125).

Chang's (2000) survey study in Taiwan investigated 110 high school English teachers' attitudes toward CLT and their practice of CLT. The results showed that Taiwanese high school English teachers hold positive attitudes toward CLT. Moreover, the teachers who hold positive attitudes toward CLT tend to use more communicative activities in their classroom practice. Liao's (2003) case study investigated two high school teachers' attitudes toward CLT and their CLT practice. The results indicated that the teachers held strong beliefs and positive attitudes toward CLT. Their

favorable beliefs and attitudes led them to try out CLT in the classrooms and adopt CLT successfully.

These research findings indicate that many EFL teachers display favorable attitudes toward CLT and the teachers' views seem to shift to a more communicative paradigm. However, a number of studies point out the teachers' concerns about CLT. Hawkey (2006) reported that Italian teachers of English think some correction of grammar and lexis errors is necessary. Li's (2004) study of Chinese teachers' opinions at a tertiary level indicated that the teachers thought that learners must be given feedback when they produce L2 to modify their production. Since the students already knew how to negotiate meaning in their first language, what they needed to learn were words in order to use them in L2 (Li, 2004). The interview data in Carless's (2004) study revealed that some students used the simplest linguistic forms to complete the tasks. Burnaby and Sun (1989) reported that Chinese college students learn the knowledge of English for future jobs in China, such as reading technical articles or translation of documents (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). This view is confirmed by Tsai's (2007) study. Taiwanese teachers also thought that EFL students have no immediate need to communicate in English. On the other hand, they need grammar and reading skills in order to learn content knowledge.

Methodology

The main purpose of this study was to examine Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT and the rationales underlying their attitudes toward CLT. To achieve this purpose, an explanatory mixed method research was conducted. The first-phase quantitative study investigated teachers' attitudes toward 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 & Plano Clark, 2007).

The question guiding the first-phase quantitative study was:

What are Taiwanese college teachers' overall attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching?

The research question in the second-phase qualitative study was:

What are the reasons underlying the teachers' attitudes toward CLT?

Research Settings and Participants

In this first-phase survey study, the researcher first identified the universities in southern Taiwan that integrate CLT into the curriculum, and then took a random sample from these colleges and universities. The teachers in each school constituted a cluster; all the teachers in the selected schools constituted the sample. The first-phase quantitative study was conducted in two selected colleges in Southern Taiwan and the sample included fifty-five Taiwanese college English teachers.

The second-phase interviews aimed at explaining the first-phase quantitative results. Thus, the follow-up interview sample was selected from the population of the first-phase quantitative study. To learn the participants' in-depth thoughts and experiences, the researcher invited eight teachers to take part in the follow-up interviews. The interviewees were made up of eight teachers from the survey sample, four teachers from each university.

Questionnaire

An attitude scale was used 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 (See Appendix).

The interviews

Face-to-face, semi-structure 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.

Analysis of Data

Results of Research Question One

Research question one asked about Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT. An attitude scale originally developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996) to investigate EFL teachers' attitudes toward principles of CLT was

given to 55 full-time English teachers who agreed to participate in the study from two selected universities. The participants were asked about their degree of agreement with the statements in the attitude scale. During the survey, the researcher administered the questionnaires, which include the attitude scale and participants' background information, to each participant. The researcher collected 54 questionnaires from the teachers who completed the questionnaires. Only one questionnaire was not returned to the researcher. The teachers' overall attitude scores were computed with the method used by Karavas-Doukas (1996). Possible scores for the scale ranged from 120 to 24, with a neutral point of 72. According to Karavas-Doukas (1996), scores higher than 72 reflected favorable attitudes toward CLT. In this study, the participants' attitude scores ranged from 73 to 111, with a mean of 83.77, and a standard deviation of 7.86 (Table 2); therefore, it can be concluded that the participants, as a whole, hold a favorable attitude toward CLT.

Table 1
Demographic Data for Survey Participants (N=54)

Participant	<i>n</i>	%
Highest level of education		
Master degree	35	64.8
Doctoral degree	19	32.5
Major		
English literature	5	9.3
Linguistics	10	18.5
TESOL	27	50.0
Others	12	22.2
Years of teaching experience		
0- 5	14	25.9
6-10	12	22.2

11-15	11	20.4
16-20	9	16.7
21-25	8	14.8

Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of the Attitude Scores (N = 54)

	Min	Max	M	SD
Score	73.00	111.00	83.77	7.86

In the questionnaire developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996), the items were grouped according to five subscales, or principles of CLT (see Table 4.6). To investigate teachers' attitudes toward the five principles of CLT, descriptive statistics were utilized to calculate the mean and standard deviation of each principle. In favorable items, the scale ranges from 5 to 1, with 5 being "strongly agree" and 1 being "strongly disagree". The unfavorable 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 favorable the teachers' attitude. The results for the teachers' attitudes toward the five principles in the questionnaire are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Teachers' Attitudes toward the Five Principles of CLT (N = 54)

Principles	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Place/importance of grammar	3.55	.52
Group/pair work	3.32	.52
Quality and quantity of error correction	3.16	.47
The role of the teacher in the classroom	3.73	.53
The role and contribution of learners in the learning process	3.52	.48

With the range from 5 "strongly agree" to 1 "strongly disagree", Table 3

suggests that the teachers as a group agreed with the five principles of CLT. Among the five principles, the principle with highest mean was the role of the teacher ($M=3.73$), followed by the role of grammar ($M=3.55$), and the role of the learners ($M=3.52$). Error correction was indicated as the lowest mean among the five principles ($M=3.16$).

Results and Discussion of Research Question Two

In the follow-up interviews, 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:

1. CLT pays attention to both form and function

Based on the findings of this study, the teachers support CLT because it is helpful to develop the students' communicative competence as well as linguistic knowledge. The teachers' beliefs revealed that their teaching goal is to develop the students' communicative competence. Nevertheless, they did not exclude teaching grammar. For them, both linguistic form and communicative function are important because grammar serves as a basis for communication to take place efficiently. 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 does not mean the exclusion of teaching grammar rules.

2. CLT develops language abilities through use

The findings from the present study indicated that the teachers 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 designed to promote communication in the classrooms. Communicative activities can create authentic situations where communication takes place.

3. CLT takes into account the affective variables in language learning

Although the teachers reported CLT is effective in developing the

students' language skills, they took into account the affective as well as the cognitive aspect of second language learning. The findings in the study suggest that the teachers preferred CLT to traditional teaching methods because CLT creates a safe and engaged learning environment. More specifically, CLT not only enhances the learners' English proficiency, but creates a classroom atmosphere that encourages risk-taking and cooperative relationship in groups.

4. 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.

Conclusion

CLT represents the current trend of college English language education that aims to develop learners' communicative competence. Although teachers play a crucial role in preparing students to communicate effectively in various situations, few studies have focused on Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT. This study was motivated to investigate Taiwanese college teachers' attitudes toward CLT and their thinking and experiences regarding CLT practice. The findings reveal that teachers hold a favorable attitude toward CLT and display characteristics of CLT in their beliefs. Based on the teachers' teaching experience, the findings demonstrate that CLT can make English teaching meaningful and interesting.

The present study found that the teachers dislike using traditional grammar teaching that requires the students to memorize numerous grammar rules. Instead, the teachers stated that CLT assists the students to comprehend linguistic forms and use these rules for communication. From the teachers' perspective, communicative activities are helpful for the students to practice rules in meaningful contexts.

In addition, different from the grammar translation method focusing merely on reading skills, CLT considers four skills - listening, speaking, reading, and writing as integrated skills, which should not be taught

separately. CLT aims to develop students' communicative competence. To communicate effectively, the students are involved in different kinds of activities that require practicing various skills to understand their peers and make themselves understood by others.

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.

Finally, in CLT, both students and teachers play different roles than those in the traditional classrooms. Instead of waiting for the teacher to make decisions for them, students take the initiative and responsibility for their own learning. Instead of being spoon-fed by the teacher, the students can explore knowledge themselves and find their own answer.

This study recommends possible directions for future studies. First, the participants in the study are from two universities in southern Taiwan; thus, the results cannot be generalized to other educational contexts. Further studies may include teachers from universities from other EFL contexts. Additionally, teachers' attitudes are based on the teachers' self-report in the study. Future studies are recommended to examine teachers' CLT practice in more detail and to examine closely how teachers' attitudes towards CLT influence their practice of CLT.

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Appendix

Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses toward the Role of Grammar (N = 54)

Item	SA	A	U	D	SD
1. Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged.*	5 9.2%	28 51.9%	7 13.0%	12 22.2%	2 3.7%
2. Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students.	18 33.3%	34 63.0%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
3. Grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.	13 24.1%	33 61.1%	4 7.4%	4 7.4%	0 0.0%
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.*	5 9.2%	22 40.8%	5 9.2%	14 25.9%	8 14.9%
5. Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is futile since learners are not used to such an approach.*	10 18.5%	18 33.3%	7 13.0%	13 24.1%	6 11.1%
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.	11 20.4%	25 46.2%	8 14.8%	9 16.7%	1 1.9%
7. The teacher as "authority" and "instructor" is no longer adequate to describe the teacher's role in the language classroom.	12 22.2%	25 46.2%	9 16.7%	7 13.0%	1 1.9%
8. The learner-centered approach to language teaching encourages responsibility and self-discipline and allows each student to develop his/her full potential.	11 20.4%	33 61.1%	9 16.7%	1 1.9%	0 0.0%
9. Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some measure of control over their own learning. It is therefore an invaluable means of organizing classroom experiences.	7 13.0%	31 57.4%	6 11.1%	10 18.5%	0 0.0%
10. The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make. If errors are ignored, this will result in imperfect learning.*	7 13.0%	18 33.3%	8 14.8%	6 29.6%	5 9.3%
11. It is impossible in a large class of	6	20	10	15	3

students to organize your teaching so as to suit the needs of all.*	11.1%	37.0%	18.5%	27.8%	5.6%
12. Knowledge of the rules of a language does not guarantee ability to use the language.	14 25.9%	35 64.8%	2 3.7%	3 5.6%	0 0.00%
13. Group work activities take too long to organize and waste a lot of valuable teaching time.*	3 5.6%	23 42.6%	7 13.0%	19 35.2%	2 3.6%
14. Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.	4 7.4%	15 27.8%	8 14.8%	24 44.4%	3 5.6%
15. The Communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners.*	0 0.0%	17 31.5%	22 40.7%	14 25.9%	1 1.9%
16. The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of a lesson.	12 22.2%	34 63.0%	2 3.7%	6 11.1%	0 0.0%
17. By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker.*	6 11.1%	18 33.3%	11 20.4%	15 27.8%	4 7.4%
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.	6 11.1%	33 61.1%	13 24.1%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%
19. The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example. *	2 3.7%	19 35.2%	3 5.6%	28 51.8%	2 3.7%
20. Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them.	13 24.1%	30 55.5%	5 9.2%	3 5.6%	3 5.6%
21. Students do their best when taught as a 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.*	4 7.4%	19 35.2%	13 24.1%	13 24.1%	5 9.2%
22. Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue.*	5 9.2%	22 40.8%	6 11.1%	16 29.7%	5 9.2%
23. Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively.*	5 9.2%	20 37.0%	7 13.0%	21 38.9%	1 1.9%

24. A textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the students.	26 48.1%	25 46.3%	2 3.7%	0 0.0%	1 1.9%
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SA=Strongly Agree; A= Agree; U=Uncertain; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly

Disagree

Unfavorable statements are indicated by an asterisk (*)