

Factors Affecting the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College English Classes

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Abstract

Foreign language teaching in many Asian-Pacific countries in recent decades has shifted toward communicative-focused instruction. However, researchers have reported a gap between policy and practice. To incorporate teachers' voices in adopting the communicative approach in the curriculum, this study explores factors that promote or hinder EFL teachers' implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Taiwanese college English classes. The findings indicated that the factors that impacted implementation of CLT related to teachers, students, the educational system, and suitability of CLT in the local context. Also, certain situational constraints were found to hinder the implementation of CTL. The article provides practical recommendations for teachers, educators, and policy makers to further improve teacher training, curriculum design, and situational constraints to ensure success in implementing the CLT approach.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, EFL, Taiwanese college English teaching

1. 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' English abilities appropriately in context. This is due to the awareness of English being the most widely spoken language in the world and used in various areas such as technology, science, and business. To compensate for the limitations of the traditional language teaching methods, CLT has been introduced in EFL settings to improve students' abilities to use English in real contexts (Littlewood, 2007). CLT advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, the theories and practices of CLT have faced various challenges in EFL contexts (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Takahashi, 2004; Yu, 2001).

As in many EFL contexts, Taiwan has implemented the teacher-dominated educational model for centuries. To employ the relatively new communicative approach in Taiwanese colleges, it is important to investigate how CLT has been implemented in such educational settings. Few studies have been conducted on college teachers' opinions about factors influencing their practice of CLT in Taiwan. Thus, this study explores factors that promote or hinder Taiwanese college teachers' implementation of CLT, with the recommendation that their views be considered in decisions regarding the integration of CLT into Taiwanese college English education.

2. Literature Review

2.1 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 is a speaker expected to produce a grammatical sentence, but he/she should also consider the situation or context 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 entails 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, and appropriate in context, but have no probability of actually occurring (Hymes, 1972, p. 14). It may be concluded that communicative competence consists of knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and language strategies.

2.2 Definition of CLT

Although there is room for individual interpretation in terms of design and procedures, scholars agree that CLT started from a theory of communicative language use, and was extended into a design for instruction, materials, classroom techniques, teachers, and learners. The goal is to develop learners’ communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Brown (2007) offered four interconnected characteristics as a definition of CLT, which is assumed in this study:

- (1). Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
- (2). Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather, aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
- (3). Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
- (4). In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts (p. 241).

2.3 Characteristics and Principles of CLT

CLT has been popular and widespread in second and foreign language teaching. 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. This 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 roles different 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 (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Teachers also 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).

2.4 The Adoption of CLT in EFL Context

CLT has become widespread in English language teaching since its emergence in the 1970s. Besides its quick expansion in ESL contexts, CLT has been implemented in EFL contexts too. To increase the number of learners who are able to effectively communicate in English, national language education policies in EFL countries have moved towards CLT since the 1990s (Littlewood, 2007).

Traditionally, the teaching of EFL has focused on knowledge about the English language instead of the actual use of English for communication. Traditional approaches such as the Grammar Translation Method and the Audiolingual Method, commonly used for English teaching, were accepted then because few people had opportunities to use English for real communication in EFL contexts. However, because of rapidly growing international needs for business, travel, and technology, EFL learners now need to use English for communication purposes. The traditional approaches no longer serve the needs of EFL learners. Shih (1999) investigated English programs in Taiwanese universities and found the English courses had changed from traditional form-based to communication-based, with emphases on language functions and learners’ needs. Many universities offered courses that focused on integrated

English skills or specific topics. In addition to the general English courses offered to university freshmen, elective courses were also offered in the second, third, or fourth year to develop students' English proficiency (Chern, 2002).

3. The Study

3.1 Statement of the Problem

Even though national policies and school curricula shifted toward CLT in EFL contexts, researchers have pointed out a gap between policy and practice (Littlewood, 2007; Nunan, 2003). The implementation of CLT has encountered problems and resistance in EFL classrooms (Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Yu, 2001). Various research studies reported that instruction in EFL classrooms was still based on the traditional approach (Littlewood, 2007; Nunan, 2003; Savignon and Wang, 2003). The ideas of CLT are different from the educational values and traditions of many EFL settings (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998). In addition, situational factors such as large class sizes, test-oriented instruction, and students' low proficiency also influenced CLT practices. Even if the policies and curricula support the adoption of CLT, only the classroom teachers can decide what really happens in their classrooms. Thus, it is essential to learn the teachers' views regarding the implementation of CLT.

Researchers have also reported situational constraints in local contexts affecting teachers' success in implementing CLT. Various research studies showed that teachers usually used form-based instruction because they felt pressure to help students pass the exams (Karim, 2004; Li, 1998; Liao, 2003; Liao, 2006; Menking, 2001; Pacek, 1996; Tsai, 2007; Yu, 2001). In addition, the research findings suggest that teachers find it difficult to manage group work for large classes (Tsai, 2007; Li, 1998; Liao, 2003; Liao, 2006; Yu, 2001; Karim, 2004). There are also factors that arise from the teachers and the students. Some teachers are concerned about their non-native English proficiency. In some studies, Chinese teachers expressed difficulties in including cultural aspects into their classes because of lack of experience in an English speaking country (Liao, 2003; Yu, 2001). Students' resistance and low-English proficiency also deter teachers from using CLT (Chang, 1999; Li, 1998; Liao, 2003; Liao, 2006; Tsai, 2007; Yu, 2001). These situational factors may weaken the teachers' efforts to use CLT. Whether or not teachers face problems in implementing CLT in EFL settings, it is necessary to count their voices in the discussion. Specifically, since research on this aspect in Taiwanese college settings has been sparse, this study intends to fill that gap.

3.2 Research Questions

This study aimed to explore the factors that promote or hinder Taiwanese college teachers' implementation of CLT. The research questions were the following:

- (1). What factors promote the implementation of CLT by Taiwanese college English teachers?
- (2). What factors hinder the implementation of CLT by Taiwanese college English teachers?

3.3 Participants

The researchers conducted interviews with participants in order to collect qualitative data. The participants in this study were eight teachers from two universities in southern Taiwan that integrate CLT into the English curriculum.

3.4 Methodology

For the purpose of this study, the researchers conducted face-to-face, semi-structured interviews to investigate the participants' perceptions and experiences regarding the research questions. The interviews were conducted in Mandarin Chinese, which is the native language of the interviewees. During the interviews, Researcher 1 asked the interviewees predetermined, open-ended questions, allowing for flexibility in follow-up questions.

3.5 Data Collection

Two open ended questions were asked to investigate factors that promote or hinder the teachers' implementation of CLT. During the interviews, Researcher 1 listened to the interviewees' responses for clues to probe for additional information. The interviews were tape-recorded after obtaining the participants' permission. Each interview lasted 45-60 minutes. After the interviews, Researcher 1 translated and transcribed each interview into English. To ensure accuracy and reliability, the researchers asked each participant to review and approve the transcripts. Further, the translations were verified by two reviewers who are experts in translation from Chinese to English. Prior to data collection, the study was approved by the researchers' Institutional Review Board for the protection of human subjects and participants gave informed consent to participate in the study.

3.6 Data Analysis

The researchers employed thematic analyses to identify themes in the data. As Ezzy (2002) stated, coding is the process of "disassembling and reassembling the data" (p. 94); thus, the data were separated into small units of texts. Then, these units were rearranged through naming and categorizing to produce a new understanding of the data.

However, since “codes do not emerge from the data uninfluenced by preexisting theory” (Ezzy, 2002, p. 93), the researchers compared themes that emerged through data analysis with themes in related literature.

4. Results of the Study

4.1 Results of Research Question One

Research question one investigated factors that promote the implementation of CLT. The purpose of the interview questions was to discover the support that the teachers experienced in adopting CLT. Based on Li's (1998) factors influencing implementation of CLT, the data were divided into four categories: factors caused by 1) teachers, 2) students, 3) the educational system, and 4) CLT. The researchers reviewed the interview texts and developed the sub-level codes under the four subcategories. The codes, based on the interviewees' responses, were similar to themes from related literature. For example, “teacher factors” was found to be a theme promoting CLT practice. By carefully examining the interview transcripts, the researchers identified two subordinate themes: teachers' professional training and teachers' persistence. The sub-themes for the other themes such as “students”, “educational system”, and “CLT” were identified in the same way. In the following section, the factors affecting CLT practice are presented and supported by specific quotes from the interviewees. All quotes have been presented *verbatim*, with no editing in grammaticality or style.

I. Teacher factors

Regarding the factors that promote the implementation of CLT, the findings relating to teachers were identified as 1) teacher's professional training, and 2) teachers' persistence.

(1). Teachers' professional training

All eight interviewees addressed teachers' professional training as an important factor in promoting the implementation of CLT. Due to the adoption of CLT in English curricula in Taiwan, CLT workshops have been offered by the government and textbook publishers. The interviewees' institutions required them to attend teaching methodology conferences and workshops. The eight interviewees claimed that teachers' professional training helped them to understand the theoretical bases of CLT and apply appropriate teaching practices.

T6: I think workshops are helpful for the teachers to receive knowledge and improve their teaching. The workshops can introduce the theoretical base of CLT and provide research studies to support the theory. For example, the comparisons of students' individual work and group work can convince the teachers of the effectiveness of CLT. However, knowing the theory is one thing, applying it is another thing. The demonstrations on using CLT in real situations are also important. In addition to the demonstrations, the explanation and discussion of why and how to teach that way can be included to inspire the teachers.

Moreover, the interviewees stated that teachers can enhance their professional development by learning from other teachers. The teachers usually generate good teaching ideas by conferring with other teachers.

T8: For me, colleagues' support is very helpful to practice CLT. I also learned teaching skills from the experienced teachers when they shared lesson plans or classroom activities with me.

(2) Teachers' persistence

Four interviewees (T1, T2, T5, and T7) indicated that the teachers' persistence in practicing CLT has a positive effect on implementing CLT. The practice of CLT highly depends on the teachers' willingness to leave their comfort zone and risk trying the new teaching method.

T2: I think teachers' persistence is important to practice CLT. Like many English teachers, I learned CLT in graduate school in the Western countries. However, when I started teaching in Taiwan, I encountered difficulties to practice CLT. The classes are usually large and the students are passive. Sometimes I feel maybe I should go back to traditional teaching. However, I know it really depends on how much I want to try CLT... If the teachers think CLT is helpful for the students, they will spend time to prepare the classes and make an effort to use CLT.

II. Student Factors

In addition to the teachers, students were considered an important factor in the implementation of CLT, specifically, 1) students' willingness to participate in the class and 2) students' needs.

(1). Students' willingness to participate in the class

Three interviewees (T2, T4, and T8) stated that students' willingness to develop their communicative competence is essential for CLT practice. According to them, when students really want to improve their English abilities, they will try their best to understand their classmates and make themselves understood, and thereby participate enthusiastically.

T8: If the students really want to learn, they try to speak English instead of Chinese and participate in group discussions. On the other hand, when the students do not want to be involved in group work, CLT cannot be implemented...

(2) Students' need to use English for communication

Three interviewees (T2, T3, and T5) reported that students' need to use English encourages teachers' attempts to apply CLT. They stated that students' need to use English in real life increases their motivation to develop communicative competence.

T2: In the past, Taiwanese college students learned English for the purpose of reading textbooks written in English. However, today's college students have different needs. Through the internet, they have opportunities to practice English after class. For example, some of my students buy or sell things via internet. They need English to communicate with buyers or sellers from other countries. Other students chat with online friends from all over the world in English. The students discover how English can be used in real life situations. These situations increase their motivation in developing communicative competence in English.

III. Educational system factors

The third group of factors which impacts the teachers' implementation of CLT comes from the educational system: 1) school support and 2) appropriate curriculum.

(1).School support

Four interviewees (T1, T3, T6, and T8) commented that administrative support from the school facilitates the implementation of CLT. In a school where the development of students' communicative competence and critical thinking skills is encouraged, the implementation of CLT is supported.

T6: The educational system in which the students' grades on form-based exams are emphasized, CLT cannot be successfully implemented. However, current Taiwanese college English education highlights the development of the students' communicative abilities and critical thinking skills. It necessitates the use of CLT in English classes.

(2).Appropriate curriculum

Four interviewees (T1, T2, T4, and T7) indicated that it is essential to develop a school curriculum appropriate for CLT to implement it. To assist CLT practice, the English curriculum should emphasize not only reading and grammar, but also listening, speaking, writing, and communication skills in English.

T1: I think it is important for the university to design curriculum that promotes CLT. Since CLT develops not only students' reading but listening, speaking, and writing skills, the English curriculum should focus on the development of the students' four skills in English. In addition, to help the students use English in authentic situations, the school curriculum can include activities and events that promote CLT. The introduction of cultural events can increase the students' understanding about the social contexts in which English is used.

IV. CLT factors

According to the interviewees, to promote CLT in EFL settings where English is not commonly used outside the classrooms, it is essential to provide practical resources. Two conditions to promote CLT were suggested by the interviewees: 1) sufficient teaching resources and 2) modified exams.

(1). Sufficient teaching resources

All eight interviewees suggested that sufficient teaching resources can assist the use of CLT. According to them, EFL students have limited opportunities to speak English outside the classrooms. To expose the students to English, teaching aids such as authentic materials and language learning equipment in the classrooms should be provided. T4 specified,

T4:I think a good textbook is very helpful for me to use CLT textbook including teachers' manual that tells me how communicative activities can be used in each lesson and provides suggestions for extended activities really makes my job easier.

Moreover, T6 stated adequate teaching aids are important to create a communicative environment for the students.

T6: I think it is important to make teaching equipment available in the classrooms. The teaching equipments such as audio, video, computers, and internet are useful because the students need to receive enough input and produce output in the English class. Also, because the students seldom meet native speakers of English outside classrooms, internet can create opportunities for them to communicate with people from different parts of the world.

(2). Modified exams

The interviewees reported a lack of an adequate instrument to evaluate students' communicative competence, including grammar knowledge and communicative abilities. Three interviewees (T2, T5, and T8) indicated alternative options in addition to form-based written tests, to implement CLT.

T2: In Taiwan, exams orient teaching. In my opinion, if the exam includes communicative questions in addition to vocabulary and grammar, it will naturally lead the teachers to teach in a communicative way. That is, the teaching will focus on CLT if listening, speaking, and conversation are included in the tests.

4.2 Results of Research Question Two

The factors hindering the implementation of CLT were categorized into four subcategories: 1) teachers, 2) students, 3) educational system, and 4) CLT.

I. Teacher factors

The interviewees pointed out some difficulties which prevented them from applying CLT. Two major problems related to the teachers were 1) inadequate teacher training and 2) lack of knowledge and skills.

(1). Inadequate teacher training

The interviewees viewed inadequate teacher training as a factor that failed to assist them in implementing CLT. Of eight interviewees, seven learned CLT in graduate school while one learned CLT at a teachers' conference. All eight interviewees stated that they have attended CLT workshops in the past year. However, three interviewees (T1, T2, and T4) expressed that the workshops did not meet their needs; they believed that the focus of the workshops should be placed on practical applications of CLT rather than theory.

T1: To learn theory, I can study by myself. However, implementing CLT in the real classroom requires lots of experience. Thus, in the workshops, I hope to learn how to design lessons and how to teach the lessons with CLT.

T4 stated her concerns about the workshops which do not help her use CLT in different conditions.

T4: I have attended some workshops that focused on demonstrating activities. The participants in the workshop are all English teachers who have high English proficiency and are willing to participate in group work. Thus, they are able to develop good ideas and express their ideas. However, unlike the situations in the workshops, our students with limited English abilities are not able to do this in the classrooms. I think workshops should include discussion on how to apply CLT in different conditions so the teachers do not feel frustrated when they go back to their classrooms.

(2). Lack of knowledge and skills

Three interviewees (T1, T2, and T8) indicated that to practice CLT, teachers need English teaching knowledge and skills. They reported teachers' lack of such knowledge and skills deters their implementation of CLT.

T2: I think the teachers' knowledge and skills are important. Sometimes they may not have teaching skills to incorporate CLT. For example, Taiwanese students are usually quiet and used to wait for the teacher's call to answer questions. The teachers who are not aware of the importance of the students' cultural background feel frustrated in using CLT. As a result, they turn to traditional teaching method.

Additionally, T1 stated that the lack of teaching skills affects the effectiveness of CLT.

T1: To implement CLT effectively, the teachers need sufficient teaching skills. For example, the students cannot enhance English proficiency if the tasks are too easy or too difficult for them. Also, it is important for the teacher to make sure every student obtains opportunities to speak in groups. Without teaching skills, even though the students do many communicative activities, they acquire little skills that are really helpful for them.

II. Student factors

Another group of factors which impedes the implementation of CLT deals with students: 1) resistance to class participation and 2) low English proficiency.

(1). Resistance to class participation

Seven interviewees (T2, T3, T4, T5, T6, T7, and T8) named students' resistance to class participation as one of the main barriers they faced in implementing CLT.

T5: I think it is difficult to involve the students in class participation because they are passive. As you can see from the classroom arrangement in traditional classrooms, the teacher is supposed to be in the front to lecture and the students sit quietly and follow the teacher's directions.

In addition, the interviewees acknowledged students' prior classroom experiences resulting from a

teacher-dominated approach.

T6: In Taiwan, our students experience more teacher-centered approach than student-centered approach before they start college. In traditional teacher-centered classrooms, the students are not encouraged to express their own opinions or challenge the teacher. For example, the students usually say “someone said” rather than “I think” in order to avoid making mistakes.

(2). Low English proficiency

Three interviewees (T2, T3, and T4) considered students’ low English proficiency to be one of the constraints to effective CLT practice. They agreed that CLT is more appropriate for high English proficiency students than low English proficiency students. Most of the interviewees’ students demonstrate adequate English proficiency to participate in communicative activities. Nevertheless, there are still some students in each class who have limited English structures and vocabulary to be involved in communicative activities. The teachers found it challenging to implement communicative activities with these students.

T4: They have difficulties to understand the teacher or the classmates’ English. It is hard for them to express their ideas in English... When they speak English, they are afraid that people will make fun of them. They feel embarrassed and shy. Gradually, they lose motivation in trying to speak English. During group work, they tend to depend on their high proficiency peers. It is challenging to encourage them to speak English.

III. Educational system factors

The third group of factors that hinders the implementation of CLT related to the educational system in Taiwan. Three major constraints were identified: 1) test-oriented teaching, 2) large classes, and 3) limited teaching hours.

(1). Test-oriented teaching

Six interviewees (T1, T2, T4, T6, T7, and T8) reported that test-oriented teaching has been one of constraints in practicing CLT. In recent years, Taiwanese college students are required to pass English tests, which are seen as an important qualification for job hunting, in order to graduate from college. The interviewees stated that the requirement of passing such exams leads students to study for grades. They are unwilling to be involved in communicative tasks which are not included in the tests. The teachers were also concerned about the fact that practicing CLT does not necessarily help the students to prepare for such exams.

T1: In high school, the students were trained to obtain better grades in order to enter a good college. However, in college, they are required to pass another exam in order to get a good job. The students study for grades because they are told grades are important. Also, in our culture, people believe the teachers who can raise the students’ grades are good teachers. Although CLT can help the students’ long-term English development, it cannot increase the students’ grades in a short time.

(2). Large classes

Five interviewees (T2, T3, T5, T6, and T8) referred to large classes as one of the obstacles to practicing CLT. The interviewees mentioned that it is challenging to use CLT in the classroom with more than 50 students because they have to give every student opportunities to practice English. Also, it is more difficult to monitor classroom activities in large classes than small classes. The following concern is common:

T2: In a large class, it is hard for me to monitor all the students and offer advice to each of them during communicative activities. For example, in the class more than fifty students, the class will probably be divided into more than ten groups, it will take the teacher more time to walk around and answer the students’ questions in each group.

(3). Limited teaching hours

Three interviewees (T1, T2, and T8) identified limited teaching hours as a limitation to apply CLT. In Taiwan, a college English class usually meets for three to four hours per week. The interviewees expressed that they do not have enough time to complete communicative tasks because they have to keep up with a teaching schedule. According to the interviewees, preparing the students for communicative tasks and involving them in group discussions takes time. The following comments were extracted from T1 and T2.

T1: CLT activities are time consuming. I am afraid of falling behind the schedule when I do communicative activities in the class. I have pressure to cover the content and prepare the students for midterm and final exams.

T2: Preparing the students for communicative tasks takes time because they were not accustomed to these kinds of activities such as cooperative learning and problem-solving tasks. It always takes me some time to explain why we do the group work and how to do it. Based on my experience, four hours per week is not enough for CLT.

IV. CLT factors

The fourth group of factors that hinders the implementation of CLT relates to CLT itself. Since CLT was developed in ESL settings where English is used outside classrooms, the teachers struggled to adopt CLT in EFL environments where English is used only in the classrooms. In addition, the teachers were concerned about how to evaluate the students' communicative competence. The problems the teachers faced include 1) lack of English environment and 2) lack of efficient assessment instruments.

(1).Lack of English environment

Five interviewees (T2, T3, T4, T6, and T7) identified the lack of English environment as one of the limitations to practice CLT. Unlike ESL environments where English is used outside the classrooms, English is learned as a school subject in EFL situations such as Taiwan. There is a lack of supportive learning environment outside classrooms for CLT practice. The following comment illustrated the point:

T7: In ESL situations, students have many opportunities to practice English outside classrooms, which can enhance the students' English proficiency. Also, the need for English to survive in the students' daily life increases their motivation to learn English. However, in EFL situations such as Taiwan, the only place the students speak English is in the classrooms. When the students leave the classrooms, there is little chance for them to meet native speakers of English. Thus, the lack of chance to practice English outside classrooms is a disadvantage for EFL students.

(2).Lack of efficient assessment instruments

Three interviewees (T1, T2, and T8) stated the lack of efficient assessment instruments as a barrier to using CLT. There has been an uncertainty about how to evaluate students' communicative competence since CLT was applied in English teaching. Unlike the form-based written tests, the assessment of CLT involves students' spoken communication. Since there is no ready-made tool for speech assessment easily available, the interviewees think it is challenging to evaluate the students' production. Teacher 1 considered a lack of effective and efficient tools to evaluate the students' performance an obstacle for teachers implementing CLT.

T1: It is challenging to develop assessment instrument to evaluate the students' oral performance. I have to use the same criteria to every student. Sometimes I feel the use of standardized written-tests is objective because the development of an unbiased instrument to evaluate the students' communicative competence is not easy.

In summary, based on interviewees' reports, factors promoting teachers' implementation of CLT in Taiwanese college English classes were identified, in frequency order, as : teachers' professional training; sufficient resources; teacher's persistence; school support; appropriate curriculum; students' willingness to participate in the class; students' need to use English for communication; and modified exams. Additionally, factors hindering the implementation of CLT were students' resistance to class participation; text-oriented exams; large classes; lack of environment; inadequate teacher training; students' low English proficiency; limited teaching hours; lack of efficient assessment instruments; and teachers' lack of knowledge and skills.

5. Research Findings and Discussion

The interviewees reported that the factors that impacted their implementation of CLT related to the teachers, the students, the educational system, and CLT itself. First, the interviewees indicated that teachers play a crucial role in practicing CLT. They stated that teacher's professional training can provide knowledge about CLT, help the teachers overcome difficulties they encounter in the classrooms, and encourage the teachers to keep experimenting with CLT. On the contrary, the teachers who did not receive adequate training may have limited knowledge and teaching skills to practice CLT. These findings support previous studies, which indicated that teacher training is one of the most important factors influencing the practice of CLT (Li, 1998; Liao, 2003, Tsai, 2007).

Second, the practice of CLT involves not only teachers, but also students. The students' willingness and motivation to use English in the classroom can have a positive impact on teachers' CLT practice. However, students' resistance and low-English proficiency weaken the teachers' efforts to use CLT. These results echo those from previous studies (Li, 1998; Liao, 2003; Tsai, 2007), which indicated that teachers found it difficult to conduct communicative activities with students who have limited English proficiency or resist participating in group work. The results seem to suggest that teachers need training in how to motivate and involve low-proficiency students by using simple language or visual aids. In addition, the teachers in the interviews reported another explanation for the students' unwillingness to participate. They pointed out that Taiwanese students are afraid of expressing their ideas in public and are trained to follow the teacher. This reveals specific cultural and educational values that prevent the teachers from practicing CLT. The findings suggest that it is important to consider the differences between Taiwanese and Western cultures when applying CLT in EFL settings such as Taiwan.

Third, school support encourages teachers to implement CLT while exam-oriented teaching, limited teaching hours, and large classes impede the teachers' practicing CLT effectively. The results of this study suggest that teachers need

administrative support to overcome these classroom constraints. Teachers will have more time to conduct communicative activities if class size is reduced, instructional hours are increased, or students' performance is not evaluated by exams. However, as suggested by the interviewees, when these conditions are not feasible as in the current educational system, the school can help the teachers by designing appropriate curricula which increase students' opportunities to practice English. The school can also promote CLT by building a school atmosphere that values students' communicative competence and critical thinking skills.

Finally, to make CLT appropriate in the local environment in which students have few opportunities to practice English, sufficient teaching resources should be provided. Teachers in this study indicated that the different environment between ESL and EFL does not mean CLT is not feasible. To make CLT suitable in Taiwan, the teachers should be provided sufficient teaching resources such as appropriate curricula, textbooks, authentic materials, professional training, and teaching equipment. Further, institutions can modify form-based exams to include elements to evaluate students' communicative competence.

Implications and Conclusions

The study provides both theoretical and practical implications for teachers, educators, and policy-makers to implement CLT in Taiwanese college English education settings.

First and foremost, the findings of the study suggest a need to offer adequate in-service training for teachers to practice CLT. As pointed out by the participants of the study, qualified teachers should have knowledge and skills to practice CLT. In addition, most of the participants stated that training in applied practices, rather than lectures and theories, was more beneficial to them. Furthermore, some of the participants reported that colleagues' support helped them to generate useful teaching ideas. Thus, as suggested by Fang (1996), rather than simply providing teachers with more theoretical knowledge, educators should assist teachers to "understand how to cope with the complexities of classroom life and how to apply theory with the constraints imposed by those realities" (p. 59).

Second, based on the insights drawn from the study, the researchers suggest considering the local culture in applying CLT in Taiwanese colleges. Typically, Taiwanese students are bashful in expressing their ideas in public because they do not have confidence in their English speaking skills. In teacher-centered classrooms, Taiwanese students do not have opportunity to speak English and are required to wait for the teachers' call to answer questions. The finding suggests a need for the teachers to understand and accommodate the differences between Taiwanese and Western cultures when engaging students in communicative activities.

Third, the findings of the study suggest a need for Taiwanese students, teachers, school administrators, and parents to adjust their educational values if CLT is to be implemented. Rather than focusing on the form-based approach which aims at developing test-taking skills, Students' communicative competence should be encouraged and developed.

Finally, the implementation of CLT involves not only the teacher's effort, but recognition of the teacher's voice and incorporating it into educational practices and policies. Some practical recommendations in relation to classroom constraints are listed below.

- (1). Smaller class sizes facilitate group work. However, when it is not feasible, teachers should be provided teaching techniques for class management, such as training in cooperative learning structures to engage students in group discussions.
- (2). Teachers and administrators should create an English environment in the school to increase students' opportunities to practice English.
- (3). Students should be grouped by proficiency levels in English classes. Correspondingly, teachers should be trained in teaching techniques for differentiated learning.
- (4). Form-based exams should be modified in order to evaluate students' communicative competence. Such exams should assess not only grammar and vocabulary but listening, speaking, conversation, and writing skills as well.

In conclusion, CLT is an emerging teaching method in college English classes in Taiwan. Despite certain limitations and hindrances to the optimal implementation of CLT in Taiwan, teachers are cognizant of its benefits to students wishing to improve their English skills, and are supportive of institutional efforts to facilitate the implementation of CLT.

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