

Teachers' Needs in the Advancement of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Taiwan

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Abstract

English language education in Taiwan has experienced a number of modifications over the past decade. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has initiated several reforms since 1994 to change the historical grammar-translation pedagogy into one emphasizing more communication. The purpose of these alterations was to increase learners' communication proficiency, so they could meet the new demands resulting from increased internationalization and globalization. Previous studies regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in many other EFL (English as a foreign language) settings and Taiwan have shown promising results, yet the process of implementing CLT has often been challenging. Many factors, such as large class sizes and parents' negative attitudes toward CLT, have been found to negatively influence teachers' willingness to implement CLT. Using a multi-methodological approach of quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews, this study aims to examine teachers' needs for better communication-oriented practices in the classrooms of Taiwan. In total, 75 teachers were surveyed. Based on their degree of willingness to participate, 15 of them were further contacted for more in-depth interviews. The findings of the study revealed that to make CLT more applicable, teachers demanded in-service training and assistance from native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). In addition, students' and parents' re-education to value the development of communication proficiency, and to gain more knowledge about CLT, and the support from school authorities, were considered crucial.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, CLT, multi-methodological approach, learning motivation, communicative competence

Introduction

In order to meet the demands of the fast-growing global economy, to recognize the status of English as an international communication tool, and to increase the number of people who can communicate effectively in English, many countries in Asia have reformed their English language education in the past two decades (Littlewood, 2007). New English syllabi aimed at "teaching English for effective and appropriate communication" have been released regularly in Singapore (Zhang, 2006). The MOE in Hong Kong introduced a policy of trilingualism (English, Cantonese, and Chinese), which emphasizes the development of oral proficiency (Law, 2003). English has been used as the medium for instruction at schools led by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) pedagogy was first introduced in the sixth curriculum (Yoon, 2004), and further reformed in the seventh curriculum in South Korea in 1997 to initiate new English education. It was promoted as a compulsory subject in every primary school. CLT was utilized in order to

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enhance students' interest in English communication (Jung & Norton, 2002). The CLT movement started in Japan in 1985, and has since then been maintained. Educational movements highlighting "practical English" were generated to develop learners' oral-aural communication ability in order to make them the functional users rather than knowledge accumulators (Aliponga et al., 2013; Bulter & Lino, 2005; Ohashi, 2015). Globalization has also been the driving force for the education reforms in China (Chang, 2006; Cheng, 1988; Garbe & Mahon, 1981; Hu, 2005; Hui, 2001; Zhu, 2003). Despite the resistance after the implementation of CLT at undergraduate and high schools, the State Education Development Commission in China authorized and issued three major English-reformed syllabi in 1992, 1993, and 1996 respectively to enforce the cultivation of communicative competence (CC) starting at the secondary level (Liao, 2004). The ambition was advanced in 2001 through the application of task-based instruction starting from the third grade (Hu, 2005; Hui, 2001). These communication reforms reached Taiwan from 1994 to 1995 when a new curriculum for junior and high schools was published with a clear objective asserting that "communication-orientedness was the principle of high school textbook compilation and classroom instruction" (Wang, 2002, p. 135). New textbooks featuring communicative activities have been used since 1999. English language learning was further lowered to the third grade in 2004 with the suggestion of an English-only policy and the adoption of "active and interactive" models via various teaching genres, realia, and other materials from diverse topics (Ministry of Education, 2014). With the pervasive implementation of CLT in the EFL context, future difficulties and alienation were first anticipated, especially among teachers. Therefore, a thorough and critical investigation on their current needs and interests will help alleviate this often chaotic atmosphere and better their CLT practices in the future. It is precisely this research gap that this study aims to fulfill.

It Matters to Communicate

The great debate of the constituents of communicative competence has been ongoing in the literature regarding second/foreign language (L2) education (Berns, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Omaggio, 2001, Savignon, 1983). Such debate reveals the significance of communicative competence and its development using authentic CLT activities, which encourage learners' maximum communication in many different contexts (Wu, 2008). When engaging in CLT activities, learners learn by doing and testing each other's perceptions through interaction in a positive and non-threatening environment. They acquire the meaning and knowledge on their own (Hendrickson, 1991), and gain grammatical/sociolinguist/discourse/strategic competencies (Pokoma & Vasylieva, 2014). Ideas or concepts of the activities that matter to learners increase their motivation and of involvement. Simply having the knowledge of a language is not enough. Only through meaningful negotiations can students become efficient learners and administer what they have learned (Allwright, 1984; Antón, 1999; Englander, 2002; Oxford, 1997; Rao, 1996). Zhang (2006) confirmed that the ultimately successful language learning experiences were created through interactive and meaningful communication. Including communicative competence as one of his teaching principles, Brown (2007) has also argued that it is the "goal" of language classrooms and should be achieved by constant and extensive language use. Likewise, Littlewood (1981) summarized several contributions that CLT activities make. They provide learners with whole-task practices, which are structured to suit learners' ability levels and to help maintain (or enhance) learning motivation. Learners' motivation is more likely to continue (or even increase) if seeing how and what they have learned is successfully employed in communication with others. The more effective in communicating with others, the higher the motivation will be maintained, or it can even be enhanced. In addition, CLT activities allow natural learning. Much language learning takes place through natural processes when real communication is achieved, thus making either inside- or outside-communicative activities a key portion of the total learning process. Positive relationships are fostered when completing CLT activities, thus humanizing the classroom by turning it into a learning-supportive context (Chang, 2011a). Joyful atmospheres among teachers and students are produced, which consequently sustains students' efforts to learn.

CLT Practices and Resistance in Classrooms

The emergence of CLT in the 1970s, and the prosperity of western countries (for example the USA and the UK) in general, made more innovative teaching techniques available, such as content-based instruction, task-based teaching, and problem-based learning (Richards, 2006; Spada, 2007). Despite its wide acceptance, its sequential introduction into an eastern context has led to widespread dissatisfaction and resistance in many EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts (Ahmad & Rao, 2012; Barkhuizen, 1998; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1997; Hu, 2002; Kumar & Kainth, 2015; Li, 1998; Lo, 2001; Shamim, 1996; Yu, 2001). In this context, cultural differences were often mentioned as problematic. As Ellis (1996) pointed out, process and meaning are what CLT emphasizes while content and forms are highly valued in EFL classrooms. The distinctive learning motivation held by learners is another reason. ESL (English as a second language) learners have an urgent need to communicate because of the existence of an English-speaking community beyond the classroom; in contrast, EFL learners lack such urgency. Often, English is merely a compulsory school subject or a “maybe” useful tool for job-hunting in the future (Sreehari, 2012). Echoing Ellis’s viewpoint, Lo (2001) asserts that many EFL practitioners, despite receiving a master’s or doctoral degree in the fields of language instruction in English-speaking countries, found it difficult to carry out ESL-based theories (CLT included) after returning to their home countries due to sociocultural variances. Littlewood’s (2007) review of several published papers has also revealed that factors associating with classroom management, students’ avoidance of English, minimal demands on English competence, and conflicts with educational values and traditions, have possibly constrained CLT in many Asian countries.

In Vietnam, Pham’s (2005, 2007) interviews with teachers found that there exist contextual conflicts, such as large class sizes, traditional examinations, personal beliefs of teachers’ and students’ roles (Iwashita & Ngoc, 2012), and students’ low motivation. Moreover, Zhang (2006) notes that the consequence of applying CLT marginalized grammar teaching, leading to failure in achieving the target outcome of teaching reading and writing in Singapore. In Thailand, Saengboon (2002) has confirmed that school administrative policy might sometimes impede CLT by grouping a large number of students (up to 100) with heterogeneous levels of English proficiency in class. Teachers were forced to use non-CLT-based textbooks to teach for tests.

Regarding South Korea, Jung and Norton’s (2002) observation suggests that many teachers complained that materials development and large class sizes functioned as a hindrance to CLT activities. Similarly, Li’s (1998) survey reveals that many constraints, caused by teachers themselves (deficiency in spoken English, low strategic and sociolinguistic competence, lack of training in CLT, few CLT re-training opportunities, misconceptions about CLT, insufficient time, and no expertise in CLT material development), by students (low English proficiency and motivation to advance communicative competence), by the educational system (large class sizes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding, and a lack of support from schools), and by CLT per se (CLT’s inadequate account of EFL teaching and a lack of effective and efficient evaluating instruments), negatively impact CLT (Kleinsasser & Sato, 1999; Sato, 2002). With regards to Japan, Kubota (2002) has revealed an unwelcome attitude held by teachers at public secondary schools toward NESTs. They, in effect, regarded CLT as a virus impeding students from intellectual and cultural virtue development.

In China, Burnaby and Sun’s (2007) study has suggested that many teachers believed that CLT is mainly applicable to those students that major in English. Zhu (2003) observed that Chinese students were strongly influenced by Confucian concepts. They were trained to be obedient, but not to challenge authority. Consequently, they tended to keep their opinions to themselves, and passively hid their ability as knowledge-receivers. Hu (2002) also noted that CLT tenets contradict Chinese culture in terms of their embodiment of opposite teaching philosophies. It advocated interactiveness, learner-centeredness, verbal activeness, independence, and individuality; whereas Chinese learning cultures asserted ancient epistemology, teacher dominance, mental activeness, receptiveness, and conformity. Likewise, Aldred and Miller’s (2000) investigation has pointed out that the active roles that learners play in CLT classrooms contradict the socio-cultural traditions of Hong Kong where students are supposed to be silent and avoid making mistakes by not raising their hands to ask or answer questions.

English is a compulsory subject and the only foreign language that is tested for all kinds of entrance examinations in Taiwan (Ho, 1998). Despite the importance of English and the popularity of CLT in classrooms,

due to insufficient and inadequate channels for CLT-related training (Chang, 2011b), and access to authentic materials (Kuo, 1995), low support from school administrators, and parents' demands for good test results and standardized answers to check their children's learning outcomes (Su, 2006), Wang (2002) observes that many Taiwanese EFL teachers tended to neglect the communicative activities compiled in the reformed-CLT textbooks. Instead, they tended to favor the traditional grammar translation method (GTM) for convenient and immediate learning outcomes, leading to learners' inclination toward memorization, grammar, reading, composition, and translation (Chen, 2001; Chung & Huang, 2009). Some parents even believed that the best teachers were the ones who had taught their children to score high on tests, instead of helping them gain valuable communication skills. Instilled education values and beliefs also play an important part. Many Taiwanese students are educated to maintain a more listener-centered standpoint within communication (Liu, 2005). A call-upon for opinion in class was beyond their expectation, and this could often result in a communication shut-down between teachers and learners (Babcock, 1993). Learning assessment was another problem. Much emphasis was still placed on the evaluation of written skills via standardized discrete-point tests (Wang, 2010). Thus, the development of new assessing techniques such as a portfolio or teacher's observation and recording of a learner's performance was obviously crucial.

The discussion regarding the practical difficulties associated with CLT in diverse EFL settings has revealed not only its significance, but also concerns over the consequent controversies and cultural appropriateness (Tanaka, 2009). Notwithstanding the extensive investigation on logistical problems, little attention has been paid to teachers' needs and interests. This study therefore aims to fill this obvious research gap.

Research Questions

Employing multiple data sources, this study attempts to understand EFL teachers' requests in order to advance their CLT practices in classrooms after its prevalence in Taiwan. The particular research questions addressed here were: (1) How have the teachers in Taiwan perceived CLT?, (2) How has CLT reflected in their teaching of English?, (3) To facilitate CLT, what support have they needed from school authorities, parents, and students?, and (4) What improvements could be made to better their CLT practice now and in the future?

Methods

Questionnaire and Survey

The methodological assumptions utilized in the study were derived primarily from Kleinsaser and Sato's (1990) work. With the objective of understanding teachers to better their CLT practice, we used a mixed-method approach since a quantitative approach provides a general (broad) view that controls statistically the bias, and external factors of the phenomena studied. Conversely, the multiple sources collected via qualitative approach provided a more complex (deep) understanding of the issue. A "Teachers' Needs for Better Communicative Language Teaching" questionnaire adapted from Li's (1998) and Rao's (1996) studies was administered. It was divided into three main parts. The first part contained questions regarding the interviewee's background, including age, educational degree, and years and grade level of teaching. The second part listed questions regarding teachers' general views on CLT and their actual classroom teaching. The final part included statements about the support and resources that the teachers anticipated. The surveys were conducted on a one-to-one basis either in Chinese or English, through either telephone or in person, to encourage cooperation and rapport creation for a potential interview to take place later (Dörnyei, 2003).

Interviews and Interview Questions

Interview is the best way of learning about people's interior experiences and how they perceive and interpret their perceptions, which in turn was affected by their thoughts and feelings about a particular event (Weiss, 1994). The narration and viewpoints elaborated by the interviewees are a convenient, yet faithful channel beyond any possible substantial boundary to get a glance of their world (English teaching in this study). This, again, provides reliable scientific explanations to understand the meaning of the particular phenomena described above. In this

study, almost all the interviews were conducted in Chinese through telephone, online, or in person to avoid possible limitations and miscommunication. Each interview lasted approximately from 30 to 60 minutes.

The whole process was audio-recorded and further translated and transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and richness of data for later analysis. The interview questions mainly consisted of three sections: (a) the major questions: eight open-ended descriptive questions from the themes that had emerged from the questionnaire (Brinkmann and Kavle, 2009; Karner & Warren, 2010), which were the teachers' general views on CLT, their actual classroom teaching, and the support and resources they anticipated (see Figure 1: the transformation of questionnaire themes into interview questions); (b) additional questions used to "explore particular themes, concepts, and ideals introduced by the conversational partner" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 136), such as "how do you usually teach vocabulary / sentence patterns / main text?; how do you think of MOE's supplementary policy for CLT?; do you think it applicable at the school where you teach?; how many students do you usually have in one class?; have you ever thought of ways to overcome difficulties?"; and (c) probing questions: used to clarify missing information or ambiguous concepts while keeping the discussion going, for example "what do you mean by....?; would you explain....?; please give me an example of how you....; can you say something more about...." (Biklen & Bogdan, 2003).

Following the "tree and branch model,"¹ the researcher asked all the main questions and then follow-up questions drawn from each interviewee's response to each main question. Occasionally, appropriate probes (repetition of particular words with questioning intonation, asking questions for more details, showing attention to encourage elaboration, and asking for an explanation or clarification) were used to ensure that we would obtain vivid, thick, deep, and detailed descriptions of the investigated phenomena (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

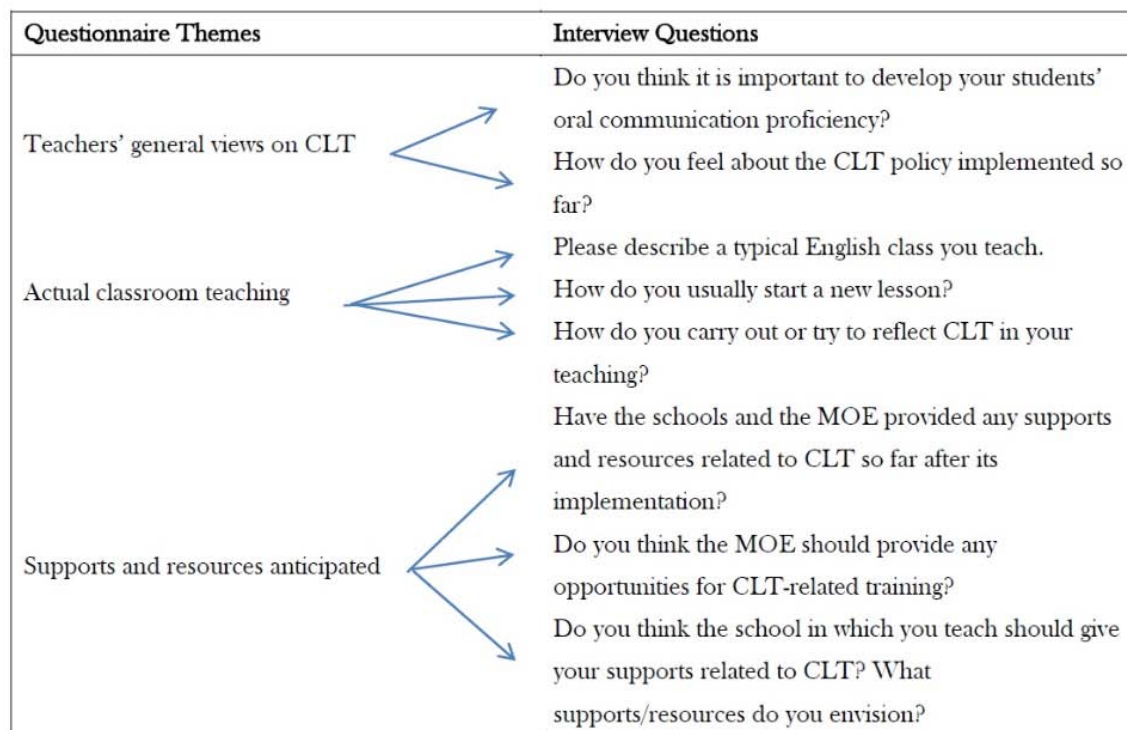


Figure 1. The Transformation of Questionnaire Themes into Interview Questions

Participants

The participants were selected randomly to “minimize the effects of any extraneous or subjective variables that might affect the outcome of the survey study” (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 73). In total, 75 English language teachers, which had been selected randomly from school websites,² were contacted and surveyed. The age of the participants ranged from 24 to 60, with the majority being in their 30’s. Altogether, 62% had less than 10 years’ of teaching experience, while 38% had more. Thirty-five (46.6%) had a bachelor’s degree and 40 (53.4%) held a master’s degree. Based on their willingness to participate, 15 were further interviewed (see Table 1). For confidentiality, pseudonyms were used throughout the paper.

Table 1
Teachers’ Background Information

Teacher	Name	Gender	Age	Teaching Years	Field of Study	Degree / Country
1	Fanny	F	52	30	TESOL	MA/TW
2	Jimmy	M	28	1.5	English Literature	MA/AU
3	Kelly	F	38	13	English	MA/USA
4	Lucy	F	34	11	English Ed.	MA/TW
5	Maggie	F	25	2	TESOL	BA/TW
6	Mandy	F	40	10	TESOL	MA/USA/UK
7	Mary	F	37	13	Social Study	BA/TW
8	Penny	F	31	5.5	Language Ed.	MA/UK
9	Sophie	F	41	17	Counseling	MA/TW
10	Sunny	F	30	6	Art and Media	BA/TW
11	Tiffany	F	37	15	English	BA/TW
12	Yuki	F	39	10	TESOL	MA/TW
13	Yvonne	F	36	11	Business Management	MA/UK
14	Wendy	F	40	10	English	MA/USA
15	Zoe	F	51	29	TESOL	BA/TW

Data Analysis

The collected survey data were analyzed using SPSS 20 to calculate the means and a total number of the participants’ responses, frequency, and percentage marking in each response for each statement. These quantitative data were sorted into three major categories based on the three themes found in the formation of interview questions and several sub-topics to integrate with qualitative data. The translation and transcription of interview data were the second phase of the data analysis. After translating and transcribing, concepts,³ themes,⁴ events,⁵ and topical marker⁶ were first identified, followed by a further and more thorough examination for clarification of unclear concepts and themes, and the synthesis of different events for better comprehension of the overall narratives. The final stage of the data analysis was coding. As Weiss (1994) states, “the idea in coding is to link what the respondents says in his or her interview to the concepts and categories that will appear in the report” (p. 154). Appropriate codes were derived primarily from the identified concepts, themes, events, and topical markers, or from the reviewed literature related to the issues under examination. The categories of codes that were applied include (1) activity codes: behavior occurring regularly (teachers’ description of their teaching situation); (2) event codes: specific activities that had occurred in the setting or the lives of the interviewees (the

mention of the difficulties encountered); and (3) strategy codes: methods, techniques, or other ways interviewees used to accomplish something (support and needs teachers asked to better their CLT implementation in schools).

Results

Teachers' Perceptions and Practice of CLT

Table 2

Teacher's General Views on Current CLT Policy, Report of Teaching Methods Used, and Needs to Improve Their CLT Practice

	Frequency (n = 75)
<u>Teacher's general view on current CLT policy</u>	
The development of students' English communication is important	100%
CLT policy is applicable	49.3%
CLT is impossible now or in the future	8%
<u>Teachers' report of teaching methods used</u>	
Grammar Translation Method (GTM)	48%
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)	54.6%
Both GTM and CLT based on the actual class situation	87%
<u>Types of need</u>	
Making English our second language	49.3%
More funding for teaching equipment	58%
Chances of overseas studying programs in English-speaking countries	88%
Regular CLT-related training	94.6%
The establishment of more English Villages	49.3%
Modification of English textbooks	74.6%
The promotion of General English Proficiency Test (GEPT)	39%
More English-proficient training led by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs)	96%
CLT-related teaching demonstration conducted by "seed teachers"	89.3%
Class-size reduction	94.6%
Students' re-grouping based on their English proficiency	70.6%
The addition of class meeting time	66.6%
Authority for English assessment	68%
The inclusion of oral proficiency into term exams	81%
Parents' re-education to better understand CLT and new possible assessment tools	88%
Students' education of the importance of communication-proficient development	94%
Co-teaching with NESTs	99%
The hiring of more teachers of overseas-studying experience	50.6%
Good interaction and regular conferences among teachers, parents and school administrators.	44.6%

Table 2 presents the percentages counted on items regarding teacher's general views on current CLT policy, actual classroom teaching, and needs for better CLT practice. It is clear that all of the surveyed and interviewed teachers asserted that the cultivation of students' oral communication ability was important and necessary, although almost only half of them (49.3%) believed that CLT policy was applicable. They agreed on CLT's tenets and practiced CLT activities if there was enough time. To fulfill CLT, most teachers (87%) had conducted

a semi-traditional teaching approach, or a “reconciling communicative approach” (Rao, 1996, p. 456), a mixture of the two main teaching approaches, CLT and GTM, regardless of various implemental conflicts.

Teachers’ Expressed Needs to Better their CLT Practice

To efficiently practice CLT, they indicated a need for (1) training to improve English proficiency, (2) opportunities for CLT-related workshops, (3) opportunities to work with native English-speaking teachers (NESTs), (4) raising students’ awareness of the importance of communication-proficient development, (5) increasing parents’ recognition of CLT, (6) class re-organization, and (7) textbook modification and testing-format alteration.

Training to improve English proficiency

English language proficiency has always been a concern to many non-native EFL teachers (Bulter, 2004). This concern has taken several forms. Some teachers were worried that their language skills were inadequate, unbalanced among four skills (Bulter, 2004; Chang, 2006; Li, 1998) and deficient in oral English (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). Some thought that they lacked strategic and sociolinguistic competences (Li, 1998). Many felt that they were not equipped to teach in communicative manner (Anderson, 1993) or that they were unable to deal with students’ unforeseen needs (Littlewood, 2007). Consequently, they struggled to introduce communicative activities, or avoided English communication courses per se (Wada, 2002). Having similar concerns, 3 out of the 15 interviewed teachers argued that it was necessary to improve their English proficiency, as Mary noted, “I think in-service training is insufficient. I personally wish that every year we were given the chance to review or improve our English skills, just like in those classes we had when we were undergraduates.” The quality of training mattered to these teachers. Opportunities of more knowledge and better language enhancement were the most welcomed and motivated, as Yuki asserted, “If more advanced training is provided, I believe we will be happy to cooperate.” To improve their English proficiency, 88% of the surveyed teachers embraced the chances of overseas study programs in English-speaking countries, and 96% of them welcomed the training classes led by NESTs.

Wherever the location, an ideal language training workshop should not mainly be lecture-based and teacher-centered, especially if it is for the improvement of oral proficiency. According to Fanny, well-organized and highly-proficient training sessions should be structured and centered on “communication.” They are not just language classes per se. Indeed, they offer an opportunity for teachers to gain further knowledge in their subject area. They are also channels that allow teachers to critically analyze not only each other’s language proficiency, but also the identity of English speakers and teachers:

It doesn’t need to be long... maybe one or two hours a day and six days a week during the summer or winter break. We get together to study with the native speakers. It can be in the format of a teacher study group (TSG). Just let us get together and chat with the native speakers. Through activities, we not only learn the content-area knowledge, but also get the chance to communicate. The teachers with stronger communication skills can be the stimulus to bring positive impetus to those who are weaker. We learn from each other. By so doing, I believe what is achieved is not just the main function of the classes. Teachers will also be empowered. (Fanny)

These teachers’ demands reflected Cullen’s (1994) suggestions about non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs), indicating a fact that NNESTs “need to improve their own command of the language so that they can use it more fluently, and above all, more confidently in the classroom” (p. 164). Indeed, in-service language training is essential, especially for veteran teachers, like Fanny and Mary who have been in the field for more than 10 years, but have lost their skills owing to the lack of utilization and practice.

Opportunities for CLT-related workshops

To promote CLT policy, the MOE and many textbook publishers in Taiwan offer numerous on-the-job training workshops, although according to several of the interviewed teachers (3 out of 15), many of these occasions have been fruitless, simply because they are usually the announcement and advertisement of either testing plan. “I feel the workshops for high school teachers are not CLT-related at all. The topics discussed are usually about the

General English Proficiency Test (GEPT),” Lucy commented. Or, they are about a certain education policy, as Mary stated, “Teacher training, I think, does not focus on teachers’ needs. Often I attend training that is focused only on the promotion of education policy.” Echoing such dissatisfaction, 94.6% of the surveyed teachers requested more appropriate CLT-related training opportunities and 89.3% of them asked for the teaching demonstration conducted by CLT seed teachers, as Meggie noted, “I want to know if any organizations or schools carry out CLT successfully, how they make CLT happen, and what their students’ learning outcomes are. Their visiting is highly welcomed, but I do believe their suggestions are valuable.”

Despite the considerable amount of knowledge about language instruction they obtained before their on-site service, teachers have inevitably encountered problems during their actual classroom practices, especially regarding new methods, like CLT, which was part of university methods courses, but was never put in practice. It is natural that teachers doubt their abilities, and the feasibility of practicing CLT without sustainable training. Regular and constructive workshops, even if they are in the form of lectures about CLT or other seminars, allow teachers to share their teaching experiences or encountered problems, thus helping them to deal with new innovations and changes in methodology (Koosha & Yakhabi, 2013), as Fanny suggested, “No matter what the topic is... about teaching materials, games, chants, or songs. I feel that each workshop is an opportunity to improve myself.”

Opportunities to work with native English-speaking teachers (NESTs)

Facing the situation of insufficient English-improving opportunities, and the urgency to teach communicatively, these teachers (93%) have sought the assistance of NESTs through co-teaching. They value co-teaching chances because NESTs compensate for their oral-deficient shortcomings and help them solve this pressing need. “It is important to enhance students’ oral abilities. That’s why I have applied for a NEST. The MOE will offer me one and he/she is coming next semester. I hope he/she can teach the entire class in English,” said Kelly. Considering the communication deficiency among her colleagues and herself, Mandy expressed a similar opinion about the invitation of NESTs. She believed NESTs’ presence is one of the elements for feasible creation of total English immersion for herself, her colleagues, and students. All of them will benefit from such situations because of the instant and continuous English practices and reinforcement accompanied, as she pointed out, “Not all English teachers at my school have spontaneous conversation abilities. Having a full-time NEST here, students and I will be forced to speak English to him/her. A more spontaneous English learning environment will be created then.”

The teachers’ opinions regarding the construction of a more spontaneous language learning environment went beyond the classroom. In their words, if the use of English stayed at schools only, CLT’s efficacy would be limited, and learning would be constrained. For example, to extend this argument, according to Zoe, a new language policy legislating English as one of our official languages is needed: “If they treat English as a second language, it won’t be learned merely in schools. When it is needed at each corner in Taiwan, students will be forced to learn and to use it communicatively.” Notwithstanding the good intention embedded, not many teachers supported the idea, for only 49.3% of the surveyed teachers agreed that making English the second language would make CLT more feasible, too.

Raising students’ awareness of the importance of communication-proficient development

As mentioned previously, for most school learners in Taiwan (as in many Asian countries), English is an essential subject and the only foreign language in both junior and high schools. It may be an important subject that is tested regularly (even daily) at schools, but not an imminent one that significantly affects the students’ daily lives (Ellis, 1996). After all, the communities they live do not depend on English as their main medium of communication. Therefore, students lack integrative motivation for improvement. As a result, English learning becomes only a “need-to-do” routine, instead of a “want-to-do” passion, not to mention the cultivation of communication proficiency.

In the study, 94% of the surveyed teachers agreed that learners’ cultivation on the importance of learning English and developing communication ability could positively boost CLT. In the interview, Wendy further argued for the necessity of an uprooted instillation, an action to alter learners’ belief, and their attitudes toward English learning:

We should do something to let our students know that English is really important, especially in the development of communication. Otherwise, they will always think that English is only a school subject. They must know that the English they learn is a usable tool for international communication, but not just for tests.

Increasing parents' recognition of CLT

The side-effect of viewing English as a school subject is the parents' over-emphasis on their children's testing outcomes, that is, the higher the test score, the stronger the satisfaction. This potentially influences teachers' selection of a particular teaching method. Namely, teachers would simply choose the methods (usually analytical, but not communicative ones) best fit to pursue high scores to ease and please the parents. To win the parents' cooperation, 88% of the teachers suggested that parents should be re-educated to better understand CLT, and to know new possible assessment tools for CLT. Thus, regular parent-teacher meeting should be compulsory since they are occasions that permit teachers to decode and explain to the parents the essence and benefit of learning a language through CLT, as Yuki confirmed, "Parent-teacher meetings...one or two times, especially in the beginning of each semester is to let parents know at least what CLT is and that the activities conducted are not just games. They are meaningful and functional."

Language learning is a lifelong journey requiring the assistance of skilled and beneficial guides (good learning and teaching methods, such as CLT). Teachers pointed toward the right direction. Students (the travelers) decide the depth and width of their trip. Once in a while, parents join in, take the lead, and even redirect without the awareness of a possible detour. Therefore, without a doubt, a pre-traveling education and clear instructions are necessary in order to maintain and ensure the joy of the journey.

Class re-organization

Large class sizes (ranging from 30 to 100) and grouping of students in the same class based on heterogeneous English proficiency (Jung & Norton, 2002; Littlewood, 2007; Pham, 2005, 2007; Saengboon, 2002; Yu, 2001) have been an issue since the CLT's prevalence in many EFL settings. Such conditions resulted in classroom-management problems, for example, unbalance oral practice opportunities or teachers' failure to pay attention to low-performing students. Having encountered similar problems, most surveyed teachers (94.6%) favored a reduction in class size. Brown (2007) writes that a class of 12-15 students is ideal because it is "large enough to provide diversity and student interaction and small enough to give students plenty of opportunity to participate and to give individual attention" (p. 245). The figure for many of our interviewee teachers was 20. The number was perfect enough to facilitate CLT activities, as Yvonne asserted, "I think 20 students should be good. This makes direct communication among us possible and easier."

Taking only the quantity into consideration was not good enough. Quality counts, too. In the survey, teachers (70.6%) claimed that it was necessary to group students based on their English proficiency. Ideally, students of equivalent English proficiency should be grouped in the same class. They learn better and advance to a higher level quicker. Doubtless, such an arrangement alleviates the teacher's role and promotes instant communication:

Students should be grouped as basic, intermediate, or advanced level. I remember when I learned English in cram schools. My classmates were students who had the same proficiency as I did. I think teaching the class with students of similar level of proficiency is easier. When I communicate with one student, I communicate with the rest simultaneously. (Jimmy)

Textbook modification and testing-format alteration

Teaching materials are the best and the most convenient resources that allow teachers access to various activities and ideas to facilitate instruction and promote communication among students (Pan, 2013). Unfortunately, according to Jung & Norton (2002), they are usually the most difficult part for CLT's realization. In Taiwan and many Asian countries, textbooks compiled after CLT policy usually followed a similar pattern, starting with a set of CLT-featured guidelines posted by MOE. Publishers needed to produce, review, and revise the textbooks accordingly. Teachers were usually put at the end of this assembly line. If they were lucky enough, they were

permitted to make a “personal” choice among these licensed and published textbooks. If not, they were just forced to use the ones that were selected by school authorities who were usually not English teachers (Richards, 1993). In fact, teachers’ needs and voices are seldom taken into consideration during the compilation process. Compared to the previous non-CLT textbooks, these so-called CLT-featured editions despite being improved and localized to include the local culture (Nguyen, 2005) still did not meet many EFL teachers’ requirements. In short, they were simply not CLT enough (Wu, 2001). Being the first-hand users of these materials, 74.6% of the surveyed teachers asserted that there is a need for a textbook modification. According to Jimmy, a good-enough recompilation must be integrated and conducted by a state-owned organization, but not by a private publisher. This is a huge project. It should be monitored and supervised closely and unanimously. The re-compiled textbooks must be classified. The books of each level should list information suitable specifically to the students of that level. New information and topics should be added level by level. The degree of difficulty and complexity increase with the advancement.

MOE should appoint our National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT)⁷ to carry out textbook recompilation. I don't think private textbook publishers can accomplish this work. The content of each level should be proposed clearly. For example, for the basic level, learners should learn the 26 alphabets. The acknowledgement of vocabulary related to daily things and colors is necessary. At level two, grammar rules should be taught. (Jimmy)

The discussion on textbook recompilation was followed by the request for testing-format alteration. As revealed in the survey, 81% of the teachers called for a shift of test format from paper-baseness (usually the test of reading and writing skills) to the inclusion of oral proficiency. Without appropriate alteration, whatever effort put in the educational reforms or the improvement of students’ communicative competence would be fruitless, as Penny commented, “Unless they change the direction of big examinations by including the assessment of oral proficiency. I mean, I believe teachers spend time teaching communicatively, but I believe they spend more time teaching reading, writing, and grammar for good test results.”

Discussion

Many of the CLT-related constraints that occur in Taiwan are also common in other EFL contexts. Thus, teachers’ needs may be close to identical there. The following discussion applies to the issues proposed by the teachers in Taiwan. This also extends to other contexts where CLT prevails.

Implications for Teacher Training Programs

Cullen (1994) points out that a NNEST training session without taking English language into consideration fails to meet the EFL practitioners’ needs and expectations. Many scholars (Brinton, Kamhi-Stein, & Snow, 2006; Edge, 1988; Ellis, 1986) have argued for the necessity of putting a language component into training workshops. To do so, Edge (1998) has suggested that teachers (as trainers) and trainees (as teacher students) should both be viewed as “language users,” because besides methodology, a “language improvement” component should always be added into EFL teacher training sessions. To develop a CLT and an English proficiency improvement course for teachers, the principles of maximizing English exposure, offering opportunities to share knowledge and ideas, and basing training on task-based and inductive arrangements (for more details, see Brinton, Kamhi-Stein, & Snow, 2006; Britten 1988; Hayes, 1995) are essential. The training techniques utilized to achieve the above principles include (1) lectures / demonstration: trainers’ provision of straight input, raw materials and demonstration of particular techniques; (2) elicitation: using question-and-answer technique to try to draw out teacher trainees’ opinions on specific topics; (3) workshops: trainees’ individual or group work to prepare materials, teaching aids and lesson plans; (4) whole discussion: a general discussion of any topics with all trainees together; (5) group/pair discussion: teacher trainees’ work in group or pairs using an activity sheet; (6) panel discussion: asking a group of trainees to form a panel. The rest should prepare and ask a number of questions relevant to chosen issues. The trainer will act as chairperson of the panel or the facilitator of panel discussion

(based on Ellis, 1986, p. 95). Workshops and training adhering to the above-mentioned principles and techniques are not just about training per se. In fact, they are CLT customized learning experiences themselves. They gratify teachers' eagerness to gain appropriate language training. Through discussion activities, teachers practice English by sharing their opinions and knowledge with one another. Simultaneously, they can critically analyze and make a contribution to each other's language learning techniques and teaching progress.

Tips for Working with a Large Class of Mixed-level Learners

Although teachers' wishes reflect their urgent needs to advance their CLT practice, in reality, it is the school authorities who make administrative decisions (such as those regarding the curriculum, class size, and schedule, students' performance tests, budgets, and even some teaching materials). Unfortunately, they are also usually the ones who jeopardize CLT (Saengboon, 2002). Under the circumstance when class-size reduction and re-arrangement is impossible, the tips on working with large classes of heterogeneous-proficient students with limited time will possibly ease teachers' anxiety. Teachers should make each student feel that he/she is important by remembering their names. By so doing, teachers show their awareness of and respect for students as individuals, and put a value on each student's presence and contribution in class. In this sense, the maximization of English practice opportunities using pair- or group-activities is vital. Teachers may feel chaotic during the practice, but this may be the only way to give students time to practice their English. To balance students' diverse English proficiencies and skills when pairing or grouping students, teachers can occasionally place students of similar proficiency and skills in the same pair/group, or sometimes place them of different levels within the same pair/group. To ensure equal and selective monitoring and feedback, teachers can spend the bulk of their time on just a small number of groups during students' collaborative work, and the groups that are not monitored are invited to report results to the rest of the class. It is the teachers' obligation to make sure that each student has a chance to talk. A constant and updated record of who has or has not been called to talk during a lesson or a whole semester would be the best way to ensure a random and equal roll call (Brown, 2007; Wharton & Race, 1999).

Alternative Assessment: Assessing Students' Communicative Competence

To develop a suitable tool for oral-proficient assessments can be a challenge for many EFL teachers. Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA), a tool designed to meet the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines,⁸ provides a good model to meet the needs for valid and reliable assessment to determine students' competences (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006). Under IPA's framework, language performances can be divided into three types of task, and each can further be tailored to fit the learner at specific levels:

- I. Interpretive communication task: at this phase, students will be required to read or listen to an authentic text (weather forecast, commercial, letter, short story, or film) and reiterate the text or answer questions relevant to the text, either in a spoken or written form.
- II. Interpersonal communication task: performing task at this phase requires dual interpretation and negotiation between two learners. They may be given information that the other person may not have about a particular topic. They, therefore, need to exchange and negotiate to obtain the missing information.
- III. Presentational task: the activity used at this phase is one-way. It requires learners' to give presentation on a given topic to a specific group of audience (teachers, classmates, or parents), such as giving a speech on an event or introducing things that they have created.

If the IPA model is relevant to oral proficiency assessment, portfolio assessment would be an excellent tool to assess other language skills (mostly reading and writing). Portfolio assessment, in the words of Moore (1994), is a purposeful "collection of evidence used by the teacher and students to monitor the growth of the students' knowledge of content, use of strategies, and attitudes toward the accomplishment of goals in an organized and

systematic way” (p. 170). What goes into students’ portfolios is determined by teachers or students themselves, depending on the learning goals and achievement presentation (Pierce & O’Malley, 1992). Farr & Tone (1998) provided some general guidelines for this type of collection, and Chen (2000) suggested that the items should include: (1) sets of papers reflecting students’ cognitive learning processes, such as rough drafts from different genres (letters, essays reports, and personal narratives), polished products, and a learning log; (2) reaction and reflection papers showing feelings, problem solving and critical thinking, and a dialog journal reflecting numerous purposes for writing and reading; (3) books or other reading materials, selected classroom tests, audiotapes of students’ reading that display the examples of what students have accomplished and read; and (4) art, audio/video recordings, and photographs that exhibit the skills that the students can master.

These two types of assessment (performance and portfolio assessment), according to Pierce & O’Malley (1992), complement each other in terms of evaluating students’ overall performance and bring a “washback effect” on teaching. They emphasize that performance and portfolio assessment:

Together represent authentic assessment, continuous assessment of student progress, possibilities for integrating assessment with instruction, assessment of learning process and higher-order thinking skills, and a collaborative approach to assessment that enables teachers and students to interact in the teaching/learning process. (Pierce & O’Malley, p. 2, 1992)

Conclusion

English has been recognized as an international language of communication for a long time now. In an attempt to increase the number of people who can communicate efficiently in English for the reason of fast-growing economic globalization, many Asian countries have launched a series of English education reforms (Littlewood, 2007). New syllabi featuring CLT to enhance students’ interests in English communication, and to develop learners effective and appropriate communicative competencies (proficiency) have been introduced (Hu, 2005; Jung & Norton, 2002; Yoon, 2004; Zhang, 2006). English was suggested as the major instrument for instruction. Communication-oriented classes that had been implemented at the undergraduate and senior high schools were lowered and practiced starting from the junior high schools, even the third grade (Hu, 2005; Hui, 2001; Liao, 2004; Wang, 2002). The publication of a “fresh” curriculum emphasizing CLT-related characteristics initiated a new era for English language education in Taiwan. The textbooks featuring CLT were subsequently compiled and used, which was accompanied by the advocacy of English-only policy (Ministry of Education, 2014; Wang, 2002). Doubtless, many of the actions have further cemented the dominance of English in classrooms, and stressed the importance of acquiring English language skills through CLT. Despite these ambitions and good intentions, without sufficient support and thorough preparation, the results have been somewhat disappointing.

In fact, prior to its prevalence in Asian classrooms, CLT has long been questioned due to its failure in fitting into the social-cultures of Asia in practice. Problems and doubts have been reported regarding its applicability (Barkhuizen, 1998; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurrell, 1997; Hu, 2002; Li, 1998; Lo, 2001; Shamim, 1996; Yu, 2001). Simple factors, such as learning motivation, values, and beliefs about students’ and teachers’ roles in classroom, as well as teaching philosophies potentially impaired CLT’s implementation efficacy (Aldred & Miller, 2000; Ellis, 1996; Lo, 2001; Zhu, 2003). The policies by school authorities aggravated the “alien problems” (Pham, 2005, 2007; Zhang, 2006). Despite the stated goals to develop communicative skills and the top-down adoption of CLT, administrators have tended to put a large number of students with various-degree of English proficiency in one class (Li, 1998; Saengboon, 2002), and ask teachers to use non-CLT-oriented textbooks to teach for paper-based examination only. Most importantly, parents’ high expectations of good test results have forced teachers to stick to traditional GTM methods (Su, 2006; Wang, 2002).

The English-education reforms in Asia, the discussion on the impact of CLT-related activities in language acquisition, and many of the previous descriptions about practical resistance reveal that CLT is appreciably questioned by teachers. The cultivation of students’ communicative competencies was undeniably necessary. Hence, it is worthwhile to further critically examine the issue in order to understand more about the teachers’ needs so as to more efficiently practice their CLT teaching. The results of this study reflect many of the problems

that teachers meet in EFL settings. In this study, the participants confirmed that to better their CLT practice, they needed training to improve their communicative proficiencies and workshop to gain more knowledge about CLT (Chang, 2011b; Li, 1998). For teachers without access to sufficient training, the chance to co-teach with NESTs became valuable. According to the interviewees, student-parent cooperation was also crucial. Teachers contended that there was a need to recognize English as a communication tool (but not just a school subject), and the development of communicative competence (Chen, 2001; Chung & Huang, 2009; Li, 1998; Su, 2006; Wang, 2010). They also expressed that classes should be re-organized by reducing student numbers (to 20 at most), and that students should be re-grouped according to their level of proficiency (Jung & Norton, 2002; Li, 1998; Pham, 2005, 2007; Saengboon, 2002). It was also suggested that textbooks should be recompiled and stratified to fit each level of study (Kuo, 1995; Li, 1998; Saengboon, 2002), while oral-proficient assessment was believed to be necessary to facilitate successful CLT (Li, 1998; Wang, 2010). Scholars who are interested in the continuous exploration of similar topics may consider EFL classroom observation to examine teachers' actual issues in using CLT.

Notes

- ¹ In the tree and branch model, "the interview is likened to tree with the trunk as the research problems and the branches as the main research questions. Each deals with a separate but more or less equal concern. In the interviews, the researcher would try to ask all the main questions and then the follow-ups to obtain the same degree of depth, detail, richness and nuance" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 145).
- ² For parents' better understanding of each school's rationale and policy, teachers' teaching and students' performances, every school in Taiwan has established its own website. The website (in both Chinese and English) lists the school's phone number, history, syllabus for each class, teachers' names, and the subjects taught. The following is an example of this type of website in Chinese: <http://www.jges.mlc.edu.tw/woops/html/> and in English: <http://163.19.160.248/~eng/ex1/index.html/>.
- ³ A concept is a word or term that represents an idea important to the research problem.
- ⁴ Themes: are summary statements and explanations of what is going on.
- ⁵ Events: are occurrences that have taken place.
- ⁶ Topical markers: are names of places, people, organizations, pets, numbers...and so on (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p. 207)
- ⁷ National Institute for Compilation and Translation (NICT): is the highest agency in Taiwan for the compiling and translating of textbooks for various subjects and grade levels. Their compilation and translation also include works of academia and the culture of Taiwan. For more details, see <http://www.nict.gov.tw/en/>.
- ⁸ The American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines: are standards developed by ACTFL to serve as a direct reference when deciding learners' target language proficiency for teachers of the foreign languages taught in the United States (USA) (for more information, please visit <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>).

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