

Teachers' Perception and Practice of English Language Teaching Following CLT Approach in Chinese Higher Education - A Study of Two Higher Educational Institutions in China

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Abstract

the purpose of the present study was to investigate the role of teachers' perception and practice of English language teaching in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in two Chinese universities, which was conducted with three pragmatic purposes: 1). to investigate teachers' perception on the characteristics of CLT approach used in English language teaching; 2). to identify teachers' perceived practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach in helping students develop their communicative language skills; 3). to explore the problems and obstacles in the midst of English language teaching with it. The mixed methodology of (Quant +qual) approaches was employed in this study. The data was collected from forty college English teachers who were working at the Department of Applied English through survey questionnaire, a case study, and semi-structured phone-call interview. The findings revealed that almost teachers' perception and practice had a noticeably positive correlativity with the characteristics of CLT approach in ELT, directly manifesting that the three intricate characteristics and instructional strategies of CLT approach in practice as they've frequently perceived highly related to the improvement of students' English language communication skills, respectively. Nevertheless, some problems and obstacles were likewise illustrated, which probed to be difficultly operated in prolific English language teaching class within CLT approach. Implications for the study are that teachers' perception and practice of ELT with the characteristics of CLT approach have meaningful effects on ELT development in Chinese higher education as well as the exhibited issues in class operation profoundly requires consideration to be kept from in college class.

Keywords: CLT approach, teachers' perception, English language teaching, communicative language, higher education

1. Introduction

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is prominent theoretical paradigm for English language teaching (ELT), which is widely accepted as a successful method by all scholars (Hamid & Baldauf Jr, 2008; Kim, 2008).

According to Ansarey (2012), Jacobs and Farrell (2003), and Sun and Cheng (2002), CLT has expanded its scope and it has been used in various ways by different educators since CLT firstly emerged in Europe in the early 1970s. Before long, it developed as a skillful method of English as a Second Language (ESL) in the last 20 years. CLT approach has been rapidly widespread in many non-English speaking countries where English is not spoken as a second language but a foreign language. Some non-English speaking countries like Bangladesh and Turkey have already officially adopted CLT approach into their current English language teaching curriculum that was authorized by their Ministry of Education (Zekariya, 2010 & Sanjoy, 2011). Some other Asian countries, such as Japan, Korea, and Vietnam have also held a solid position to officially adopt and implement CLT approach in their national English language curriculum (Zekariya, 2010). According to Richard (2003) and Kirkpatrick (2007), English has been considered as a language that is being predominantly used in a global world, particularly in a variety of aspects, for instance, international communication, business relationship, and culture transmission. As the previous studies remarkably noticed (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012; Hu, 2005; Kumar, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018), CLT approach has not yet been successfully implemented since traditional English

grammar teaching still dominated in most English language classrooms.

As a learner-centered approach to English language acquisition, CLT approach can lead to more positive attitudes in the EFL meaning because the goal of language teaching is communicating rather than gaining language skills (Rahman et al., 2018). Exactly as Zakariya (2010) addressed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which dominantly emphasizes the communication in real social context. However, the empirical studies also demonstrated that the disparity between CLT approach and its implications, which was often caused by ineffective teaching practices and teachers' perception on the characteristics of it. As mentioned above, the previous studies have been conducted in class both internal and external constraints make it difficult for teachers to implement communicative practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach (Haider & Chowdhury, 2012; Hu, 2005; Kumar, 2020; Rahman et al., 2018). Internal constraints are primarily affected by teachers' perception like possessing an integrated language teaching knowledge (e.g., implicit or explicit knowledge). On the other hand, as for external constraints, which teachers are unable to master, are related to the educational funding, scheduling conflicts, and overcrowded class. Therefore, the analysis of practice of instructional strategies and perception of teachers acts as a framework to recognize apparent inconsistencies between teachers' values and the CLT concepts (Hall & Cook, 2012). Compared to the studies in abroad, college English language teachers in China have also been with a trouble in using practice of instructional strategies with respect to CLT approach to teach English language in class. The reason why they also lacked of systematic skills or knowledge was likely to be concerned with being unfamiliar with this approach. Crucially, with the primary goal of developing students' English communication ability, Chinese higher educational institutions have required their college English teachers to employ a variety of contemporary English teaching approaches to instruct the students, the considerable one of which is adopted through CLT approach. In light of it, with the certain aim, implementing CLT approach on English language teaching in Chinese higher institutions has emerged with some problems and obstacles as well. Albeit the role of teachers' perception and practice of instructional strategies toward utilizing CLT approach has received considerable attention in the previous research, there is a dearth of study pragmatically illustrated them in Chinese higher education institution associated with the CLT approach in English language classes. Unlike other countries that officially regulated CLT approach to be entirely used in higher educational institutions, CLT approach was not officially deployed as a main language teaching strategy in Chinese higher educational institutions. Accordingly, this study employs the mixed methodology within three pragmatic purposes: 1) to investigate teachers' perception on the characteristics of CLT approach used in English teaching; 2) to identify the perceived practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach in helping students develop their communicative skills, as well as 3) to explore the problems and obstacles in the midst of English teaching with respect to CLT approach. In association with the purposes, the research questions will be as followings;

- (1) What is teacher's perception on the characteristics of CLT approach used in English teaching?
- (2) What the perceived practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach do teachers apply in helping students develop their communication skills?
- (3) What are the problems and obstacles in the midst of English language teaching with respect to CLT approach?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Teachers' Perception and Practice of CLT

Numerous studies have revealed various elements that functionally have a significant impact on teachers' perception and practice of English language teaching with CLT approach. According to Kajinga (2006), a previous theory that claimed that teachers' experience has an impact on their perception. Yalaki (2004) made the following claim in this regard that Pre-service teachers develop their perception of teaching from years of experiences as being teachers, and their perception seems to be stable and resistant to change. Additionally, Casto et al. (2004) demonstrated that the claim was likely sustained, which essentially suggested that once the teachers' perception is formed, it is difficult to modify.

Johnson (1994) in his study on the perception of pre-service teachers found out that teachers' perception has been developed from various aspects such as: 1). their formal and informal language learning experiences, 2). experiences as language teachers and 3). teachers' preparatory programs. Karavas (1996) in his observable research indicated that several studies of teachers' perceptions in relation to CLT approach have previously been conducted in various countries. Empirically, Lakachew (2003) conducted one study in the Ethiopian environment to determine English teachers' perception at secondary school in CLT approach. According to the findings of the Lakachew's study, teachers' perception in Ethiopia was generally positive through the use of

CLT approach. However, it did not generally ensure the findings as same as what they perceived in classrooms. It also implied that the teachers' perception who complied with the value of CLT approach was highly inconsistent with their present practice in classroom. The teachers displayed some negative feelings and expressions within some constraints and problems, resulting in the difficulty of implementing this new approach in class (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). Regarding with these existing problems in the study of Lakachew (2003), it recommended that the Ethiopian Ministry of Education should provide organized seminar and pre-service training for the sake of that teachers are able to have more chances to gain systematic instructional strategies related to CLT approach. Also, Ethiopia should transfer the mode of examinations from the traditional paper-based exams to the new ones which allow assessment for students' language communicative abilities. Similarly, Marina (2003) in Brazil investigated the use of CLT approach in high schools and language academies in southern part of Brazil. Through data collection, the study of Marina (2003) discovered that teachers in Southern Brazil did not have enough understanding and awareness of the characteristics of CLT approach. Therefore, they could not properly implement the classroom activities with CLT approach nor could they cope with the complexity of activities with it in class. Another study which was conducted by Khaled (2004) in Bangladesh revealed the teachers' perception of activities in communication corresponding to their classroom practices, which positively indicated that Bangladesh EFL teachers were clearly aware of the fundamental principles of CLT approach and practiced the major CLT practice with instructional strategies that were complied with CLT approach very appreciable in secondary class. Pederson (2003) observed that the study of educational perception of teachers has been strongly advocated as the decisions they make and the actions they take in class. This in turn had a great impact on students' language learning, which reflected that teachers' perception in CLT approach is more likely to be as one influential factor in English language teaching. Likely, Zacharias (2005) pointed out that teachers' perception can't be observed directly but can be inferred from teachers' behaviors and instruction strategies in the classroom. Therefore, there indeed have a strong connection between teachers' perception and their practice in classroom.

Given that the previous studies, the conceptual framework was applied in our present study had been consequently constructed from theory of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a theoretical base. The below conceptual framework (Figure 1) was used to explore and analyze the connection between teacher's perception and practice. This conceptual framework was figured as a guide of this study in directing the process of constructing questionnaire, semi-structured interviews and cast study. Through analyzing the collected data, it was followed to lead to the complement of research objectives.

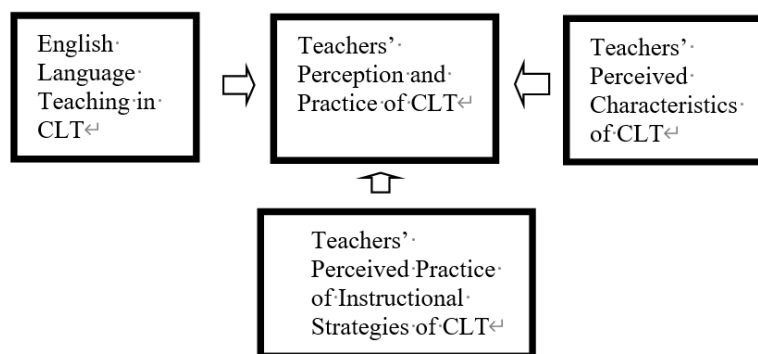


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

2.1.1 Teachers' Perceived Characteristics of CLT

CLT is a communicative usage-centered teaching theory and it is characterized as a method of language teaching or secondary learning that places a strong emphasis on communicative competence as the ultimate objective of language learning. The goal is to make sure that language is used and communicated effectively in the school setting (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). Since CLT approach placed a greater focus on communication than on grammatical refinement, its functions have been radically different for teachers and learners who have operated conventional language programs (Knight, 2001). Therefore, the characteristics of CLT approach emphasize on the development of learners' social interaction, communication, comprehension, and participation skills. For instance, they focused on developing students' skills and preventing teachers from taking an authoritarian stance in class (Efrizal, 2012; Ho, 2020; Richards, 2005; Savignon, 1991; Solikhah & Budiharso, 2020). According to Littlewood (1994), he mentioned that the main characteristics of CLT approach are 1) language features 2) meaning and structure 3) forms 4) communicational aspects. The following expositive characteristics of CLT can

be summarized as CLT approach aiming to make real communication of language learning, which provides opportunities for learners to practice and try out the language features which they have learnt. In addition, learning tasks or materials that are prepared through characteristics of CLT in class should make all students in link to the language skills when making communication in any realistic situations.

Teachers using CLT approach to teach that implicate the learners are able to build up their communicative competence of language features through making some language mistakes. Meanwhile, through CLT approach, language grammar teaching should be inductively conducted in which students are required to discover the meanings or structure in the real context that the language was used. What is more, CLT approach provides numerous opportunities for learners to develop language skills both accuracy and fluency in language learning as well as links the four integrated skills such as speaking, writing, reading, and listening together in a language. Lewis (2000) also states fluency is accomplished widely by combining chunks, which includes phrases in a sentence embedded with content words. Teaching learners the lexical phrase can help learners to produce the language more fluently because they can be easily retrieved from memory. Thus, not only language accuracy but language fluency is regarded as complementary principles underlying the characteristics of CLT. Consequently, the emphasis of characteristics of CLT is gradually shaped through more language communication rather than language correctness or refinement. Its functions are radically different from those of conventional language programs (Knight, 2001).

2.1.2 Teachers' Perceived Practice of Instructional Strategies of CLT

Zekariya (2010) has categorized the communicative language practice of instructional strategies of CLT approach into the four subdivisions to provide a maximum benefits for students to develop their language communicative abilities. 1). social formulas and dialogue, mainly involve speech encounters as greetings, partings, introductions, excuses, compliments, complaints, and hiding feelings. 2). community oriented tasks, which are sets of practice that significantly encourage the students to be willing to communicate with native speakers in different kinds of situations. 3). problem-solving activities, motivate the students to present any kinds of communicative problems and some alternative solutions to them. 4). role play, is considerably beneficial to give students chances to practice with their peers to perform some communicative abilities. Not only for this, but Richards (2006) further explained that carrying out communicative language practice in pairs and group work will benefit the learners in the many ways, for instance, students have chances to learn the language communication from hearing the opinion and sentences used by all other group members. Students might be capable to make a great improvement by producing a much more amount of communicative language or useful ideas than they engage in teacher-centered practice. More importantly, students' motivation seems to be increased while working in small group, and it is also an essential way for students to develop social communicative abilities. Besides, Paulston and Bruder (1976), Richards (2006), Larsen-freeman (1986), and Celce-Murcia (1991) continuously provided another four communicative language practice activities. The first is named as linguistically structured activity, generally revolves round the presentation or the practice of certain linguistic structures. Although these activities are not inhibitive, they may pretty well turn out to be contextualized and meaningful. Secondly, it is performance activity that students prepare something in advance and deliver their message to the class, which can be followed by a class discussion. The third is participation activity in which the students need to participate in natural settings, for instance, guided discussions, interviews, or oral dialogues. Last of all, observation activity, which the learners are expected to observe and record verbal or nonverbal language communication between two or more native speakers for the target language.

In order to deal with the unexpected problems occurring during the communicative language practice process, language learners can find other ways of expressing themselves, like using synonymous phrases, employing body gesture, or using a longer explanation so that they can keep the conversation going and finally accomplish the communicative purposes. In a whole, they ultimately offered extreme benefits that the students are most likely to comprehend and become aware of the significance of communicative language practice as actually being used in real life.

2.1.3 English Language Teaching in CLT

In order to provide the practicality for English language learners to develop their oral English proficiency, CLT approach in English language teaching has kept evolving in the late 1970s. More and more alternative methods underlying the CLT approach have been initiated. To enable students to make real life interaction within social context, English language teachers should be creative and diligent to design various meaningful tasks and activities for students to practice frequently (McDonough & Shaw, 1998, p. 202).

How CLT approach is able to be embedded in English language teaching that is generally taken to be profoundly

investigated by the contemporary college teachers. Hunkins (1998), they stated that teachers play a vital role in educating students who are mainly involved in teaching language communication skill process with CLT approach. Roger (1995) has also mentioned that teachers' perception in the process of teaching with CLT approach needs to be realized as a vital influential factor on assisting students to master language communication skills. Moreover, Pajares (1992) has assumed that earlier the perception that is natured with the CLT approach becomes, more difficultly it turns to alter. According to Ornstien & Richard & Rogers (1986), CLT approach is an extraordinary language teaching approach which strives to drive students' communicative ability as the major goal of language teaching, as well as demonstrates the pedagogical attributes of language communication. Actually, the context of CLT has determined its efficacy since effective teaching strategies offered a social relation to a given cultural setting (Hoa & Thi, 2020).

Among those, the integrated language skills method is considered to be one potential type of English language teaching method in CLT. Through implementing the integrated language skills method in CLT, language teachers need to combine four main language skills, particularly on the aspects of reading, speaking, listening and writing, in connection with each other in the midst of teaching process (McDonough & Shaw, 1998, p. 201). The potential necessity of using the method in CLT is to allow the learners to have opportunities to make a more comprehensive communication with their peers and the other people both inside and outside the class. Sometimes, the students might be provided with controlled practice of language activities like paragraphs comprehension, letters spelling, and questionnaire with instruction clues, which simply implicit that it provides the students the capacity to express their thoughts fluently without getting stuck or inappropriate slowness (Hedge, 2000). Conversely, Nhem (2019) argued that the actual English language teaching within CLT in real classroom diverged significantly from teachers' perception of CLT. For instance, there was little time for students' engagement because teachers spent the most their time lecturing. The majority of previous studies used the qualitative way of interpretive methodology to investigate teachers' perception and practice in secondary education of abroad and China. Nevertheless, few studies have used the mixed methodology of qualitative and quantitative including questionnaires, semi-structured interview and a case study to explore the application of the CLT approach in Chinese Higher Education.

3. Methods

3.1 Participants

The participants were forty college English language teachers (female and male) from two private universities in Shandong Province, China. The study was conducted at the two universities that provided an undergraduate applied English program with CLT approach teaching. In consideration of the demographic potential influences among gender differences, teaching experience, and educational background on teachers' perception and practice of English language teaching with CLT approach implement in class, the demographic analysis of the participants were initially deployed. All forty respondents were full-time university teachers whose educational background with Master and Doctoral Degree of English Education. Given that, they were skilled and specialized in the field of English language teaching, which was seen to be validity in developing students' English communication abilities.

3.2 Measurement

3.2.1 Data Collection

To select the sample size, the mixed methodology was followed and the convenient sampling technique was adopted as well. Hence, to achieve the minimum sample size, the study distributed questionnaire to the forty participants. The minimum sample size was to do the data collection, one of which was data in survey questionnaire to be quantitatively analyzed. The other collected data through transcribing respondents' recorded narratives in case study and semi-structured interview through phone call was to be qualitatively analyzed.

3.2.2 Procedure

Three stages of data collection procedure were deployed in this study. The first procedure is the fulfillment of survey questionnaire; the second stage is to conduct semi-structured telephone interview with teachers; the third stage employed a case study to transcribe and analyze the recorded narratives from teachers. The questionnaires were distributed in person to teachers at the two Applied English Language Departments of the two universities. The semi-structured interview was additionally conducted through phone call. Simultaneously, their narratives in the answer were recorded based on the permission of interviewees.

The first survey questionnaire includes two parts: 1) the demographic profiles of the respondents, were varied in gender, age, educational background, and teaching experience 2) the participants' perception about

characteristics of CLT approach, were measured by using five points; “Strongly Agree (SA)”, “Agree (A)”, “Neutral (N)”, “Disagree (D)”, and “Strongly Disagree (SD)”, were empirically adopted from Rahimi and Naderi (2014). Accordingly, all of the participants’ perception about characteristic of CLT approach items in survey questionnaire was measured on five-point Likert scale. The survey was prepared in which the respondents were required to select the provided choice ranging from the five points of “Strongly Agree (SA)”, “Agree (A)”, “Neutral (N)”, “Disagree (D)”, and “Strongly Disagree (SD)”. Also, the major purpose of questionnaire items to collect teacher’s perception on the characteristics of CLT approach used in English teaching in their mind. The Cronbach Alpha value of the scale was reported 0.87 in the previous studies.

The second questionnaire was referred to the teachers’ perceived practice of instructional strategies of CLT approach and what frequency of them underlying CLT approach have been applied in their class, which was measured through using four-point Likert scale adopted from Sharp, Hopkin, and Lewthwaite (2011). The participants were suggested to select the choices like: “Often”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely” and “Never”. As the similar as the first and second format of survey questionnaire, the questions in the third questionnaire was written in five-point Likert scale as well in order to find out the problems and obstacles that the participants faced to in class with respect to CLT approach.

Finally, in correlation to explore more reliable and precise information about their perception regarding with English teaching through CLT approach, a case study of in semi-structured interview was closely followed to be analyzed through transcribing respondents’ recorded narratives in the phone-call interview. The participants were requested to demonstrate their personal definition and analysis concerning with CLT approach. Also, they were implied to mention different teaching methods or activities which they have applied with CLT approach, or possible solutions to their encountered problems in class. Meanwhile, they were also suggested to give some recommendation regarding to how to successfully implement CLT approach in teaching EFL context.

4. Findings

4.1 Descriptive Summary of Teachers’ Demographic Profile

According to Johnson (1994), teachers’ perception development contained a variety of aspects. It’s necessary for analyzing teachers’ demographic profile in the study. General demographic profile of the participants showed that only thirty-four participants could complete the questionnaires among the forty respondents. Six participants were not able to answer the questionnaire due to some situations referred to their time constraint, heavy workload and health problem. In the study it was presented individually in the following graphs;

4.1.1 Participants’ Gender

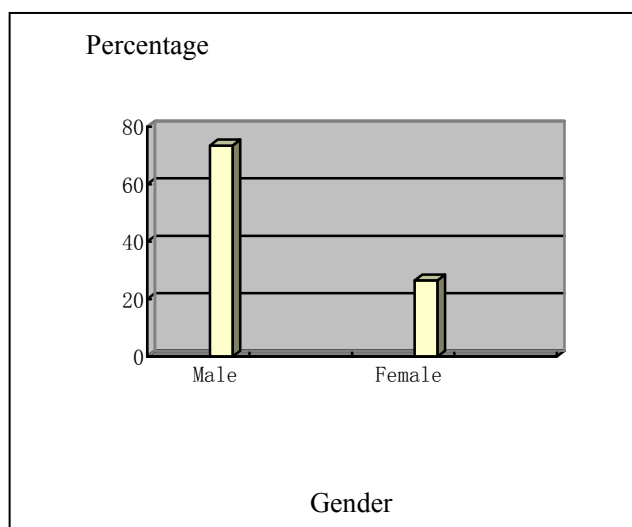


Figure 2. Participants’ Gender

According to the bar chart presentation in Figure 2, 73.5% which equals to twenty-five persons were male, and other 26.5% of participants that equals to nine persons were female. The figure showed that there were more male than female respondents who participated in this study. It could be implicitly interpreted that more male than female college teachers work at two Applied English Departments of two selected universities in China. To

be reflective to the present Chinese higher education system, it implied that more male teachers than female teachers work in college English language teaching field in China.

4.1.2 Participants' Teaching Experience

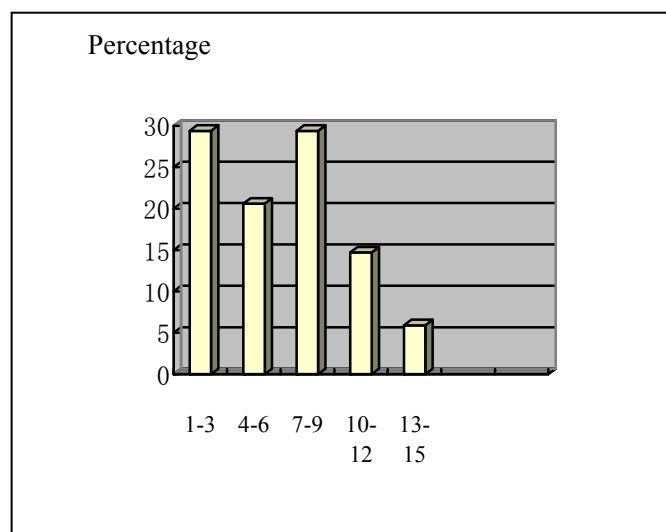


Figure 3. Participants' Teaching Experience

In association with Kajinga (2006)'s claim, Figure 3 depicts a total of ten teachers with teaching experience ranging from one to three years, presented by 29.4%; and seven teachers with teaching experience ranging from four to six years, shown by 20.6%. Furthermore, 29.4% of teachers with 7 to 9 years of teaching experience, equals to ten; five have 10 to 12 years of teaching experience by 14.7%; while just 2 teachers who have 13 to 15 years of teaching experience, demonstrated by 5.9%.

4.1.3 Participants' Highest Degree of Education

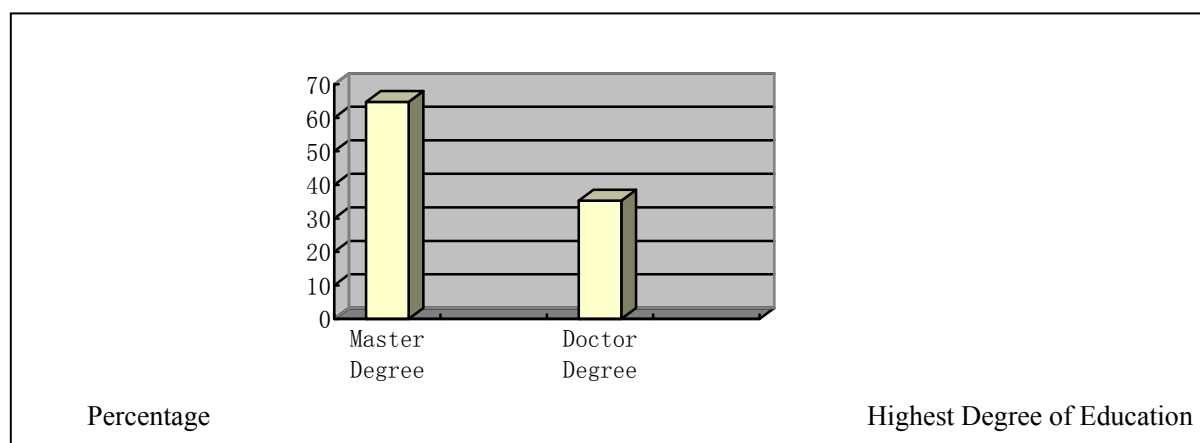


Figure 4. Participants' Highest Degree of Education

Based on the questionnaire survey demonstrates that thirty-four participants who answered the survey questionnaire, the bar graph of Figure 4 demonstrates that twenty-two English teachers equals to 64.7% has hold the Master Degree, and other twelve teachers who have Doctoral Degree by 35.3%. It interprets that the mandatory condition of faculty recruitment at least requires Master degree to be employed in Chinese university.

4.2 Major Findings Related to RQs

4.2.1 Research Question 1: What is Teacher's Perception on the Characteristics of CLT Approach Used in English Teaching?

According to Littlewood (1994), the study provided a list of eleven characteristics of English language teaching following CLT approach in the questionnaire. The participants were requested to select the provided options from five-point Likert Scale that ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". If the teachers often

selected option of “Strongly Agree” or “Agree” which led to two positive options to have high percentage score, two suggested that they have clear understanding of what characteristics of CLT approach are. If most of them selected “Disagree” or “Strongly Disagree” which resulted in the high percentage and frequency of negative options, it could be interpreted that they did not have a full comprehension of the real characteristics of CLT approach yet. The summary of findings of teachers’ perception was shown in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Teachers’ Perceived Characteristics of CLT

Perceived Characteristics of CLT	Response in Percentage (%)				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. It’s a type of learner-centered approach.	35.3	41.2	5.9	14.7	2.9
2. Teaching goals mainly focus on four communicative competences.	29.4	38.2	5.9	17.6	8.8
3. Teaching emphasizes language fluency rather than accuracy.	32.4	26.5	8.8	26.5	5.9
4. Teaching process mainly involves with communicative activities.	29.4	32.4	5.9	26.5	5.9
5. It provides students chance to express what they have learnt.	26.5	35.3	8.8	17.6	2.9
6. It stresses on language function and meaning rather than form.	35.3	32.4	11.8	17.6	2.9
7. Four language skills are linked together in teaching process.	38.2	44.1	8.9	5.9	2.9
8. Students’ errors are tolerated to help them practice communicating.	17.6	38.2	5.9	20.6	17.6
9. It allows students to collaborate together while learning.	26.5	35.3	8.8	23.5	5.9
10. CLT helps provide students error corrective feedback.	23.5	38.5	11.8	17.6	8.8
11. Authentic tasks and materials are needed to promote students’ communicative skills.	35.3	32.4	5.9	14.7	11.8

It reveals the majority of the teachers have positive rather than negative perceptions toward characteristics of CLT approach. Three teachers’ perceived characteristics of CLT approach are recognized as be predominantly used in English language teaching. According to Table 1, it indicated the characteristic stating that CLT was a type of learner- centered approach, was rated by 35.5% (n=12) of teachers as “Strongly Agree”, 41.2% (n=14) as “Agree” and other 5.9% (n=1) of teachers opted for “Neutral”. Also, only 14.7% and 2.9% (n=7) of total teachers hold a negative perception as “Strongly Disagree” and “Disagree” with this characteristic. Most of teachers haven’t found it difficult to recognize this characteristic of CLT approach since there was connected relationship between language communication and learner- centered approach. Generally, learner-centered approach creates students many chances to practice communicative skills and a lot of interactions with their peers and teachers to learn. Savignon (1991) further mentioned that both communicative language teaching and learner-centered approach have been considered as effective teaching methodologies to develop students’ learning autonomy and communication skills in both authentic and non-realistic context. It is necessary for teachers to perceive that learner- centered approach within CLT approach is useful to help students build up their communication skill as it influences the way they teach in the class.

On top of that, another characteristic was that four language skills are linked together in teaching process, was obviously one among major characteristics of CLT approach. To prove this, it showed that more than half of the total number, nearly 82.3% teachers rated “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” for this item. Whereas, there are only 8.8 % of other respondents opted for “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” and 8.9% for neutral. They recognized that achieving the purpose of English language communicating smoothly and successfully. It’s better to integrate more than one language skill in English language teaching. Mc Donough & Shaw (1998) stated that in a real-life language interaction, when students are speaking to their partners, they require to use listening and speaking skills. Similarly, they also need reading and writing skills in case they are required to write a piece of essay. Therefore, teachers should be suggested to teach students four language skills iteratively in class.

Regarding to another characteristic mentioned that Authentic tasks and materials are needed to promote students’ communicative skills, it was rated as “Strongly Agree” and “Agree” by 67.7 of total teachers. On the other hand,

other 26.5% opted for “Disagree” and “Strongly Disagree” but another 5.9% of teachers chose “Neutral”. It demonstrated that the majority of teachers perceived that it is useful for teachers to prepare adequate and meaningful authentic materials to develop students’ English language communicative skills. Authentic and comprehensible materials are needed to promote students English language communication skill is also highly perceived as an important characteristic of CLT approach, which is also consistent with what the researcher in previous studies indicated that language teaching with CLT approach should be introduced by the use of authentic materials in class (Littlewood, 1994, Canale & Swain, 1980).

In order to make the quantitative findings of the first research question more comprehensive and reliable, semi-structured interviews are followed to be analyzed to support the result above. The study requested the participants to express their further personal opinions regarding to the characteristics of CLT teaching approach used in English language teaching. A diversity of opinions from the teachers’ semi-structured interviews was briefly shown, one of which had given her perception on what she personally defined what the characteristic of CLT approach in her mind:

“I think that CLT is one kind of teaching method which enables students to use English as a second or international language in order to communicate practically for their academic purposes and realistically in their daily lives”

Another female teacher whose teaching experience is about seven years also showed another meaning of what the characteristic of CLT should be. Her idea was briefly quoted as the following:

“From my point of view, CLT is a newly evolving teaching approach with initiating students’ communicative skill which strongly emphasizes that the communicative competence to be the main goal of language teaching. Also, its characteristic is that it gives an equal importance to both the fluency of spoken and written language as well as the accuracy of the language production in materials such as listening and reading”

According to the two excerpts above they both addressed that the characteristic of CLT approach is with the main purpose of learner-centered to strengthen the learners in each aspect of language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) for developing their integrated language communicative skills, which enable them to know what the authentic materials to say, when to say, and how to say it appropriately based on the given situation. Moreover, CLT approach helps the students to master the language itself combines of the vital context and situations in which the language can appropriately be used.

4.2.2 Research Question 2: What the Perceived Practice of Instructional Strategies with CLT Approach do Teachers Apply in Helping Students Develop their Communication Skills?

Based on Paulston and Bruder (1976), Richards (2006), Larsen-freeman (1986), and Celce-Murcia (1991) claimed that the purpose of being expected to the teachers that illustrate their instructional strategies, a list of ten different kinds of instructional strategies to be selected through two principal scales; 1.what instructional strategies they used to practice; 2.what degree of frequency instructional strategies they used in their English Language teaching procedures. To specify each item’s degree of frequency, the teachers were requested to select the provided options, “Often”, “Sometimes”, “Rarely” or “Never”. The quantitative finding of a variety of instructional strategies used by the teachers in class was shown in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Teachers’ Perceived Practice of Instructional Strategies with CLT

Perceived Instructional Strategies of CLT	Response in Percentage (%)			
	Often	Sometime	Rarely	Never
1. Pair work	55.9	26.5	11.8	5.9
2. Role play	8.8	58.8	23.5	8.8
3. Group Discussion	52.9	32.4	11.8	2.9
4. Game or Jigsaw	11.8	50.0	29.4	8.8
5. Debate activities	5.9	50.0	26.5	17.6
6. Presentation to the whole class	32.4	50.0	11.8	5.9
7. Problem solving activities	17.6	58.8	17.6	5.9
8. Writing notes and report from newspaper	2.9	35.3	35.3	26.5
9. Make oral dialogue or conversation	23.5	38.2	29.4	8.8
10. Call students to orally respond the questions	35.3	38.2	20.6	5.9

In Table 2, the result above had demonstrated that 55.9% (n=19) of total teachers have often used *pair work* in their teaching procedure, 26.5% (n=9) teachers sometimes used pair work, four teachers that is by 11.8%, rarely used pair work and other 2% of teachers never used it in their English language teaching process. It indicated that pair work is commonly used by the majority of teachers to allow students to interact and communicate with each other. In addition, in term of group discussion, the majority of teachers by 52.9% (n=18) often used it, 32.4% which equals to eleven teachers sometimes used it, 11.8% (n=4) of teachers rarely used it and only one teacher which is equals to 2.9% (n=1) never try to use group discussion even once. The result showed that most often use group discussion to encourage students to share ideas together. They recognized that interrelationship between peers in group discussion is quite useful to be motivating students to show their opinions on the communication of particular topics. This findings are also in relation to what Larsen-freeman (1986) stated that pair work and small group discussion are useful components in CLT approach to help students build up their communication skills. The more chances students are allowed to discuss in pair or in small group, the sooner they can improve their communication and language competency.

Concerning with presentation to whole class in instructional strategies with CLT approach, eleven teachers that is by 32.4%, often practiced it in their teaching process. Seventeen teachers that is equivalent to 50 % sometimes applied it. 11.8% teachers (n=4) rarely used it and other two teachers which is about 5.9% never experienced it. Based on the previous studies on the part of communicative activities in CLT classroom, Richard (2006) & Cele-Murcia (2001) listed that doing the presentation to whole class as a performance activity with communicative nature, which could be named by prepared talk and oral presentation. Furthermore, Richard (2006) proved that doing the presentation in class can be regarded as making a language interaction among students during the communicative learning process as it naturally occurs.

With the main purpose to make the quantitative result obtained more specifically, the qualitative findings were collected and analyzed from the following semi-structured interviews. A variety of opinions that were collected from teachers through the interviews like one teacher had showed more details relating to his practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach. His speech was quoted as below:

"I have used different activities like pair work, group discussion to talk about different topics in the books, and some social problems. I usually suggest students to present their ideas or result from their discussion in front of the whole class. I sometimes used role play to let students express what they have learnt, use their language knowledge to interact with their peers. Also, I sometime request them to debate on some topics, especially related to social issue. I normally encourage students to be active in all activities. Moreover, I firstly explain to them the procedures of how to do each activity; otherwise, they will feel misunderstood. After I make sure all students clearly understand what and how to do, the activity starts. However, I still explain them along the way"

From his narratives above, he was open-minded to all students about his concerns about their English language learning. Whenever students were in trouble with any activity; for instance, they found it hard to interact with their peers, he often consulted them in free time. He created to make the organized activities like group discussion. He also asked them to express their points of view either in the group discussion or in pair work. As being a teacher, he tried his best to motivate students to express ideas and communicate with each other actively. Furthermore, another female teacher who has had more than seven years of teaching experience additionally expressed her perceived practice of instructional strategies with CLT in her class. She revealed that in order to help students to learn English language successfully and to grape English language communicative skills fluently, her speech relating to the instructional strategies she applied with CLT approach was also directly quoted as below:

"I normally generate interesting topics relating to second language culture issues for my students to think and discuss together in pair or group. I frequently give relevant lectures of different topics that allow them to do exercises through pair or group work and to present the topic to the whole class. Moreover, I prefer to assign students whose language knowledge and understanding level are similar to each other work together so that they don't find it challenging to participate in discussion. I also sometime group students with various learning styles and different levels of language comprehension to share their idea together on how to learn language effectively and discuss some educational and language issues"

In light of her statement above, she usually initiated interesting topics to interact students with their pairs or groups. She also did good instructional behaviors to make students form an organized learning attitude while doing activities like group discussion. He also asked them to express and share their points of view to the whole class.

4.2.3 What are the Problems and Obstacles in the Midst of English Language Teaching with Respect to CLT Approach?

Under Nhem (2019)'s argument condition, to enquire teachers about their teaching problems and obstacles in English language teaching with CLT approach, a list of nine different kinds of teaching problems and obstacles prepared for the teachers to select. The participants were also suggested to rate the provided options from five-point Likert Scale that ranges from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree". The quantitative findings of teaching problems and obstacles encountered by the teachers were shown in Table 3 as the following:

Table 3. Teachers' Perceived Problems and Obstacles with CLT in Class

Perceived Problems and Obstacles of CLT	Response in Percentage (%)				
	SA	A	N	D	SD
1. Lack of knowledge or skill of CLT	11.8	14.7	8.8	41.2	23.5
2. English speaking competence is insufficient	0.0	29.4	11.8	41.2	17.6
3. Little time to prepare teaching materials	8.8	38.2	8.8	26.5	17.6
4. Students' low level English proficiency	5.9	35.3	8.8	44.1	5.9
5. Students' negative attitude toward communicative activities	5.9	26.5	5.9	41.2	20.6
6. Large class size	26.5	38.2	5.9	23.5	5.9
7. Inadequate authentic teaching materials	2.9	17.6	5.9	50.0	23.5
8. Lack of students' active participation	17.6	38.2	2.9	32.4	8.8
9. CLT is difficult to apply in non-English speaking environment	11.9	29.4	5.9	38.2	14.7

Pertaining to the problem of having little time to prepare teaching materials, around 47% (n=16) teachers strongly agreed and agreed with this problem that it is one among their concerns which led them to be difficult to executive English language teaching with CLT approach. 26.5% of the participants which equals to nine teachers and other 17.6% (n=6) of them disagree and strongly disagree with this option as they are capable to manage time well to apply this approach in their teaching procedures. Only 8.8% (n=3) teachers stayed neutral. Even though the majority of teachers are in minor trouble with time constraint to prepare teaching materials or lessons to teach students, it is still a major considerable problem in class. The finding of this kind of obstacle is also similar with the one in finding of the previous study conducted by Zekariya (2010). Zekariya (2010) confessed that teachers in Turkey basically had too much extra work to do before implementing a class to students, which led to decrease their class performance in teaching English. Meanwhile, it was hard to keep up with English teaching at a maximum level of effort. Additionally, Zekariya (2010) pointed out that large class size caused many difficulties for them to use pair work or group discussion, particularly in the class with immovable desks or chairs, and it was almost impossible to provide care and adequate attention to individual learners according to the large size of students' number. Therefore, large class size is here found to be one of major problem to cope with as a number of nine and thirteen teachers that equals to 26.5% and 38.2%, individually, opted for "Strongly Agree" and "Agree", but other 23.5% and 5.9% of total teachers rated as "Disagree" and "Strongly Disagree" with large class size, and only 5.9% (n=2) of the teachers chose to be neutral. It pointed out that more teachers agree and strongly agree rather than disagree and strongly disagree with this item. Thus, they highly perceived that large class size is mainly their concerning problem to apply CLT approach in English language teaching. It was almost impossible to provide care and adequate attention to individual learners. Beyond that, it also reported that lack of students' active participation was rated as "Strongly Agree" and "Agree" by 55.8% (n=19) of total participants, whereas other 41.2% of teachers (n=14) disagree and strongly disagree with this item and only 1 teacher that equals to 2.9% rated as neutral for this obstacle. It indicated that more teachers considered lack of students' active participation is one major problem in their English language teaching process. This critical problem found was also consistent with one previous study by Khaled (2004). Khaled (2004) similarly posed the problem in his case study that students were attentive to participate in sharing idea on the learning topics, but they turn to discuss other irrelevant things with their peers because of being in short of language learning motivation.

To make the quantitative result of the third research question more supportive and enriched, the qualitative results further collected from the semi-structured interviews. The teachers were kindly asked to reveal additional

opinions concerning with the problems and obstacles they faced to in English language teaching following the approach of CLT. Besides, they practically added their experiences they had applied in solving the problems. The findings from the interviews would be more meaningful with direct expressions of interviewees' opinions. The below is a summary of different teachers' narratives collected the interviews.

One male teacher with more than nine-year teaching experience expressed some of his concerns about the problems and obstacles that he had met with before:

After having been teaching them for an enough long period of time, I've discovered what English language teaching's obstacles are, in which the limited time in preparation of the materials, for instance, teaching English language culture and situational dialogue. According to teachers heavy workload in university, I struggled to find the kinds of materials which are attractive, interesting and worth doing for students' active participation in my class which generally resulted in that they were hardly willing to participate in all learning that communicative activities I assigned for them. Thus, being as a college English language teacher, I must be knowledgeable of how to select attractive and useful resource to my real context.

Another female teacher with over three-year teaching experience also added that large class size is also one major obstacle of the CLT approach application in English language teaching:

Since there were too many students in one class, it has seemed too hard to group students to work together in pairs or group discussion, and it is quite challenging to control students in a limited class time. In term of a mixture level of students in a single class, I must know clearly about the level of each student so that I can put students into different groups effectively. It is such a big pressure for college English language teachers to apply CLT approach in the large-sized class.. If the teachers are in short of classroom management in the kind of class, they scarcely know how to keep students' active participation.

While being asked to mention the concerning teaching problems and obstacles, they were also worried and complained about the existing problems; for instance, large class size of students' number, limited time to prepare teaching materials, and lack of students' active participation, which would cause more negative impacts on the successful and continual practices in English language teaching with CLT approach in Chinese higher educational institutions.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Teachers' Perception on the Characteristics of CLT Approach Used in English Language Teaching

The present study showed that the majority of teachers have understood quite well of what kind of characteristic that CLT approach should be used in English language teaching. The demographic information of the participants subsequently indicated that most had already obtained their Master Degree of English Education while some of them already graduated from Doctoral Degree of English Education, meanwhile, includes their relatively long teaching experiences. Given that it led them to have a solid understanding of the characteristics of CLT approach. The principal characteristics which have been fallen under CLT approach identified by the teachers in this order: four language skills are linked together in teaching process; a type of learner-centered approach; authentic tasks and materials are needed to promote students' communication skills. When teachers have a full understanding of the main characteristic of CLT in their mind, it is more likely that they will be strongly motivated to practice CLT instructional strategies with their students for improving students' English language communicative skills. It indicated that teacher's misconceptions or misunderstanding of CLT characteristics negatively affected the way they teach students in class as they were not confident enough in practicing the CLT activities.

5.2 Teachers' Perceived Practice of Instructional Strategies with CLT Approach in English Language Teaching

Relating to the teachers' perceived practice of instructional strategies of CLT approach, the study has clearly shown that the teachers in this study have used a variety of communicative activities in their teaching procedure to help develop students' communication skills. Those communication activities that each teacher has adopted in the study have been arranged in the following order to show the noticeably high frequency: group discussion; pair work; presentation to the whole class, which were mostly practiced in English language teaching of Chinese university to develop students' English communicative skills. It is similar to what was discovered in the study of Defeng Li (1998) that it was if the teachers have sufficient knowledge or strategies to implement CLT approach, CLT is successful to be applied. The university should initiate more seminars for training teachers to understand more deeply about the practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach in English language teaching. Although the majority of teachers in this study had a good understanding of CLT approach, some of them didn't have full comprehensibility about it, which resulted in failure in practicing CLT. Therefore, the training of

teachers' instructional strategies is very crucial for successfully operating CLT approach in Chinese higher education institutions.

5.3 Teachers' Perceived Problems and Obstacles in The Midst of English Language Teaching with Respect to CLT Approach

In association to teachers' perceived problems and obstacles of CLT approach used in English language teaching, this study manifested that the participants had expressed their most concerns with some problematic areas such as large class size; lack of students active participation; little time to prepare teaching materials or lessons, in which were difficult for them to allow students to do group discussion or pair work. Additionally, when they first introduced English communicative activities of CLT to students, they were not willing and confident to engage in the assigned activities. The awkward situation was getting improved as teachers kept motivating them and explained benefits of each activity before letting them start each activity. Sooner or later, they tend to change their unwilling attitude to understand its benefits and take a proactive role to perform all English language communicative activities with CLT approach. The reasons behind insufficient students' active participation was explained that students didn't accustom with the English language communicative activities of CLT approach due to they got previously used to largely expose to traditional English grammar teaching methods that had a little changes for students to practice English language communicative skills both with teachers and their peers.

5.4 Limitations and Implications

Due to the limitation in sample size of the study, the analytic procedure of this study might be widely conducted as well. If the study could be employed in a large sample size, it would have produced a clearer picture of teachers' perception and practice of English language teaching following CLT approach as well. Until now, almost all studies that were conducted for discovering teachers' perceptions and their practice of instructional strategies with CLT approach had shown the unambiguous correlation between teachers' perception and their perceived instructional strategies regarding with CLT approach. Regretfully, the study didn't investigate the correlation between them as well. The future study possibly explore to what extent in the correlation through regression analysis.

The present study has shown some major problems and obstacles hindered successful application of CLT approach. Eventually, the university should limit an appropriate class size. It is easy for both teachers and students to practice English language communicative activities with CLT approach in such an effective manner and time saving. In another way, it is convenient for teachers to manage students easily to arrange them to work in group discussion or pair work. Considerably, teachers' extra workload should be authentically taken into consideration by the university management team because it has negatively affected the teachers' time in preparing meaningful and authentic resources for instructing students. As for teachers' creation and innovation in applying diverse effective instructional strategies of CLT approach in their English language teaching, it can push students to actively participate into learning English language.

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