

TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS ON THE USE OF THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING APPROACH IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOMS

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Abstract

In teaching English, many teachers employ different approaches in order to make the teaching and learning process successfully delivered to students. One of the approaches which is oftenly used is the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. This research aims to investigate the teachers' perceptions on the use of CLT in English classrooms. This qualitative study used personal interview method to collect the data. Five REAL English teachers at IONS International Education were chosen as the subjects of this research. The results showed that the teachers had positive responses towards the use of this approach. There were also several different perceptions on the weaknesses, difficulties, and criteria on applying it. The researcher hopes that this research can be beneficial to readers, particularly English teachers who wish to seek out the perceptions on the use of CLT approach in teaching students.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, IONS International Education, REAL English, teachers' perceptions

Introduction

The world of education has never got separated from any different kinds of issues. Recently, there have been many issues which are related to the language teaching and learning in classrooms. Indonesia is one of the countries which has various issues in terms of education. Some examples of the recent issues include government spending and policies, technology and education, assessment and attainment, education and the curriculum, school reform, and many others (Knowles, 2018). Among them, there is one issue which is mostly discussed by many teachers or instructors, namely teaching approaches.

In teaching subjects, particularly in teaching language, the use of appropriate approaches in different situations is very important. Teachers need to know that the choice of correct approach in teaching the correct subject is necessary. That is why teachers, instructors, or educators need to have proper knowledge of each approach and be able to use them in teaching their students correctly. The approaches which are commonly used are Natural Approach, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), Content-Based Instruction (CBI), Communicative

Language Teaching (CLT), Structural Approach, Oral Approach or Situational Language Teaching. One of the approaches which is widely used currently by teachers is the Communicative Language Teaching approach.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the teaching approaches which mainly focuses on improving the communicative competence in order to develop good communication and effective language use. Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2010) also state that it is “an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasises that the goal of language learning is Communicative Competence and which seeks to make meaningful communication and language use a focus of all classroom activities” (p. 99). In IONS International Education, there are many teachers or instructors who employ various approaches in teaching their students, specifically Communicative Language Teaching approach.

IONS International Education is one of the non-formal institute of education which is located in Yogyakarta. This institute was built in 2007 under the same founder as NEUTRON institute of education. Currently, there are eleven various courses which are offered within IONS International Education. One of the well-known course programs is REAL English. There have been many students from various regions who come and apply to study in REAL English as it has an excellent reputation in teaching English to them.

This research aims to find out the teachers’ perceptions on the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the English classrooms in IONS International Education, specifically REAL English. The reason why the researcher would like to study the perceptions is because this kind of approach becomes popular in the 21st century teaching and learning processes and the researcher wants to know the teachers’ feelings and opinions toward the approach.

Previously, there were several research which investigated the teachers’ perceptions on the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach. The first research was conducted by Khan (2016) in the paper entitled *EFL Teachers’ Perceptions on the Usefulness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*. The research tried to examine EFL teachers’ perceptions on the significance of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. The result of the research showed that most of ELT teachers agreed that CLT was a highly useful approach for teaching the English language. The ELT teachers found that CLT approach was more convenient since they found sufficient instructional materials to use for teaching and conducting activities.

The second research was conducted by Chang (2011) in her paper entitled *EFL Teachers’ Attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College*. The purpose of the research was to investigate Taiwanese college teachers’ attitudes toward CLT and the reasons behind attitudes the teachers held toward CLT. The results showed that teachers held favorable attitudes toward principles of CLT and displayed characteristics of CLT in their beliefs. They also demonstrated that Taiwanese college English teachers believe CLT can make English teaching effective and meaningful.

The third research was done by Daflizar (2013) in the paper entitled *An Investigation of Indonesian EFL’s Teachers Perception of Communicative Language Teaching*. There were three aims of the research, namely to investigate

Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT, to look at whether the teachers had implemented CLT in the classroom, and to identify difficulties the teachers face in implementing CLT. The results showed that the teachers generally had had considerably good understanding of principles and activities of CLT. Also, it was revealed that all teachers had faced several constraints in implementing CLT activities in their classrooms.

Based on the short description above, the researcher aims to answer a formulated research question, namely "What are the IONS International Education teachers' perceptions on the use of the Communicative Language Teaching approach in the English classrooms?" Through the results, the researcher do hope that this research can contribute scientific information on the Communicative Language Teaching approach. Also, it is expected that this research will give valuable information to teachers, instructors, or educators in using the approach within their classrooms effectively.

There are some theories related to this research which are discussed by the researcher. They are Communicative Language Teaching, Perception, IONS International Education, and REAL English. The discussions of each theory are as below.

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the teaching approaches which mainly focuses on the development of the communicative competence rather than the grammar competence. The purpose of this approach is to make students able to communicate in the target language. Richards and Rodgers (2001) say that the aim of this approach is "to make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and develop procedures for the teaching of the four language and communication" (p. 155). Therefore, they need to understand knowledge of the linguistic forms, meanings, and functions (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p. 122).

In Communicative Language Teaching, the learners play the role as negotiators, which means that they need to interact within groups and within classroom procedures and activities to which the groups undertake. Learners are supposed to contribute as much as possible in order to make them able to learn in an interdependent way (Breen & Candlin, 1980). Meanwhile, the teachers have two main roles, namely to facilitate the communication process between all participants in classrooms and various activities and texts, and to act as an independent participant within the learning and teaching group.

Thus, it can be concluded that Communicative Language Teaching aims to put a focus more on the communicative and interactive competence rather than the accuracy of the language structures. Also, this approach refers to a diverse set of principles which reflect a communicative view of language and language learning and that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 172). Therefore, in the classroom context, it will be helpful for teachers who are trying to teach students on how to communicate and interact with their friends, teachers, or groups.

Perception

The term perception can be simply defined as an opinion or belief which is held by people on how they view something. This means that people can have different perceptions based on their individual view. According to Woolfolk (1995), perception can be defined as “an interpretation of sensory information” (p.245). In complementing it, Chaplin (1968) defines the perception as a process to understand something through the human sense which involves the awareness of people’s belief about something.

IONS International Education

IONS International Education is one of the non-formal educational courses which is situated in Yogyakarta. Specifically, this institution is located at C. Simanjuntak Street Number 50, Terban, Gondokusuman, Special Region of Yogyakarta. It was built in 2007 and is run under the same director as NEUTRON learning institution. It is one of the well-reputable non-formal education institutions which is equipped with current advanced facilities and infrastructures, and professional employees and teachers.

Currently, there are eleven departments which are available whether to give students good provisions or educate them in preparing their upcoming futures, namely REAL English, True Mandarin, World Languages Centre (WLC), i-Link, Neutron Priority, IONS Potential Detection, IONS Culinary College, Fun Science, Kawai Music, Publishing Learning and Training Centre, and Progress Prima. Students can choose their own departments based on their interests and needs. Also, the teachers or instructors in every department are certified to teach their students well.

REAL English

REAL English is an English course which was established by a businessman named Ir. Handojo Mawardi, who was assisted by Daniel Batey and Moniq Van Devard on 4th January 2003. This course was built in order to give an alternation in teaching English by using full native English speakers. At first, there were only 30 up to 40 students per month who applied in the institution. However, as the time went by, the rate of students acceptance became larger, that was, around 70 students per month.

The first office when it was built was located at Tentara Pelajar Street Number 16/40, Yogyakarta. Three years later, REAL English opened its first branch on Komplek Ruko Niaga Permata Sukajadi, Batam. Currently, the number of the branches are 7 in total, including in Yogyakarta, Muntilan, Seturan, Magelang, Klaten. They are well-developed in terms of the facilities and infrastructures which are provided.

The purposes of REAL English course is to be a colleague in introducing English to the society without putting aside the development of other aspects, and to create a conducive, healthy, and enjoyable learning environment for students. Aside of that, this course contains several various programs for different purposes, namely REAL Young Learners, REAL General, REAL Conversation, REAL Business, REAL TOEFL-IELTS, TOEIC.

Method

This research was included into qualitative research, which means that the data were analysed and interpreted in the forms of descriptions. According to Ary, Jacobs, and Sorensen (2010), qualitative research is defined as “a generic term for a variety of research approaches that study phenomena in their natural settings, without predetermined hypotheses” (p. 648). It means that the type of research seeks to investigate something as natural as possible without expecting the results first. In qualitative research, the data are collected from various different sources such as recorded interviews, field notes, journal, diary entries, documents, images. In processing the data, then, they are transformed into a written form since qualitative data analysis is done with words (Dörnyei, 2007). Thus, it can be concluded that qualitative research deals with descriptions rather than numbers.

The method which was used in this research was interview, specifically personal interview. In this research, the researcher made some questions to be answered by the interviewees in a face-to-face setting and records the answers (Ary et al, 2010).

Findings and Discussion

In order to find out the teachers’ perceptions on the use of Communicative Language Teaching in English classrooms, the researcher conducted personal interviews to five English teachers at IONS International Education, in REAL English department, to be specific. The findings and discussion are as below.

REAL Teacher 1

1. What do you think about the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach in teaching English?

Answer: For me, using Communicative Language Teaching approach is very good, especially in this 21st century in which learning language primarily focuses on achieving the communicative competence.

2. When do you think the Communicative Language Teaching approach is applied?

Answer: Almost every time, especially during teaching speaking and playing games in group when the students are needed to speak in English with their friends.

3. In your opinion, what should be the criteria when using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: It should be related to what materials which are going to be delivered to students. Also, the teacher must have good knowledge of the approach itself of how to implement it during the teaching and learning process.

4. What are the difficulties did you encounter during applying the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: Well, the difficulties which I ever encountered were students who did not want to speak in English, so they kept using Indonesian. Second, it was difficult to choose proper activities and materials which are suitable to the approach.

5. Can you mention several weaknesses in using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: Based on my knowledge, it was difficult for the students to produce correct grammar during the communication since this approach considers grammar as the secondary focus, instead of the primary one. Then, teachers who are delivering materials in English but students whose native language are not English will be difficult to understand them.

From the questions and answers above, it can be seen that REAL Teacher 1 contended that the Communicative Language Teaching approach was a very good approach to be used in the teaching and learning process in the current century. It is due to the communicative competence in learning language, English, in particular, is viewed as the primary focus rather than the grammar or language structure competence.

Then, the teacher explained that the CLT approach was applied almost every time. Mostly, the teacher used the approach when she taught speaking and when she asked students to play games in groups to which the communication and interaction skills were needed. Thus, it can be concluded that she would use the approach frequently, particularly during teaching communicative and interactive activities in her classrooms.

On the other hands, she found two difficulties which she encountered during applying this approach. The first difficulty was that the students who did not want to speak English would keep using Indonesian, their native language. The second difficulty was she, sometimes, found it difficult to choose proper activities and materials which were suitable to the CLT approach.

Finally, according to the teacher, there were also some weaknesses in using the approach. First, several students could not produce utterances with accurate grammar since it was not the main concern of this approach. This means that the teacher would rarely correct the grammar when the students produced it incorrectly. Second, students whose native language was not English, would be oftenly difficult to understand materials delivered by teachers who kept using English.

REAL Teacher 2

1. What do you think about the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach in teaching English?

Answer: Basically, the approach is really helpful in fostering students to speak and interact with their friends and teachers in English.

2. When do you think the Communicative Language Teaching approach is applied?

Answer: It is applied when I need to achieve the communicative competence based on the materials I deliver to them. In teaching speaking, especially, I always apply this approach.

3. In your opinion, what should be the criteria when using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: It must be suitable to the materials which I give to the students. The materials should be communicative, instead of fully-theoretical.

4. What are the difficulties did you encounter during applying the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: I have two difficulties based on my experience. The first difficulty is that the students who are still new to learning English, especially, will find it uncomfortable to speak in English with teachers and friends so that they are less-competent. The second one is the classroom will be too noisy since almost every student speaks with louder voice so the teacher, sometimes, gets a difficulty to manage the class.

5. Can you mention several weaknesses in using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: Well, I can say that students with low levels of proficiency in the target language may find it difficult to participate in oral communicative activities. Another one is that this approach focuses more on the fluency, not the accuracy. No wonder if there are several students who have good speaking skill but their grammar and pronunciation are not good enough.

According to the teacher's answers above, the use of the Communicative Language Teaching approach was beneficial to students as they could learn how to speak and communicate with their friends as well as teachers in English. Besides, he said that the approach was applied when the materials needed it to deliver them successfully. When he taught speaking, he always applied it in order to make students be more communicative.

The criteria to use the Communicative Language Teaching approach, in his opinion, is that the materials should be properly suitable to it, which means that they must contain communicative activities, not only written theories. Also, in terms of difficulties in applying the approach, the teacher gave two examples according to his own experience in the teaching and learning process. The first example was that students who were still new to learning English would find it uncomfortable to speak in English since it made them less-confident to do it. The second example was the classrooms would be difficult to manage and handle since each student spoke with louder and louder voices, especially in a large classroom with many students.

The teacher also gave some weaknesses in using this approach. The first weakness was the students may find it difficult to participate in oral

communicative activities, particularly those who had low levels of proficiency in using English. The second weakness was this approach emphasised more on the fluency, not the accuracy. So, there were some students who could speak fluently but the grammar was not accurate enough.

REAL Teacher 3

1. What do you think about the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach in teaching English?

Answer: It is very good since it helps students well in learning the spoken language in English. Moreover, we are in the 21st century in which communicative competence in language is viewed as a primary need.

2. When do you think the Communicative Language Teaching approach is applied?

Answer: I will say that this approach is applied almost in teaching every language skill. Speaking, in particular, is the most frequent skill which employs the approach.

3. In your opinion, what should be the criteria when using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: The first criteria, for me, is that having good knowledge on the approach is a must for teachers. The second criteria is that the approach must be suitable to materials delivered. The third criteria is that the approach must be joyful for the students.

4. What are the difficulties did you encounter during applying the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: From my own experience, I found that the difficulties during applying this approach were that there were some learning textbooks which contained inappropriate CLT-related features, unbalanced interaction between teachers and students, and big classes were sometimes difficult to employ the CLT approach and to handle students.

5. Can you mention several weaknesses in using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: Several weaknesses which I have known so far are such as students' insufficient motivation towards English learning, students' unwillingness to communicate in English, students' low English proficiency, and the exclusion of oral proficiency tests at school.

Based on the teacher's answers above, she found that the use of the Communicative Language Teaching approach was very good. Furthermore, she stated that communicative competence was viewed as the primary need in learning language in this 21st century. The approach was applied almost in his every class, particularly when the students were trying to learn speaking.

The teacher explained that in order to use the approach well, the criteria was that teachers must have good knowledge on the approach first. Then, the teachers had to choose suitable materials to the approach. Last but not least, the execution of the materials must be enjoyable for students' learning process.

The difficulties, according to her, were that some learning textbooks contained inappropriate CLT-related features. This means that the communicative materials in the books are not qualified enough to be used to teach communicative lessons. Aside of that, another difficulty was unbalanced interaction between teachers and students. Students would be difficult to understand the materials which were given by teachers who kept using English during the teaching and learning process. As a result, students could hardly comprehend the information delivered by teachers. The next difficulty was that bigger classes were difficult to handle when all students spoke and interacted to each other. The classes would be too noisy that teachers had to work more to control the classrooms.

REAL Teacher 4

1. What do you think about the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach in teaching English?

Answer: I think this approach is really helpful in developing students' communication and interaction skills, especially during using English both inside and outside the classrooms.

2. When do you think the Communicative Language Teaching approach is applied?

Answer: According to my experience, I employ this approach frequently in my classes because the materials for students mostly require communication in English. In role-play and other language games, the approach is also implemented.

3. In your opinion, what should be the criteria when using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: In my opinion, the criteria of applying this approach are that there should be more engaging communicative activities or materials. Since this approach focuses more on the communicative competence, teachers should also be able to make students communicate and interact using English, instead of only sitting on their seats and doing written tasks or learning theories from textbooks.

4. What are the difficulties did you encounter during applying the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: I found that it was difficult to me in teaching students who are not willing hard to speak or learn English. Oftenly, the students would prefer to use Indonesian, their native language, than English. Aside of that, it is difficult to employ the approach when the materials are not suitable.

5. Can you mention several weaknesses in using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: Yes. I can give three examples of weaknesses in using this approach. First, students tend to use Indonesia in group discussion, instead of English. Second, students are mostly found unwilling to speak in English. Third, the grammar will be mostly inaccurate when students speak English fluently.

The teacher said that the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach was really helpful in developing students' communication and interaction skills, particularly when they used English inside and outside the classrooms. In the term of the application, he said that the approach was applied frequently in his classes since the materials delivered mostly required communications in English. Furthermore, when he wanted to use role-play or game, the approach would be implemented.

In terms of the criteria, the teacher gave two examples of them. The first criterion was that there should be more engaging communicative activities or lessons. It means that the materials delivered or given to students must be fun, interesting, as well as communicative to do so that they are willing to learn and communicate to each other. The second criterion was teachers must be able to make students communicate and interact using English, which means that teachers have to choose proper communicative activities, instead of only sitting on their seats and doing written tasks or learning theories from textbooks.

There were two difficulties which were encountered by the teacher during applying the CLT approach. The first difficulty was the teacher found it difficult to teach students who were not willing to speak or communicate in English. Instead, they would prefer to use Indonesian, their native language. The last difficulty was there were many materials which were not suitable with the approach. It means that the materials are fully theoretical, not communicative.

REAL Teacher 5

1. What do you think about the use of Communicative Language Teaching approach in teaching English?

Answer: This approach is really useful in teaching and learning English. The class becomes more alive to which the students are more active in participating the classroom activities.

2. When do you think the Communicative Language Teaching approach is applied?

Answer: Actually, I can always apply this approach as long as I teach lessons which require students to speak in English.

3. In your opinion, what should be the criteria when using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: The criteria are such as being able to make students actively speaking in English and able to make the learning process more enjoyable.

4. What are the difficulties did you encounter during applying the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: The first common difficulty which I encountered in using this approach were like some students found it hard to produce correct grammar during communicating to others. Another difficulty was the students were not competent enough to speak English since it was not their native language.

5. Can you mention several weaknesses in using the Communicative Language Teaching approach?

Answer: Yes. The first weakness is that students with low levels of proficiency in English may find it difficult to participate within oral communicative activities. Second, it needs a consideration also that this kind of approach may not be appropriate in EFL classrooms where English is rarely heard or used outside of the classroom. Third, during applying this approach, there is less-emphasis on the correction of pronunciation and grammar errors.

According to the first question and answer above, it can be seen that the teacher gave a positive response towards the use of the Communicative Language Teaching approach. He said that the approach was really useful since it could make the class more alive and students became more active in participating in the class activities. Then, according to him, the approach could be implemented as long as the materials delivered were communicative enough and students were willing to speak in English.

For the criteria of implementing the CLT approach, he gave one example, namely the teacher who used the approach must be able to make students spoke actively and make the learning process fun and enjoyable. As for the difficulties of applying the approach, he mentioned two examples, such as several students found it hard to produce correct grammar during communicating to others, and students were not competent enough to speak English since it was not their native language.

Last but not least, there were three weaknesses which were given by the teacher. The first weakness was students with low levels of English proficiency may find it difficult to participate within oral communicative activities. The second weakness was the teacher needed to consider that the approach may not be suitable in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms where English was rarely heard or used outside the classrooms. The last weakness was there was less-emphasis on the correction or feedback of pronunciation and grammar errors, which made the students were less-accurate to produce them correctly.

Conclusion

This research aims to find out the IONS International Education, specifically REAL English teachers' perceptions on the use of the Communicative Language Teaching approach in the English classrooms. The results showed that the teachers who involved in this research had positive responses towards the use of the CLT approach. All of the teachers agreed that the approach were useful and helpful to be used in the current century since the communicative competence is

viewed as the primary need in learning language, particularly English. However, despite of the usefulness and helpfulness, the teachers also contended that there were various difficulties and weaknesses during implementing the approach.

From this research, the researcher suggests that future researchers can conduct the same research with different subject. There are still other communicative teaching approaches whose teachers' perceptions have not been researched yet. The researcher wishes that the future research discusses about teachers' perceptions on other communicative approaches, such as the Natural Approach, Cooperative Language Learning, Content-Based Instruction, Task- Based Language Teaching, Lexical Approaches, Competency-Based Language Teaching, Multiple Intelligences, Neurolinguistic Programming, and Whole Language. Last but not least, the researcher also suggests that future research on teachers' perceptions can be conducted quantitatively.

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