

*Research article*

# Teachers' Beliefs, Perceptions and Attitudes Regarding the Practice of CLT Implementation in the EFL Classrooms

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Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second or foreign languages that emphasize communication as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. The purpose of this study was to investigate teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the practice of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation in the English Language classrooms, and data were collected from twelve English language teachers drawn from six high schools found in Guraghe Zone (Southern Ethiopia) through self-reported questionnaire. The data were organized, tabulated and analyzed and interpreted using descriptive analysis method. Findings revealed that teachers' use of Communicative Language Teaching promotes learners' centeredness in taking responsibility for their own learning process; teachers should understand the basic principles of CLT; tasks and activities of CLT must be negotiated and adapted to suit students' needs rather than being imposed on them. The teachers agreed that CLT is the most important criterion by which language learning and performance should be judged. They also said that group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interactions among students. Therefore, it is recommended that the teachers should further develop their understanding of CLT and should implement it accordingly so as help their students to become effective in using the language for communication by developing their communicative competence.

**Keywords:** Teachers' Beliefs, Perceptions, Attitudes, Practice, CLT, EFL

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## INTRODUCTION

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second or foreign languages that emphasize communication as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. The origins of CLT can traced to the changes of the British language teaching tradition dated back to the late 1960s. Wilkins (1972), in his book entitled "Notional Syllabus" initiated the significant role for the development of CLT and its greater application between the teachers and learners simultaneously. One of the most characteristic features of

CLT is that it pays systematic attention to function (meaning) as well as structural (form) aspects of language and describes spoken and written discourse. The goal of CLT is to develop communicative competence. It means what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competent in a speech community with a number of functions such as instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, and heuristic, imaginative and representational functions.

In fact, communication is now seen as the fundamental reason for learning a language and for many English as Foreign Language (EFL) teachers, communicative

teaching approach has become the only teaching method that they have experienced. Since CLT is not only a procedure but also an overall plan for the presentation of language materials or activities, nowadays, teachers of English have been encouraged to implement CLT method to help students develop their abilities in using English appropriately in various communicative contexts or situations. The CLT advocates teaching practices that develop communicative competence in authentic contexts (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). To improve learners' abilities to use English in real situations, CLT has been adopted in the settings of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context (Littlewood, 2007). Therefore, it is clear that teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are important in their decisions to implement CLT in their classrooms. The reason for the mismatch between CLT theory and practice maybe due to teachers' attitudes (Karavas-Doukas, 1996).

One significant factor that impacted the implementation of CLT is related to the variable interpretation of CLT (Butler, 2011; Cheng & Goswami, 2011). Since the introduction of the CLT in the late 1970s, there have been different versions of the communicative approach in second and foreign language teaching. As teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes reveal their thinking about teaching and learning language, investigating these issues may serve to provide insights about the features of CLT approach and English language teachers' practices regarding its implementation in the learning-teaching process, especially, in the English as a Foreign Language classroom. For this reason, it is important to explore English language teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the implementation of CLT approach in their EFL classrooms.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study was designed to investigate Guraghe Zone high school English language teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the practices of implementing CLT in the EFL classrooms, thinking that it is important to provide useful insights about the implementation of this approach in order to develop their students' communicative competence in the English language and their overall classroom achievement.

## OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the Guraghe Zone high schools EFL teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the practice of CLT implementation in the EFL classrooms.

Therefore, the following research questions were designed to guide this study.

- 1) What are teachers' beliefs regarding the practice of implementing CLT in the EFL classrooms?
- 2) How do the teachers perceive this approach (CLT) as a language teaching method?
- 3) Do teachers have clear understanding of the basic principles of CLT approach?
- 4) What are the teachers' attitudes toward the implementation of CLT approach in the EFL classrooms?

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study will be significant to English Language teachers and their students, as it will enhance their understanding of the significance of the CLT for the development of language learning and overall learning achievement. Specially, the teachers of these schools would be able to recognize the principles of CLT's approach which play an important role in the teaching and learning practices of English language. Seemingly, students of English language will be able to improve their communicative abilities and their overall language learning achievement as a result of the information obtained from this study. Conclusively, this study will assist program planners and education managers in policy formulation, and revision of teacher education programs at various levels of schooling for teaching and learning of English language.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT is a language teaching approach that uses language as a tool for the maintenance of social relations. Hence, CLT is highly dependent on the target language context by socializing the teaching and learning process in authentic language context. The interactive view of the nature of language fits with the learners' communicative needs, and the approach has gradually become the dominant model of teaching language methodologies (Butler, 2011; Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1997, cited in Jiandong & Dacheng, 2012). Though, second language teachers are encouraged to use CLT in their language classrooms, the majority of them seem to have failed to deliver genuinely communicative instructions (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Li, 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999, cited in Jiandong & Dacheng, 2012). The outcome on the foreign language teaching context is also not promising. Taking English as an example, the efficacy of using CLT in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) remains a controversial topic (Anderson, 1993; Cheng & Goswami, 2011).

Hence, the CLT approach refers to a theory of the nature of language and a theory of the nature of language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Spada (2007), there are different explanations of CLT at the theoretical level. She points out that British applied linguists share similar ideas of CLT as an approach to second language teaching that includes both form and meaning but there have been a number of different views in North America. In the United States, Hymes' theory of 'communicative competence' lays the theoretical groundwork for CLT, which regards language as a communication tool aims to develop "an ability when to speak, when not, and... what to talk about, with whom, when, where, and in what manner (Hymes, 1972, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.227). The concept of communicative competence is further specified in terms of four dimensions, including grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980, cited in Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Then, this holistic view about the communicative rationale offers two main insights. First, developing language within a socially meaningful context is the key feature that distinguishes CLT from other 'traditional' language teaching approaches or methods. Second, the emphasis on social interactional function of CLT does not necessarily downplay the grammatical aspect of language teaching.

However, across the world, the primary influence on the development of CLT methodology has been mainly associated with the work of British applied linguists (Spada, 2007). Throughout their work, Littlewood, 1981; Widdowson, 1979), they build the fundamental idea that meaning and form are closely linked and that both of them need to be addressed in second language learning. Littlewood (2006) indicates that there are various versions of CLT, which take different routes to achieve the goal of communicative language learning-to develop learners' communicative competence.

Although there are different interpretations of CLT at the theoretical level, it is believed that teachers' use of CLT in their classroom teaching is not merely determined by their knowledge of CLT learned from teacher education courses. Rather, it is a dynamic and complex process in which their perspectives of practice could be shaped by both professional knowledge and experiences in practice (Littlewood, 2007).

Karavas-Doukas (1996, cited in Nitish Kumar, 2012) suggests that the mismatch between the beliefs and practices may contribute to the neglect of examining teachers' attitudes before implementing any new approach. This means, promoting the approach only and trying to convince the teachers on the effectiveness of CLT, does not successfully change the teachers' existing beliefs about language teaching and learning (Newish Kumar, 2012, p.21).

## Empirical Review of CLT Approach

Karim's (2004) survey study examined university-level EFL teachers' attitudes toward CLT in Bangladesh. The findings showed that most teachers displayed positive attitudes toward the basic principles of CLT. He also stated that the teachers were aware of the features of CLT and their perceptions of CLT corresponded with their reported CLT practice.

In Italy, Hawkey (2006) applied both survey and face-to-face interviews to investigate whether teachers agreed with the advantage of the communicative approach in language teaching. The teachers stated positive views about CLT and said that "CLT improves learners' motivation", and "CLT improves communication skills" (p.247).

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

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

Similarly, Li's (2004) study of Chinese teachers' opinions at a tertiary level indicated that the teachers thought that learners must be given feedback when they practice L2 to modify their production. Since the students already knew how to negotiate meaning in their first language, what they needed to learn were words in order to use them in L2. The interview data in Carless's (2004, cited in Nitish Kumar, 2012) study revealed that some students used the simplest linguistic forms to complete the tasks. This view is confirmed by Tsai's (2007) study which stated that Taiwanese teachers also thought that EFL students have no immediate need to communicate in English. On the other hand, they need grammar and reading skills in order to learn content knowledge.

Widdowson (1999) says that "learners do not very readily infer knowledge of the language system from their communicative activities." "Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) values, among other things, learner-centeredness, which is, giving the learners more responsibility and involvement in the learning process.

This is often achieved through discovery learning activities and through group work as opposed to the traditional teacher-fronted lesson. Similarly, Song (2009) asserts that rather than the teacher transmitting information to the learners in the traditional classroom, CLT is a learner-centered approach that requires learners to control their own learning in the communicative process.

Sun and Cheng (2002) suggest that there are wide ramifications in the objectives of teaching and learning a foreign language. This means that the instruction needs to emphasize not only the development of language competence, but also providing students with cultural experience. CLT also takes a relatively relaxed attitude towards accuracy in the belief that meaning takes precedence over form. Finally, CLT has inherited the humanistic view that language is an expression of personal meaning, rather than an expression of a common culture. Such notions, it is argued, derive from very Western beliefs about education and language. Its critics argue that CLT is an inappropriate methodology in those cultural contexts where the teacher is regarded as a fountain of wisdom and where accuracy is valued more highly than fluency" (Thornbury, 2003).

Nitish's (2012) study of teachers' attitudes towards CLT in Bangladesh revealed that the teachers hold favorable attitude towards CLT. But most EFL teachers, especially in Bangladesh secondary education, only have a general idea of what communicative language teaching (CLT) is and hold many misconceptions about how to apply it in the language classroom (p.20).

## METHODOLOGY AND DESIGN

### Participants

This study employed a qualitative research approach to study English language teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the practice of CLT implementation in the Guraghe Zone high school English language teaching context. The participants of this study were twelve

English-speaking language teachers selected from six high schools found in different Woredas of Guraghe Zone (SNNPRs) through a simple random sampling technique to serve as sources of data for the study. The study was conducted in the academic year 2018/19. The teachers who participated in this study were teaching English to students of different grade levels, namely, 10, 11 and 12 and most of them had many years of experiences in teaching English as a Foreign Language. Nine of them are males and only three of them are females. Out of these, eight of them are AM Degree holders and four of them are BA Degree holders. All of them had taken many English language teaching courses including theories of language teaching and learning, language testing as well as language teaching methodologies.

### Data Collection Tool

In order to investigate the teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes regarding the practices of CLT in the EFL classrooms, a survey was conducted on 12 (twelve) high school English teachers through self-reported questionnaire that consisted of 13 items. Since the study was descriptive and non-experimental by nature, it was based on primary data gathered through a questionnaire. The items of the questionnaire were adapted from the literature in the field and were prepared in English and administered by the researcher in collaboration with a colleague.

### Data Analysis and Interpretation

In order to make the analysis process clear and effective, the data collected by means of the questionnaire were organized, tabulated, analyzed or interpreted using descriptive analysis and presented in Table 1. The data was tabulated in terms of frequency and percentage value was calculated for each item using simple descriptive statistics. Then, verbal interpretation of the results was carried out so as to make the analysis clear and understandable piece of writing. The respondents were asked to give their responses according to the short terms given below:

**Table 1:** Frequency and Percentage of Participants' Responses to the Questionnaire

Items	SA	A	U	D	SD
1   CLT values learner-centeredness and gives learners more responsibility for their own learning and involvement in the learning process.	8 66.7%	2 16.7%	1 8.3%	1 8.3%	0 0.0%
2   By mastering the rules of grammar, students will be fully able to communicate with others effectively.	2 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%	3 25%	7 58.3

**Table 1: continuation**

3	The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through interesting and challenging activities.	7 58.3%	3 25%	0 0.0%	2 16.7%	0 0.0%
4	An EFL teacher should understand the basic principles of CLT approach and must know how to implement it in teaching English as a Foreign Language.	6 50%	4 33.3%	2 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
5	Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit students' needs rather than being imposed on them.	6 50%	3 25%	0 0.0%	3 25%	0 0.0%
6	Students do their best when CLT is implemented in the classroom where small group work may occasionally be useful.	1 8.3%	8 66.7%	1 8.3%	2 16.7%	0 0.0%
7	Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue (Amharic).	6 50%	4 33.3%	2 16.7%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
8	Direct instruction of grammar rules and terminologies is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively.	1 8.3%	3 25%	0 0.0%	2 16.7%	6 50%
9	The textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students, rather the teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely different needs of the learners.	7 58.3%	4 33.3%	1 8.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
10	CLT is the most important criterion by which language learning and performance should be judged.	4 33.3%	5 41.7%	0 0.0%	3 25%	0 0.0%
11	Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students.	4 33.3%	7 58.3%	1 8.3%	0 0.0%	0 0.0%
12	For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teacher's feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not on the linguistic form of their responses/utterances.	3 25%	6 50%	0 0.0%	2 16.7%	1 8.3%
13	CLT approach emphasizes language learning for communicative competence.	2 16.7%	9 75%	0 0.0%	1 8.3%	0 0.0%

SA=Strongly Agree, A=Agree, U=Uncertain, D=Disagree, SD=Strongly Disagree

## FINDINGS

As it can be seen from the table above, majority (66.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that CLT values learner-centeredness and gives learners more responsibility for their own learning and involvement in the learning process which has been expressed through their agreement with the statement. Only few (16.7%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that by mastering the rules of grammar, students will be fully able to communicate with others effectively. Most (58.3%) of the respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that by mastering the rules of grammar, students will be fully able to communicate with others effectively, and (25%) of them also disagreed with this statement. More than half, (58.3%), of the participants strongly agreed with the statement that the role of the teacher in the classroom is to impart knowledge or skills through interesting and challenging activities.

Half (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that an EFL teacher should understand the

basic principles of CLT and must know how to implement them in teaching English as a Foreign Language, and some (33.3%) of them agreed with this statement as an important issue. The same number (50%) of participants strongly agreed with the statement that tasks and activities of CLT should be negotiated and adapted to suit students' needs rather than being imposed on them. Also, (25%) of them agreed with this statement positively. Whereas (25%) of the respondents disagreed with the statement that tasks and activities of CLT should be negotiated and adapted to suit students' needs rather than being imposed on them.

Majority (66.7%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that students can do their best when CLT is implemented in the classroom where small group work may occasionally be useful. This implies that large group is difficult for the teacher to monitor the learners' performance as well as their progress in the classroom. Some (16.7%) of the respondents hold negative opinions about this statement which has been expressed through their disagreement with the statement.

Half (50%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the

statement that group work activities have little use since it is difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue (Amharic). Likewise, (33.3%) of them agreed with this statement positively, whereas (16.7%) of them said that they were uncertain about this statement.

On the other hand, half (50%) of respondents strongly disagreed with the statement that direct instruction of grammar rules and terminologies is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively in English, and (16.7%) of them also disagreed with this statement negatively. The majority (58.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed with the statement that the textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students, rather the teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely different needs of the learners. Also (25%) of them agreed with the above statement positively, whereas (16.7%) of the respondents disagreed with this statement negatively.

About (41.7%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that CLT is the most important criterion by which language learning and performance should be judged, and (33.3%) of them strongly agreed with this statement. More than half (58.3%) of the respondents agreed with the statement that group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students and (33.3%) of them have strongly agreed to this statement positively. Many (25%, 50%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively with the statement that for students to become effective communicators in the foreign language (English), the teacher's feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not on the linguistic form of their responses. On the contrary (25%) of the teachers hold negative views about this statement which has been expressed through their disagreement. Majority (75%) of the teachers agreed with the statement that CLT approach emphasizes language learning for communicative competence.

## DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

Out of the 12 teachers who participated in this study, 10 of the participants agreed that CLT values learner-centeredness and gives learners more responsibility for their own learning and involvement in the learning process. Whereas only 2 of the respondents agreed that by mastering the rules of grammar, students will be fully able to communicate with others effectively. Whereas 10 of them said that the role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through interesting and challenging activities. Similarly, 10 of the teachers agreed that an EFL teacher should understand the basic

principles of CLT approach and must know how to implement it in teaching English as a Foreign Language. And also 9 of them hold positive attitudes toward the statement that tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit students' needs rather than being imposed on them, and 9 of them said that students can do their best when CLT is implemented in the classroom where small group work may occasionally be useful. Again 10 of the teachers said that group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue. Moreover, almost all (11) of the teachers agreed that the textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students, rather the teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely different needs of the learners; 9 of the respondents believed that CLT is the most important criterion by which language learning and performance should be judged. Also 11 of them agreed that group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for cooperative relationships to emerge and in promoting genuine interaction among students. Moreover, 9 of the teachers confirmed the statement that, for students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teachers' feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not on the linguistic forms of their responses/utterances, and 11 of teachers said that CLT emphasizes language learning for communicative competence.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the interpretation and discussions of results made above, it can be concluded that the participating teachers of this study have positive perceptions and attitudes regarding the practice of CLT approach implementation in the EFL classrooms they were in charge of and they have been practicing this approach in the teaching of English to their students. This can be due to the fact that the need for communication skills and communicative competence in using the language has been realized by most of the teachers. This study was initiated to investigate high school language teachers' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards CLT and their thinking and experiences regarding CLT practice. The findings revealed that the participating teachers showed positive perceptions/beliefs and hold favorable attitudes towards CLT, and they said that CLT values learner-centeredness and gives learners more responsibility for their own learning and involvement in the learning process; the role of the teacher is to impart knowledge through interesting and challenging activities and must understand the basic principles of CLT and must know how to implement it in teaching the language. Tasks and activities should be negotiated to suit students' needs

rather than being imposed on them. Most of the teachers believed that students can do their best when CLT is implemented in the classroom where small group work may occasionally be useful even though they think that group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the learners' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue (Amharic). They also agreed that the textbook alone is not able to cater to all the needs and interests of the students, rather the teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely varying needs of the learners, and CLT is the most important criterion by which language learning and performance should be judged. Finally, the respondents believed that group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for co-operative relationships to emerge and in providing genuine interactions among students, and for students to become effective communicators in the language, the teacher's feedback must be focused on the appropriateness and not on the linguistic form of their responses/ utterances. Almost all of the respondents agreed that CLT emphasizes language learning for communicative competence.

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