AN INVESTIGATION OF INDONESIAN EFL TEACHERS' PERCEPTION OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

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Abstrak

Selama tiga dekade terakhir, Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif (CLT) telah menjadi salah satu pendekatan yang paling dominan di bidang ESL atau pengajaran EFL di banyak negara di seluruh dunia, termasuk Indonesia. Tujuan dari penelitian ini adalah: (a) untuk menyelidiki persepsi teoritis CLT guru Bahasa Inggris di Indonesia, (b) untuk melihat apakah guru telah menerapkan CLT di kelas, dan (c) untuk mengidentifikasi kesulitan yang dihadapi guru dalam melaksanakan CLT. Para peserta dalam penelitian ini adalah 7 guru EFL Indonesia yang mengejar studi mereka dalam program Pengajaran TESOL dan Bahasa Asing di Universitas Canberra. Tiga puluh-item kuesioner digunakan untuk pengumpulan data. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa guru yang terlibat dalam penelitian ini umumnya memiliki pemahaman yang cukup baik dari prinsip-prinsip dan kegiatan CLT. Sebagian besar guru juga melaporkan bahwa mereka telah menerapkan CLT dalam kelas mereka meskipun banyak dari mereka masih dipertahankan kegiatan pendekatan tradisional. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan kendala dalam melaksanakan kegiatan CLT antara lain, kemampuan bahasa Inggris siswa yang rendah, kelas yang banyak siswanya, dan kurangnya sumber pembelajaran.

Abstract

Over the past three decades, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become one of the most dominant approaches in the field of ESL or EFL teaching in many countries around the world, including Indonesia. The aims of this study were threefold: (a) to investigate Indonesian EFL teachers' theoretical perceptions of CLT, (b) to look at whether the teachers have implemented CLT in the classroom, and (c) to identify difficulties the teachers face in implementing CLT. The participants in the study were 7 Indonesian EFL teachers who were pursuing their study in TESOL and Foreign Language Teaching program at the University of Canberra. Thirty-item questionnaires were used for data collection. The results of the study revealed that the teachers involved in this study generally had considerably good understanding of principles and activities of CLT. Most of the teachers also reported thatthey have implemented CLT in their classrooms even though many of them still maintained activities of traditional approaches. The results also revealed that all of the teachers face some constraints in implementing CLT activities in their classrooms. Among the most common constraints include low English proficiency of the students, large classrooms, and lack of sources.

Istilah kunci: Persepsi Guru, Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif

Key terms: Teachers' perception, Communicative Language Teaching

Introduction

Over the past three decades, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become one of the most prevailing approaches in the field of ESL or EFL teaching in many countries around the world. In Indonesia, the Ministry of National Education has made significant attempt to implement CLT through national English curriculum. "Like any other reform efforts in the world, the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching in public discourse, and later on, its institution in Indonesia's schools … represent a response to our disappointment with the theories coming before it".[1] However, reports of CLT practices from around the world suggest that although most second/foreign language teachers claim to use CLT, many do not actually do so. Karavas-Doukas, for example, concludedthat ''… the few small-scale classroom studies thathave been carried outseem to suggest thatcommunicative classrooms are rare. While mostteachers profess to be following a communicativeapproach, in practice they are following moretraditional approaches''.[2]

Communicative Language Teaching starts from a theory of language as communication. CLT refers to a various set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning and that can be used to support a broad variety of classroom procedures.[3] A communicative approach to language teaching involvesthenegotiationof meaningbetween speakerandlistenerorbetweenauthorandreader. Meaning must be at the center of all communicative exchanges. [4]

Brown proposed the definition of CLT to include the following issues: (a) "Classroom goalsare focused on *all* of the components of communicativecompetence"; (b) "Language techniquesare designed to engage learners in the pragmatic,authentic, functional use of language for meaningfulpurposes"; (c) "Fluency and accuracy areseen as complementary principles underlyingcommunicative techniques"; and (d) "studentsultimately have to *use* the language, productively and receptively".[5] In essence, CLT is the engagement of learners in communication in order to allow them to develop their communicative competence.[6]

Research into teachers' views and practices of CLT in ESL and EFL contexts has, by and large, showed that there is a discrepancy between teachers' theoretical perceptions of CLT and actual classroom practices. In a study of Japanese second language teachers, Sato and Kleinsasser discovered the inconsistency between teachers' perceptions of CLT and their actual classroom behavior. Even though the majority of the teachers reported using communicative activities such as role-play, games, survey, and group work, these things were rarely observed in the classroom.[7] Similar findings were also reported by Karavas-Doukas.

Although she acknowledged that there were glances of communicative approaches, the teachers preferred traditional ones in which most lessons were teacher- centered and demonstrated an explicit focus on form.[8]

Furthermore, a number of constraints in implementing CLT have also been identified in some previous studies. Sato and Kleinsasser, for example, discovered teachers' misconceptions about CLT, large classrooms and the educational systems as the main challenges teachers faced in implementing CLT. In a study of 20 Turkish EFL teachers, Mehmet also discovered some teachers' constraints in applying CLT which include grammar-based national syllabus, loaded teaching schedules, insufficient facilities, large classrooms and teachers' lack of practical knowledge. [9] The identification of constraints in implementing CLT is important as it is crucial for a future improvement. Savignon and Wang states "once they have been recognized, the difficulties experienced in the implementation of a communicative approach often lead to further modification".[10]

Based on the facts above and the scarcity of research on teachers' perception of CLT in Indonesia, I was encouraged to investigate Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT especially in the light of the following research questions:

1. What are Indonesian EFL teachers' theoretical perceptions of communicative language teaching?
2. Have the teachers implemented CLT in their classrooms?
3. What constraints do the teachers face in implementing CLT in their classrooms?

Subjects

The subjects of the study were 7 Indonesian EFL teachers who were doing their master's degree in TESOL and Foreign Language Teaching program at the University of Canberra, Australia when the survey was carried out. The ages of the subjects ranged between 25 to 35 with teaching experience ranged from 2 to 8 years. Five of the subjects are university lecturers and the other two are secondary school teachers.

Instrument

To collect the data on teachers' perceptions of communicative language teaching, thirty-item questionnaires were used. The questionnaires were developed based on theories, principles, and sample activities of CLT found in ELT textbooks and articles. The questionnaires consisted of 27 likert-scale items and three open-ended questions.The Likert-

type itemswere designed to identify teachers'understandings of CLT and teachers' views on CLT implementation while the open-ended questions were designed to obtain information about difficulties the teachers face in implementing CLT, how the teachers define CLT in their own words, and the appropriateness of CLT in their contexts.

Data collection and analysis

In collecting the data, the researchers contacted 8 Indonesian EFL teachers who were doing their master's degree in TESOL and FLT program, explained the purpose of the survey, and asked them to complete the questionnaires. Out of 8 questionnaires distributed, 7 were returned. To understand the data, the responses from the likert-scale items were presented in numbers instead of percentages. This was because the number of the subjects was too small to convert into percentages.

Results

Table 1 presents teachers' responses to items on the basic tenets of CLT. For the convenience of comparison, the five-point scales of responses were converted to three-point simplified scales (agree, undecided, and disagree).

Table 1

Teachers' understanding of the basic tenets of CLT

Basic tenets	Number of response		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1. Contextualized learning	7	-	-
2. Activity-oriented and meaningful real communication	7	-	-
3. Student-centered learning	5	1	1

As can be seen in the table above, all of the subjects agreed that CLT is a contextualized, activity-oriented learning and involves meaningful real communication. A vast majority of the subjects were also aware that CLT is a student-centered learning.

When asked to identify which activities they agreed to be suitable for CLT activities, the teachers gave the responses as shown in table 2.

Table 2
Activities appropriate for CLT

Activity	Number of response		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1. Information gap	7	-	-
2. Role play	7	-	-
3. Interview	6	1	-
4. Presenting grammar by means of a conversation	5	1	1
5. Memorizing dialog	-	2	5

As can be seen in table 2, all of the teachers agreed that information gap and role plays aresuitable activities for CLT and a vast majority agreed interviewsand grammar presentation in a conversation are also suitable for CLT.

Table 3
Teachers' view on implementing CLT

Questionnaire items	Number of response		
	Agree	Undecided	Disagree
1. In the classroom, I talk more than my students.	2	2	3
2. I use/introduce authentic materials from the target language.	6	-	1
3. I correct most errors students make in speaking and writing so that the errors do not become a permanent habit.	-	1	6
4. My role in the classroom is more as a facilitator than a model and controller.	4	3	-

As can be seen in table 3, a vast majority of the teachers agreed that they use/introduce authentic materials in their classrooms and most of the teachers disagreed that they correct most errors students make in speaking and writing. With regard to the teacher's role in the classroom, only 4 agreed that their role is more as facilitator than a model and controller.

Table 4 below shows types of activities the teachers use in their classrooms. As can be seen, a vast majority of the teachers use a number of activities that are appropriate for CLT considerably frequently. For example, 5 out of 7 teachers claimed they group activities 'often' and the other two use them 'always'. The majority of teachers also claimed that they often use task completion activities and role-plays. However, some of the teachers also

reported using activities of other approaches considerably frequently, for example, grammar rules explanation and drills. In another statement, the teachers were also asked for their agreement of whether they introduced or use authentic materials in their teaching. To this statement, 6 of the teachers agreed and one did not.

Table 4
Types of activities the teachers use in their classrooms

Types of activities	Number of response				
	Always	Often	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Silent reading	-	-	4	1	-
Paragraph translation	-	1	1	4	-
Action sequence (TPR)	-	1	2	2	-
Drills	-	2	3	-	-
Role-plays	1	5	1	-	-
Problem solving	-	2	2	2	-
Task-completion e.g. puzzles, games, map-reading	-	6	1	-	-
Memorization of dialogue and choral repetition	-	1	3	2	1
Grammar rules explanation		5	2	-	-
Group activities	2	5	-	-	-

When asked to define CLT in their own words, the teachers came up with some commonality definitions except for one teacher. For example, most of the teacher defined CLT as an approach which involve real meaningful activities for the purposes of communication, some also defined CLT as student-centered approach. One of the teachers, however, said that CLT is a method that focused more on speaking.

In responding to the open-ended questions on what difficulties they have faced in implementing CLT in their classrooms (Q. 28), the teachers came up with relatively similar concerns. Amongthe most common difficulties are students' level of English,big class size, lack of resources, and unavailability of facilities. Some also mentioned difficultiesin finding appropriate materials for the students' level, managing the classroom, and finding ways to encourage students' creativity.

To question 30, asking whether and why/why not CLT is appropriate for their contexts, all of the teachers responded 'yes'. Most of the teachers also shared common views with regard to this issue. The most common reason for this was that language is a means of communication, and therefore it should not merely be taught as knowledge but also as a skill so that the students can use it to communicate.

Discussion

The results in table 1 and 2, which show teachers' level of agreement on principles and typical classroom activities of CLT, revealed that the teachersparticipated in this study generally had considerably good understandings of CLT principles and activities. The notion that CLT is contextualized, activity-oriented, involving meaningful genuine communication has been suggested by theorists in second language teaching. Hendrickson, for example, states "at all levels of communicative language teaching, students need a great deal of exposure to the foreign language presented in contexts…[t]eaching language in authentic contexts in the classroom should approximate as closely as possible language as it is used by native speakers outside of the classroom".[11]

The findings also showed that most of the teachers have implemented CLT activities such as role-plays, task completion, and group activities in their classrooms. However, activities of traditional approaches such as grammatical rules explanation, drills, silent reading, memorization of dialog and choral repetition are still maintained. This could result from the fact that even though the development of communicative competence has been spelled out in current English curriculum in Indonesia, the final exam still focuses grammar and reading comprehension so that teachers must prepare their students for these purposes.

The results also revealed that each of the teachers has their own concern relating to difficulties of implementing CLT. Large classrooms, students' low level of English, lack of sources, and unavailability of facilities are among the most common constraints preventing the teachers to implement CLT. Some of these constraints were also identified in several previous studies (e.g. Sato and Kleinsasser, 1999; Mehmet, 2006). With regard to the classroom size, however, CLT activities basically can be used in the same way in large as in small classrooms, except that more preparation may be needed in large classroom. Also, since second language learning is facilitated through communicative activities, students' level of English also should not be seen as a constraint because CLT acknowledges diversity, as Jacobs and Farrell (2003 in Richards, 2005) state "learners learn in different ways and have different strengths. Teaching needs to take these differences into account rather than try to force students into a single mould. In language teaching this has led to an emphasis on developing students' use and awareness of learning strategies".[12]

Conclusion

The present study records Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT. The results revealed that the teachers involved in this study generally had considerably good understanding of principles and activities of CLT. Even though most of the teachers have implemented CLT activities in their classrooms, many still maintain activities of traditional approaches. It also turned out that all of the teachers had their own constrains in implementing CLT in their classrooms.

Despite providing useful information to the understanding of Indonesian EFL teachers' perceptions of CLT, this study is far from perfect. One obvious limitation of the present study is that the data were only taken from such small number of sample that one should be cautious to generalize these findings. Second, because the data were merely based on perceptions, the results on the implementation of CLT may not represent teachers' actual classroom practices. However, since no studies have been done to gauge teachers' perceptions of CLT in Indonesia, the present study has, partly, revealed some problems which can be used for further investigation. Thus, in future, further research involving larger number of sample and using a variety of data collection methods such as interviews and classroom observation is needed. Relevant factors such as students' English proficiency level, classroom sizes and settings which likely facilitate and hinder the implementation of CLT should also be the areas of investigation.

Endnote

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