

Teachers' Perspectives of the use of CLT in ELT Classrooms: A Case of Soran District of Northern Iraq

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Abstract

This mixed-method study aims at exploring Iraqi English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The study was conducted in Soran town, in the northern part of Iraq. The participants of the study were 58 EFL teachers from secondary and high school classrooms. In the first phase, a five-point Likert-scale questionnaire was administered (Karavas-Doukas, 1996) to examine the participants' attitudes towards CLT principles: "place/importance of grammar, group/pair work, quality and quantity of error correction, the role of the teacher in the classroom, the role and contribution of learners in the learning process." The second phase of the study was qualitative and consisted of semi-structured interviews to examine the reasons behind the implementation of CLT in terms of the factors that hinder and encourage the implementation of CLT in the Iraqi setting. The results of the quantitative analysis revealed that the teachers held overall positive attitudes towards the use of CLT. The findings of the interview phase concluded that the main factors that cause the failure and success of the implementation of CLT in Iraq can be categorized under four headings: educational factors, teacher factors, student factors, and CLT factors. The results of the study suggest that the educational system and the teachers' communicative competence are essential to promote the employment of CLT in Iraqi EFL classrooms.

Keywords: CLT, communicative competence, Iraq, teachers' attitudes

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Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been a popularly employed method since the 1990s and its use has been flourishing. This method is largely regarded as essential to second-language learning and communicative competence. Thus, how CLT becomes utilized in practice is vital and deems necessary an investigation of the attitudes of those educators employing it.

Brown (1994) maintains that the nature of CLT depends largely upon the perceptions or attitudes of educators regarding the teaching and acquisition of the particular language of study. Attitude is described as “the interplay of feelings, beliefs, and thoughts about actions” (Rusch & Perry, 1999, p. 291). Generally, teachers' attitudes are significant in developing an educational system and progressing the learning process. Nevertheless, attitude alone is not sufficient for examining the effectiveness of an English Language Teaching (ELT) method, for socio-organizational context must also be considered.

The primary goal of CLT is to reinforce writing, reading, speaking and listening skills in various contexts via interdependent communication and learning (Larsen-Freeman, 2008). As a result, this approach has shifted classroom models from being teacher-centred toward learner-focused, meaning that the role of teachers has transformed from being a conveyor of information to that of an engager in interaction with students as well as a practical guide (Larsen-Freeman, 2008). The overall aim of CLT in an EFL classroom is to provide learners with opportunities for interaction and communication in the English language, with teachers playing various roles including that of a mediator, guide, and facilitator. In order for a teacher to fulfill these roles, they not only must guide communication and interaction within the classroom but also incorporate non-traditional materials supporting these processes (Breen & Candlin, 1980). The teacher should guide students only when dealing with the use of materials and participation in the chosen activities such as role-play, pair/group work, and games. However, students should play the dominant role in appropriating these activities to meet their individual needs.

Many scholars have emphasized that teacher attitudes should be examined closely rather than marginalized when considering the effectiveness of a language-teaching approach (Breen & Candlin, 1980). These attitudes are essential to student success, especially within CLT, in which teachers relinquish the role of controller or conveyor in order to adopt a more facilitative role. Moreover, since CLT principles were designed for a Western educational context, it is necessary to investigate factors that either hinder or promote its effectiveness in additional cultural contexts.

This study examines teachers' attitudes towards implementing CLT in classroom practice at the secondary education level in the Soran district of northern Iraq. The key goal is to probe Iraqi EFL teachers' attitudes towards CLT as well as to determine the obstacles and encouraging factors they encounter in utilizing this approach. To support the results of this study, the researcher describes the educational environment particular to the study's location. Accordingly, the results may have direct implications the development of teachers and teaching methods in Iraq's secondary English education classrooms.

This study addresses the following research questions:

- Research Question 1: What are Iraqi EFL teachers' attitudes towards the principles of CLT?
- Research Question 2: What kinds of problems do Iraqi EFL teachers encounter when implementing CLT in their language classrooms?
- Research Question 3: What essential reasons encourage the implementation of CLT in Iraqi EFL classrooms?

CLT has been widely examined by ELT scholars (Ellis, 1996; Gorsuch, 2000; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002; Sun & Cheng, 2002; Inceciay & Inceciay, 2009). However, to the best of our knowledge, no studies have specifically dealt with perceptions of CLT as well as its implementation in the Iraqi context. Thus, this study gains its significance not only from the fact that it contributes to a broader understanding of CLT as an EFL approach but also from the fact that it may offer direct guidance for Iraqi EFL educators in adopting CLT in their classrooms. It is hoped that this study will enable these teachers to develop interpersonal classroom interactions while providing their students the chance to gain independence in their language learning. Additionally, the implications from this study might lead to the transformation of the relatively passive role of Iraqi EFL learners into a more active one.

Methodology

In this study, a mixed method of quantitative and qualitative data collection was conducted. First, descriptive analyses were performed on the responses obtained from 58 teachers regarding their attitudes towards CLT. As De Vaus (2002, p.18) defines it, "descriptive research deals with questions of *what* things are like, not *why* they are that way." For the first phase of data collection, a 5-point Likert-scale questionnaire, adopted from Karavas-Doukas (1996) was used to measure the level of perceived attitudes of the participants.

Karavas-Doukas categorizes the principles of CLT into five subscales: place/importance of grammar, group/pair work, quality and quantity of error correction, the role of the teacher in the classroom, and the role and contribution of learners in the learning process (See Table 1).

Table 1. Questionnaire Items on the subscales of CLT

| Principles | Item numbers |
|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|
| Place/importance of grammar | 1, 3, 12, 17, 23 |
| Group/pair work | 2, 9, 13, 21, 22 |
| Quality and quantity of error correction | 6, 10, 14, 15 |
| The role of the teacher in the classroom | 7, 16, 19, 24 |
| The role and contribution of learners in the learning process | 4, 5, 8, 11, 18, 20 |

Since a thorough understanding of a particular subject cannot be obtained via a questionnaire, the researcher supplemented these with semi-structured interviews obtaining the

subjective views and experiences of the randomly-selected six participants who had already answered the questionnaire. The aim of this was to investigate the rationales behind the implementation of CLT in their EFL classrooms (See Appendix I). Before the researcher began conducting the interviews, the interview questions were checked by a university professor of education to verify their compatibility with the research questions. During the interview process, the researcher asked the interviewees prearranged and open-ended questions; however, follow-up questions were also asked.

Participants included 58 secondary education teachers. Although random sampling would be the preferred method for this kind of a study, based on limitations of access to potential participants, we employed convenience sampling.

The researchers created an online Google form to collect the needed data. Out of 58 participants, only 30 of them responded online. The remaining 28 answered the questionnaire manually after the researcher visited their schools. Since participants were English language teachers, the researchers administered the questionnaire in English. The 5-point Likert type questionnaire consists of twenty-four statements and, therefore, the potential overall participant scores range between 24 and 120. The questionnaire consists of 12 positive and 12 reverse-coded statements. The researchers also included a background information section with the questionnaire asking for the participants' age, gender, years of experience, number of professional training programs attended, frequency of using CLT, and majors of study.

As a questionnaire alone is insufficient to acquire a thorough understanding of an issue, the researcher supplemented this data collection tool with face-to-face interviews. These involved six randomly-selected participants and explored the factors underlying their motivation to implement CLT in their classrooms. The overall teaching experience of participants between six and ten years. Prior to conducting the interviews, the researcher phoned the interviewees to inform them of the purpose of participation and obtain approval regarding their willingness to participate voluntarily. After the researcher had obtained such consent via a signed document, an interview schedule was organized to accommodate interviewees based on their availability; moreover, the interviews occurred outside of their work environment so as to encourage free discussion and avoid interjections. Before each interview commenced, the researcher thoroughly explained the reasons and protocols of the study to the participant.

After the interviews were conducted, the researcher translated two of the audios into English and transcribed the audiotapes verbatim. The transcriptions then were revised by the interviewees for verification. Also, the translated versions were reviewed for accuracy by a doctoral candidate holding a Master's degree in ELT as well as by the first author himself, who is a professional academic translator.

As an ethical protocol, the researcher obtained an administrative consent letter from the General Education Directorate of the region. The approval letter from the Directorate of Education was attached with all the questionnaires in order to assert the purpose of the study.

For the analysis of the quantitative data, the answers by the respondents were digitalized and put into SPSS. Then, descriptive statistics were obtained to numerically determine the attitudes of the participants.

Creswell and Plano Clark (2007) suggest that for qualitative data analysis, a five-step technique is preferable for "preparing the data for analysis, exploring the data, analyzing the data, representing the data analysis, and validating the data" (p. 129). After confirming the accuracy of the respondents' data, thematic content analysis was employed to categorize the data. This technique is preferred when "the general issues that are of interest are determined prior to the analysis, but the specific nature of the categories and themes to be explored are not predetermined", as was the case with this study (Ezzy, 2002, p. 88). Next, the coding process—described by Ezzy (2002) as "disassembling and reassembling the data process"—was considered (p. 94). That is, the data were classified into smaller items of texts. Then, each item was re-organized by categorizing and identifying the themes to yield different obtained data.

Findings

As mentioned above, the first research question probed Iraqi EFL teachers' attitudes towards the principles of CLT. Thus, the mean, standard deviation, maximum and minimum scores were calculated to define the participants' responses. Furthermore, the principles of CLT were divided into five subscales: the importance of grammar, group/pair work, quantity and quality of error correction, teacher role inside the classroom, and the role and contribution of learners in the learning process. Thus, descriptive statistics were obtained for all five principles in order to describe the means, standard deviations and percentages for each item as well as the overall scores for principles.

Table 2 describes the overall attitudes of the participants towards the use of CLT in their classrooms.

Table 2. Descriptive analysis of overall attitudes of participants

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation |
|------------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|
| Overall attitude score | 58 | 63.65 | 91.00 | 76.2933 | 5.65507 |
| Valid N (likewise) | 58 | | | | |

As illustrated by Table 2, most participants had a positive (favorable) attitudes towards CLT principles. The obtained scores ranged from 63.60 (minimum) to 91.00 (maximum), with a mean of 76.29 and standard deviation of 5.65.

The results indicate that participants held favorable attitudes toward all five subscales of CLT. More specifically, they exhibited moderate attitudes towards group/pair work, with the highest mean ($M=3.33$), indicating the most favorable items of CLT subscales. Similarly, the participants held moderate attitudes towards "the role and contribution of learners in the learning process", with the mean score of ($M=3.31$). Furthermore, the participants held moderate attitudes towards "the role of the teachers in the classroom" ($M=3.25$). However, their attitudes towards the "place/importance of grammar" and "quality and quantity of error correction" were also favorable but with lower means: ($M=2.96$) and ($M=2.96$), respectively.

As mentioned in the methodology section, the questionnaire is composed of five subscales. We are going to present the item-based frequencies in each subscale in this section.

For the first subscale, which is *place and importance of grammar*, the following findings have been obtained. Twenty-three participants (39.7%) agreed that grammatical correctness is necessary for learners to achieve communication goals (Item 1). Twenty-one (39.7%) thought that grammatical rules should be taught as a way to achieve communication, but not as the main purpose itself (Item 3). Moreover, twenty-five (43.1%) reported that knowledge of grammar rules does not guarantee learners to achieve communication skills (Item 12). Twenty-five (41.4%) believed that grammar is essential for learners who seek the capability of communicating with a native speaker (Item 17). Finally, thirty-one (53.2%) remained uncertain regarding whether a direct instruction of grammar is vital for learners to speak fluently (Item 23). The responses indicate that some teachers prefer grammar rules to be directly involved in their classrooms, while others suggest that grammar rules should be taught as a means for learners to achieve effective communication.

For the second subscale (group/pair work), the findings are as follows. Twenty-five teachers (43.1%) agreed that group work aids learners in emerging within an environment in which they themselves can communicate with one another (Item 2). Thirty-two (56.1%) argued that group activities enable students to control their learning and, thus, it is an irreplaceable communication tool (Item 9). In terms of the potentially time-consuming nature of group activities, twenty teachers (34.5%) asserted that group activities are difficult to employ in their classrooms. Similarly, the same amount of participants (34.5%) opposed the idea that such activities require time and organization (Item 13). Twenty-four (42.1%) reported that small group work activities may occasionally be useful, but it is difficult to consider them as alternatives for authentic instruction by an experienced teacher (Item 21). Finally, twenty-three participants (41.1%) agreed that group work activities cannot prevent learners from utilizing first language and monitoring them is difficult (Item 22). According to the respondents, group activities function as the main tool for learners to gain a self-confidence inside the classroom, although some of the teachers still oppose group activities inside the classroom.

The third subscale, quality and quantity of error correction, revealed the following findings. Twenty-three participants (40.4%) felt that teacher feedback should involve learners' fluency in communication rather than grammatical errors (Item 6). Twenty-two (38.6%) claimed that it is necessary for the teacher to correct all structural rules; otherwise, he/she might contribute to students' imperfection in learning (Item 10). Twenty-four (41.4%) agreed that error correction is a waste of time because errors are an unavoidable part of the learning process, while twenty-one (36.2%) suggested that it is a fact that errors are part of the learning process, but neglecting them results in impotent learning in future (Item 14). Most participants (38.6%) agreed that one disadvantage of CLT is that it focuses more on fluency while neglecting accuracy (Item 15). From the responses of the participants, it is concluded that error correction is a significant feature of the learning process and is essential to becoming a good communicator in a foreign language.

The role of the teacher in the classroom, which is the fourth subscale, gave us the following findings. Twenty-two participants (37.9%) agreed that teachers should act as a facilitator than an instructor inside classrooms. To the credit of this notion, it is widely argued that the classroom should be student-centered rather than teacher-centered in a CLT environment (Item 7). More than half of the respondents (53%) claimed that the teacher as knowledge provider is only one segment of his/her diverse roles, which are supposed to be fulfilled during

the lessons (Item 16). The majority of teachers (56.9%) asserted that knowledge of the target language should be transmitted to students through examples, writings and explanations, while fourteen of the total amount (24.1%) strongly agreed (Item 19). Lastly, almost half of the respondents (46.6%) believed textbooks to be insufficient for creating a communicative atmosphere, but the teacher should take tasks and other materials into consideration in order to meet the needs of learners. Not surprisingly, twenty-three of the total amount (39.7%) strongly agreed in supporting this argument (Item 24). In their responses, teachers confirmed that the role of teacher should be varied inside classrooms and that the role of the teacher is not as a “director” or “controller” but rather as a “facilitator.” Moreover, they perceived activities as important for imparting the content of the lesson, and textbooks as requiring supplementary explanations and examples when conveying information to students.

For the final subscale (the role and contribution of the learners in the learning process), we obtained the following findings. It is observed that twenty-five participants (43.1%) thought that teachers rather than learners should decide the content of the lesson (Item 4). Twenty participants (35.1%) believed that learners should not be trained in order to be familiarized with CLT since they are not used to such an approach (Item 5). More than half of the participants (54.4%) favored learner-centered classrooms (Item 8). Almost half of the respondents (46.6%) reported that it is difficult to organize the teaching process in large classrooms (Item 11). The majority of the participants (57.9%) claimed that language is better to acquire when it is employed as a vehicle to something else, rather than as an object of study in and of itself. (Item 18). Lastly, thirty-seven participants (63.8%) agreed that forcing learners to perform tasks and activities could not achieve the goal of CL, while ten of the participants (17.2%) strongly supported this notion (Item 20). It can be concluded from participants' responses that learners are considered key players in the process of language learning, specifically when it comes to communicative competence..

Research Question 2 inquired the sort of problems Iraqi EFL teachers encounter in implementing CLT in their language classrooms. The main purpose of the interview questions was to identify the most common obstacles encountered by teachers while implementing CLT in their classrooms. Thematic content analysis was employed to categorize the interview data. The interview transcripts were separated into two categories: factors and sub-factors preventing teachers from successfully implementing CLT in their classrooms. The researchers' categorization is based on Li's (1998) categorized rationales hindering the implementation of CLT, and under each factor, there are the following sub-factors: educational system factors, educator factors, learner factors, and CLT factors.

The researcher read the interview transcripts carefully and subsequently identified codes that were supported by relevant quotes from the interview data.

Table 3. Essential reasons hindering the implementation of CLT

| Factors | Sub-factors |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Educational system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Test-based curriculum – Lack of supplies – Size of the classes – Underpayment – Communicative incompetence |

| | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Educators | – Lack of courses and training |
| | – Personal problems |
| | – Unawareness of methods |
| | – Lack of fluency |
| Learners | – Familial attitudes to ELT |
| Communicative Language Teaching | – Contextual inadequacy |

Four interviewees indicated the important roles that large classes play in preventing the implementation of CLT. They maintain that it is difficult, if not impossible, to implement CLT in a 40-student classroom. Furthermore, they reported that class activities and giving opportunity to each student, among other necessary activities, are almost impossible in large classes. Two participants explain the following:

One of the biggest problems is that we have a large number of students. There are fifty students in a classroom, which is totally bad. This surely affects the process of implementing a CLT approach. It is difficult for the teacher to control this number of students and the situation. So, this is one of the biggest problems that I have ever noticed.

Further, another interviewee reiterates that the educational system does not help in supporting the teachers:

The system of education itself is not applicable to the situation we are in now. It is completely different when you have only 20 students, not 40, and it is relatively easy to overcome obstacles facing CLT implementation. So, it is very difficult to find a mechanism to convey the very principles of this approach in a proper way. There are numerous students in one classroom, so you cannot conduct group activities.

Moreover, one interviewee emphasized the importance of speaking in the target language, stating that “a lot of the teachers who teach English do not know the language itself, let alone are able to teach it somebody else. So, I think this directly leads to failure in language teaching.” he added, “It is obvious that CLT requires a fluent teacher to impart the message of CLT principles in a successful way. Therefore, if the teachers are not fluent, problems result.

One interviewee viewed personal barriers as one of the most important factors inhibiting teachers from successfully implementing CLT. He stressed that economic hardship may isolate teachers from what they are supposed to impart, saying the following:

T4: The economic hardship of teachers is another big barrier. For example, if a teacher is well-paid, the government can punish him when he does not execute his job properly, but if not, the teachers may seek an alternative way to earn their livelihood. This results in impotence during the teaching process.

Another interviewee states that “the low level of students’ English is a major obstacle in the implementation of this approach. Some of the students can ask questions in the second language, but only 40 percent.”

To address Research Question 3, “What are the essential encouraging reasons behind the implementation of CLT in an Iraqi context?” the interview transcripts were subjected to thematic analysis once again. Based on the investigation of Li (1998) pertaining the factors promoting the selection of CLT in a Chinese context, the interview data was separated into the following four categories: educational system, educators, learners, and CLT. After a careful reading of the texts, the interview transcripts were coded under subcategories (See Table 4).

Table 4. Factors encouraging the implementation of CLT

| Factors | Sub-factors |
|--------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Educational system | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Supplying necessary equipment – Decreasing student number in classes |
| Educators | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Fluency precedes accuracy – Necessity of courses, training and workshops – Fluency improvement – Role of teacher – Using target language |
| Learners | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Learners need to be familiar with CLT |

Two interviewees out of six viewed the “supplying of necessary equipment” as having a crucial effect on promoting the implementation of CLT in an Iraqi context. T2 states, “Well, if you have everything like materials, a small number of students, a nice atmosphere, and air conditioners, it is much easier to implement CLT principles inside your classroom.”

Only one interviewee viewed fluency as preceding accuracy during CLT implementation, claiming that “in a CLT classroom, it is almost impossible to implement it if the system is not parallel with focusing more on communication rather than grammatical rules. Grammar should be used as a mean to achieve communication.”

Half of the interviewees reported that the role of the teacher inside the classroom is essential. When asked about his role as a teacher, one of them expressed the following:

Actually, the ways of teaching have changed rapidly; thus, we need to play the role of “facilitator” because the method demanded is a communicative one. A communicative method does not need the role of “authority,” so I think it is better to be a guide rather than a controller.

Discussion

The quantitative research questions probed Iraqi EFL teachers' attitudes towards the principles of CLT. The results suggest that these teachers hold positive attitudes towards CLT, in general. This finding corresponds with that of previous studies conducted in China, Bangladesh, Italy, Iran and Taiwan, which similarly conclude that participants hold favorable attitudes towards CLT (Mangubai, Dashwood, Berthold, Flores & Dale, 1998; Karim, 2004; Chang, 2000; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Liao, 2003). The above-mentioned researchers conclude that EFL teachers are convinced of the value of CLT in an EFL environment.

As mentioned previously, the findings suggest that the teachers held positive attitudes towards all the principles of CLT. Furthermore, the results correspond with those of Chang (2000), in which participants held more positive attitudes toward pair/group work than other techniques used in CLT. Likewise, the minimum score for the quality and quantity of error correction in Chang's study is similar to the score determined by the current one.

Similarly, the results of Mangubai et al. (1998) indicate that participants positively favour the role of learners as the most important principle, as was the case with this study. The results of this study suggest that teachers are no longer playing the role of "controller" inside the classroom, but rather that of "contributor" and "facilitator." Moreover, it is strongly suggested that students are able to play a vital role in the learning process.

Among the CLT principles, the quality and quantity of error correction had a minimum score, which is consistent with the findings of other studies. The findings of Mangubai et al. (1998) conclude that teachers experience worry concerning error correction. Similarly, the findings of Hawkey (2006) reveal that there are some concerns about the principles of CLT, especially when it comes to the quality and quantity of error correction. The participants of both studies argue that grammatical rules and vocabulary correction are essential since it is important for the students to know the correct form of a sentence or expression. Furthermore, even if one of the core characteristics of CLT is prioritizing fluency over grammatical rules, the results of the aforementioned studies have demonstrated that teachers worry about concentrating on grammar or fluency while correcting learners' errors.

The findings of Rajabi and Godazhdar (2016) support those of the current study, both of which have revealed the highest attitudes score towards group/pair work. Conversely, the minimum score achieved in this study regarded the place/importance of grammar as well as the quality and quantity of error correction, while the findings of the previous study indicate the role of learners as the minimum score obtained.

Finally, the results of this study indicate that teachers' positive attitudes are not the only factor affecting the implementation of CLT. Rather, other factors such as educational system and context should also be considered as essential factors (Carless, 2004).

The qualitative part of this study examined factors both hindering and encouraging the implementation of CLT in Iraqi EFL classrooms. The results indicate some inconsistencies between CLT in theory and in practice. During the interviews, participants suggested that the factors improving and hindering the implementation of CLT are related to the following four areas:

1. Educational system
2. Teachers
3. Students
4. CLT

Educational system factors

The interviewees expressed that an educational system can play an essential role in providing an appropriate atmosphere for the implementation of CLT. Furthermore, they specified that test-based curriculum, lack of supplies, class size, and underpayment hinder this process. The findings of this study are consistent with those of various past studies (Liao, 2003; Li, 1998; Burnaby & Sun, 1989), which reveal that a large class size and test-based curriculum are considered to be detrimental for the implementation of CLT. Additionally, the findings of the present study argue that the educational support given to teachers is essential for overcoming restraints pertaining to CLT implementation. The findings also suggest that the reduction of class size can lead to the successful implementation of CLT. The lack of support on behalf of educational authorities was deemed by participants as severely obstructing CLT implementation in their classrooms. Lastly, the interviewees also asserted that favourable buildings and salaries for teachers could also provide an appropriate CLT atmosphere inside the classroom.

Teacher factors

The results of the interviews show that teachers play a vital role in implementing the principles of CLT. Furthermore, participants suggested that communicative incompetence, lack of courses and training, personal problems, and unawareness of ELT methods severely hinder the implementation of CLT inside their classrooms. The interviewees stated that trainings and courses can promote the awareness of teachers regarding CLT. On the other hand, a lack of training may lead to an insufficient understanding of CLT. The results of studies conducted by Liao (2003), Li (1998), and Tsai (2007) support those of the present study by suggesting that teachers need to improve their fluency in the target language. Last but not least, the findings suggest that the role of teachers should shift from “controller of the classroom” and “provider of knowledge” to “facilitator” and “guide.”

Student factors

Teacher-related factors are not the only ones either promoting or hindering the implementation of CLT, for learners, too, play an essential role in this issue. The interviewees indicated that lack of fluency and family constraints are two key student-related factors of CLT implementation. It is suggested that the lack of fluency on behalf of students undermines the efforts of teachers during CLT implementation. This finding is supported by those of Tsai (2007), Liao (2003), and Li (1998), which show that it is difficult, if not impossible, for teachers to employ CLT activities among students who are not fluent in English. The results of the interview data indicate that students should be familiar with the principles of CLT prior to its implementation. They also prove that it is essential to consider cultural differences between Western and Eastern contexts while implementing CLT.

CLT factors

The results of this study indicate a contextual inadequacy in the application of CLT. The findings suggest that it is necessary to differentiate between EFL environments in which CLT is implemented. Moreover, an Iraqi EFL context does not fit the needs of CLT because the target language is used solely in the classroom (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Tsai, 2007; Li, 1998). The interviewees also expressed that supplying necessary equipment for CLT activities is essential to successfully implement them. It is noteworthy to mention that, as suggested by interviewees, an

exam-based curriculum does not aid in CLT implementation; therefore, it needs to be adapted accordingly.

To conclude, the present study aimed at identifying encouraging factors related to CLT implementation in Iraqi ELF classrooms. The population also significantly differed from that of other studies conducted on this topic. Therefore, contradictory results indicate the contribution of the study.

Conclusion

The findings of the quantitative phase reveal that the participants held positive views towards the CLT in general. Moreover, teachers' attitudes towards the subscales of CLT were determined as follows: teachers held a low attitudes towards "place/importance of grammar", while they had a moderate attitudes towards "group/pair work", the quality and quantity of error correction gained a low attitudes among the participants, the teachers' attitudes towards "the role of the teacher in the classroom" found to be moderate. Lastly, "the role and contribution of learners during the learning process" among the participants found to be moderate.

The qualitative phase was conducted via semi-structured interviews with six participants who had already participated in the first phase of data collection. The researcher administered a guideline as a main tool for acquiring necessary information about the factors that influence the selection of CLT in an Iraqi context, especially in Soran district. Yet, the interviewer did not allow participants to provide additional views. According to Li (1998), the hindering factors of CLT implementation can be categorized into four main areas: educational system, teachers, learners, and CLT. Furthermore, each factor funnelled into a sub-factor, accordingly.

Based on the interviewee responses, it can be concluded that the educational system has a grave effect on the implementation of CLT. The participants reported that the large class size, underpayment, lack of courses, lack of necessary supplies and old-fashioned curriculum significantly hindered CTL implementation. Furthermore, they expressed concern regarding the fluency of some teachers because one of the core pillars of CLT is fluency. Despite teacher fluency, the students themselves were identified obstacles in terms of not being fluent. Finally, the interviewees reveal that CLT is inconsistent with an EFL context, and it was especially developed for an ESL context.

The interviewees suggested that reducing the number of students in each class, providing necessary equipment, changing test-based curriculum, and engaging in trainings and courses may lead to successful CLT implementation. In addition, the participants argued that the teachers should be fluent and familiar with the methods they teach in order to implement CLT.

The present study investigated the attitudes of Iraqi EFL teachers towards the principles of CLT as well as the essential factors influencing the implementation of CLT. Since most previous educational studies are not impeccable, this research recommends some suggestions for further studies. The participants of this study were from one context: Soran District; therefore, the findings could not be generalized to other contexts in the region. Further studies should also be implemented to cover various areas in Iraq. The participants of the study should also represent public and private schools alike. Their views and implementation of CLT might have led to inconsistency. Therefore, further research is required to deal with both public and private school

teachers independently. This study was also limited in its investigation of teachers' attitudes toward CLT. Therefore, future studies are recommended to include educational systems and learners attitudes towards CLT.

Finally, since the findings of this study are based solely on what the participants reported, it is difficult to discover whether they apply what they preach. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct action research in future studies.

CLT aims at developing the communicative competence of students during the learning process. Despite the fact that teachers play an important role in leading students to improve their communication skills, no research has been conducted in an Iraqi context concerning this matter. The results of the present study reveal that the teachers possessed positive attitudes towards CLT principles. Based on the interview data, the participants suggested that there are some factors such as educational system, teachers, students, and CLT which influence CLT implementation.

Pedagogical Implications

The present study gives some practical and theoretical implications for stakeholders, curricula designers as well as learners to implement CLT in Iraqi secondary and high school settings. According to the findings of this study, the following implications can be observed: first, the obtained results of the present study propose that training and practical courses are needed for teachers to implement CLT in their classrooms. As it was noted by the participants, it is necessary for teachers who are qualified to realize the importance of the knowledge of CLT. The findings of this study also concluded that the teachers need to obtain teaching skills in order to make all the students participate in activities in various situations. Also, a number of participants suggested that the government should support them in facilitating the implementation of CLT. Therefore, Iraqi schools as well as its government must support the practitioners by providing courses and workshops consistent with their needs.

Another implication is, based on the views of the participants, that it is necessary to consider the Iraqi culture when implementing CLT. The teachers who participated in this study mentioned the obstacles they encounter when implementing CLT. Iraqi students, mostly, are not good enough to express their minds inside the classroom in English. Therefore, the results of this study suggest that teachers should make their classrooms student-oriented rather than teacher-oriented. Further, it is obvious that CLT was initially designed for ESL context and the Western environment, therefore, teachers should realize the differences.

The participants of this study also reported that large class size, mother language-based classes, low-level students combined with high level students, and the exam-oriented curricula are considered to be obstacles in applying CLT. Therefore, the educational authority should do the following: first, reduce the number of students in classrooms in order to make CLT feasible. Second, the administrators and educators are bound to create a student-centered environment. Third, it is necessary that the low-level students be separated from those who are better off in this respect. Fourth, modifying the exam-based curricula into a more comprehensive one that includes not only form and vocabulary but also writing, speaking, conversation and listening skills would also be beneficial.

Suggestions for Further Research

Since most previous educational studies are not impeccable, this research recommends some suggestions for further studies. The participants of this study were from one context: Soran District; therefore, the findings could not be generalized to other contexts in the region. Further studies should also be conducted to cover various areas in Iraq. The participants of the study should also represent public and private schools alike. Their views and implementation of CLT might have led to inconsistency. Therefore, further research is required to deal with both public and private school teachers independently. This study was also limited in its investigation of teachers' attitudes toward CLT. Therefore, future studies are recommended to include educational systems and learners attitudes towards CLT. Finally, since the findings of this study are based solely on what the participants reported, it is difficult to discover whether they apply what they preach. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct action research in future studies.

Note: This article is extracted from a MA thesis written by the first and supervised by the second author.

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Appendix A

Interview guide

Dear teacher:

I would like to invite you to take part in a mixed method research study aimed to explore Iraqi EFL teachers' attitudes toward CLT. It is necessary to ask for permission prior any attempts of the study. To participate in the study, the researcher needs to inform you that the study comprises two parts; responding to a questionnaire and a likely in-depth face-to-face interview which is prepared by the researcher accordingly.

The data of the study are utterly closed to the third party and will be remained confidential. I would like to assure you that no information concerning your background will be released without your consent. The interview takes about half an hour; your opinion will offer in-depth information about the research topic. The researcher also would like to inform you that your participation is entirely voluntary, you may withdraw your participation willingly. Therefore, you are asked to sign and provide your email address in case the researcher or the interviewee have further discussion.

Thanks for your kind assistance

I hereby provide my background information conditionally, as states by the researcher, keeping my anonymity as well as informing me while necessary to reveal some of my information.

Participant's name: _____

Signature and date: _____

Phone number: _____

Email address: _____ Interview questions

1. To start with, please shortly tell me about how you become an English Teacher?
2. Can you tell me how do you feel about your profession?
3. What type of school do you work for? (Primary or Secondary)
4. Briefly tell me what methods are you using in your class? Why?
5. Do you believe that the methodology that you are using currently is applicable in your classroom context?
6. In your own words, how do you define communicative competence?
7. Would you name the method that you implement in your classroom communicative language teaching?
8. What is your view about Communicative Language Teaching?
9. In your view, what factors seem to hinder employing CLT in your teaching?
10. Then, how would you encourage CLT to be implemented inside the classrooms?