

## IRAQI EFL TEACHERS' PERCEIVED DIFFICULTIES IN IMPLEMENTING CLT IN IRAQI SCHOOLS

lecturer .Ahmed A .Hamza

College of Education For Human Sciences

University of Babylon

Email:hameeshow38@gmail.com

الصعوبات التي يواجهها مدرسو اللغة الانكليزية في العراق في تطبيق الطريقة التواصلية في المدارس العراقية

الباحث. احمد عبد الجليل حمزة

كلية التربية للعلوم الانسانية/جامعة بابل

المخلص:

تهدف الدراسة إلى قياس مدى فهم مدرسي اللغة الانكليزية في العراق للطريقة التواصلية المتبعة في تدريس اللغة الانكليزية في المدارس العراقية وخصوصا الصعوبات والتحديات التي يواجهها أولئك المدرسون في تطبيق تلك الطريقة في البيئة التعليمية في العراق. تناولت الدراسة في البحث تعريف الطريقة التواصلية ومبادئها إضافة إلى استعراض أدبيات البحث الخاصة بتعريف الكفاءة التواصلية وكيفية توظيفها في الطريقة. وفي الجانب العملي من الدراسة، اختيرت عينة من (٦٠) مدرسا للغة الانكليزية في عدة مدارس عراقية ليوزع عليها الاستبيان الخاص بالبحث تبين من خلاله تشخيص ابرز الصعوبات التي تعترض تطبيق الطريق التواصلية والحلول العملية لتلك الصعوبات كي يتم تطبيق تلك الطريقة بالشكل الأمثل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الطريقة التواصلية، الصعوبات، تطبيق

### Abstract

CLT has been widely explored and studied by many researchers in the field of English language teaching. There have been many studies conducted on the use of CLT in EFL settings. Hence, this study is designed to investigate the Iraqi EFL teachers' understanding of English teaching, predominantly the difficulties and challenges they face in the implementation of CLT practices in the Iraqi context.

This study first investigates the definition and principles of CLT In addition, a review of existing literature related to communicative competence, as well as how it functions in CLT is presented.

Participants for this study were sixty Iraqi teachers of English teaching at primary and secondary levels. The main modes of data collection consisted of questionnaire .The results show that Iraqi EFL teachers observe many difficulties in implementing CLT in their classrooms. These

difficulties stem from four directions, namely, the teacher, the students, the educational system, and CLT itself. The results suggest that despite showing keen interest in change and being eager to identify with CLT, Iraqi teachers are not rather optimistic about the complete adoption of CLT, and thus feel that only by overcoming the difficulties from those four sources, and by establishing more favorable conditions for the implementation of CLT can teachers truly benefit from CLT in their English classrooms.

**Key words:** CLT ,Difficulties ,Implementing

**1.1 Statement of the Problem** Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a methodology was first proposed in England in the 1970s. This methodology was regarded as revolutionary since it placed an essential emphasis on communication in language learning classrooms. Being primarily an ESL (English as a second language) methodology, it rapidly gained a widespread acceptance in the Western countries. Following the emergence of CLT in English-speaking countries, it began to spread all over the world. Signifying the new and being endorsed as a reaction against the traditional language teaching methodologies, CLT has served as a major source of influence on English language teaching practice in both ESL and EFL (English as a foreign language) environments. Despite the apparent popularity of CLT in the last thirty years or so, there have been opposing views on the appropriateness, as well as the feasibility of implementing CLT in EFL contexts. Some ELT (English language teaching) scholars have accentuated the significance of the local needs and the conditions of the particular EFL contexts, and the benefits of the traditional methods of language teaching .Nevertheless, the majority of the ELT scholars have advocated the idea that neither of these extremist positions will benefit English teaching and learning in Asian contexts. Given the present English teaching circumstances in Asian countries, those researchers have revealed that implementing CLT approach fully in those countries is almost impossible. They have also pointed out that certain barriers be overcome for the effective implementation of CLT in Asian countries . Iraq, as one of Asian countries, has implemented gradually CLT in schools and an investigation of Iraqi EFL teachers' understanding of English teaching, predominantly the difficulties and challenges they face in the implementation of CLT practices in their classes can be very informative and provide guidance as to how to introduce CLT in EFL settings more effectively and efficiently. Thus, the present study aims at pointing out the problems and the difficulties that Iraqi EFL teachers face to implement CLT in their classrooms.

## 1.2 Aims of The Study

This study aims at:

1. Investigating problems that are encountered in English teaching in Iraq
2. Exploring what can communicative language teaching achieve to English teaching in Iraq.
3. Shedding the light on the difficulties and challenges that Iraqi EFL teachers face in implementing CLT in their English classroom.

## Chapter Two

### 2.1 Review of related literature

CLT is a recognized theoretical model in English language teaching today. Many applied linguists regard it as one of the most effective approaches to ELT. Since its inception in Europe in early 1970s, CLT has served as a major source of influence on language teaching practice round the world. As Li (1998) comments, CLT has extended in scope and has been used by different educators in different ways.

It is most likely that when asked to name the methodology they make use of in their classrooms, the majority of language teachers today assert “communicative” as the methodology of choice. However, when pushed to give a detailed account of what they mean by “communicative,” their explanations diverge broadly. What is involved in CLT? Does CLT mean teaching conversation, an absence of grammar in a course, or an emphasis on open-ended discussion activities as the main features of a course? The answers to these questions can be best understood by examining CLT in terms of its historical development, of a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the language classroom.

#### 2.1.1 Definition and Principles of CLT

There is considerable debate as to appropriate ways of defining CLT, and no single model of CLT is universally accepted as authoritative (Yet, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners’ communicative competence. Despite being a simplistic account of CLT, this idea of communicative competence is considered to be the main conception of CLT. Communicative competence included knowing what to say and how to say it appropriately based on the situation, the participants, and their roles and intentions. Traditional grammatical and vocabulary syllabuses and teaching methods did not include information of this kind. It was assumed that this kind of knowledge would be picked up informally.

In CLT, meaning is given prime importance, which is achieved through interaction between reader and writer, and through negotiation between speaker and listener. There are a variety of communicative activities (e.g. games, role plays, simulations, and problem-solving tasks), which offer learners an opportunity to practice their communication skills meaningfully in different contexts and by taking on different roles. In the process of utilizing these kinds of performance activities, learners avoid using their native language and teachers occasionally, if ever, correct students' mistakes.

Another typical feature of communicative language teaching is that "it gives planned emphasis on functional as well as structural features of language, combining these into a more completely communicative view" Teachers who espouse CLT move beyond teaching structural rules of the target language, and create opportunities for learners to use the target language in a meaningful way. In doing so, they help their learners build up communicative competence.

Small group work can also be regarded as an important tenet of CLT. Larsen-Freeman (1986) puts forward that activities in a communicative class are commonly carried out by students in small groups. Negotiation of meaning can be accomplished by involving learners in group work in which they can freely interact with each other. Through small group activities, the students are engaged in meaningful and authentic language use rather than in the simply mechanical practice of language patterns.

Another feature of CLT is "its learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 69). As cited in Li (1998), individual learners have their unique interests, learning styles, needs, and goals that should be reflected in the design of instructional methods. Li (1998) further states that it is crucial for teachers to develop materials based on the established needs of a particular class. Besides, in a CLT classroom, students must be made to feel secure, unthreatened, and non-defensive, so teachers adopting CLT should avoid taking on a teacher-centered, authoritarian attitude (Taylor, 1983).

Brown (2001), in describing the key principles of CLT, offers the following six characteristics:

1. Classroom goals are focused on all of the components (grammatical, discourse, functional, sociolinguistic, and strategic) of communicative competence. Goals therefore must intertwine the organizational aspects of language with the pragmatic.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes.

Organizational language forms are not the central focus, but rather aspects of language that enable learner to accomplish those purposes.

3. Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. Students in a communicative class ultimately have to use language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts outside the classroom. Classroom tasks must therefore equip students with the skills necessary for communication in those contexts.
5. Students are given opportunities to focus on their own learning process through an understanding of their own styles of learning and through the development of appropriate strategies for autonomous learning.

### **2.1.2 Classroom Activities in CLT**

Communicative intent is always given a prime position in every CLT activity. In a communicative class, students are provided with opportunities to use the language a great deal through communicative activities. There are various classifications of activities that are typically found in a communicative language classroom. Paulston and Bruder (1976), for example, in their book *Teaching English as a Second Language: Techniques and Procedures* classified the activity types that they thought were of maximum benefit in enabling students to attain communicative competence into the four categories below:

- i. **Social Formulas and Dialogs:** These cover such speech encounters as greetings, partings, introductions, excuses, compliments, complaints, hiding feelings, etc. It is actually very difficult to lie, to complain and to turn someone down for a date in another language, and the learners of a foreign language need to be taught how to get along with those situations in an appropriate manner .
- ii. **Community Oriented Tasks:** Those are sets of exercises which compel the student to interact with native speakers outside the classroom.
- iii. **Problem-Solving Activities:** The students are presented with a problem and some alternative solutions, from among which they have to choose one or create their own.
- iv. **Role Plays:** In role plays, students are assigned a fictitious role. The students may even act out the role of themselves. The simplicity of role plays and the improvisation is a matter of student proficiency. Paulston and Bruder (1976) maintain that the teacher should attach importance to the format of the role play which consists of three basic components, whether or not it is a complex one. In the situation, the teacher clearly

explains the scene and the plot of the role play, which is followed by the description of the task and the action to be accomplished. Then, the teacher assigns the roles, the list of characters, making sure that the roles are not too elaborate for the students to carry out. Useful expressions part contains the linguistic information, primarily expressions and phrases that will facilitate the acting out of the roles.

They also examined the classroom activities that help learners develop their communication skills and grouped them under four basic headings for the ease of discussion:

- i. Linguistically Structured Activities: These activities generally revolve around the presentation or the practice of certain linguistic structures. What she suggests is that although these activities are not inhibitive, they may pretty well turn out to be so unless they are contextualized and made meaningful. The structured interview, where the students question each other for factual information, thus exchanging real information; and language game can best exemplify useful linguistically structured activities.
- ii. Performance Activities: These are activities in which students prepare something beforehand and deliver their message to the class, which is or can be followed by a classroom discussion. Peer evaluation is an invaluable technique to ensure that the audience is more than passive listeners (knowing that they will evaluate the presenters based on the given criteria draws their attention to the presenter). Role plays and dramas are among the ones that can be cited as examples of performance activities and they classified as follows:
- iii. Participation Activities: In participation activities, students take part in some communicative activities in natural settings. Guided discussions, interviews, and oral dialogs best exemplify these types of activities. Here, the factor of authenticity arouses interest and motivation on the part of the learners, calling for a natural need to carry out what is expected by the activity.
- iv. Observation Activities: In observation activities, learners are expected to observe and/or record verbal and nonverbal interactions between two or more native speakers of the target language, which is of extreme benefit in that the students appreciate and become aware of the target language as it is actually used in real life.

### **2.1.3 Teachers and Students' Roles in CLT Classroom**

Breen and Candlin (1980), in defining the role of the teacher in CLT classroom, notes the following central roles:

The first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group. A third role of the teacher is that of a researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities.

This draws attention to a distinctive feature of CLT – that of a “learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching” It is thus advisable for teachers adopting a communicative approach to produce and use authentic teaching materials that meet the needs of their particular learners. Moreover, teachers need to motivate their students, as well as provide them with a comfortable classroom atmosphere for language learning. Littlewood (1981) states that the roles of teacher in CLT consist of, but are not limited to, coordinator and manager of activities, language instructor, source of new language, consultant when needed, as well as participant. In addition, it is typical in a CLT classroom that it is not merely the teacher, but everyone present who manages the classroom performance. He also maintains that teachers can no longer be regarded simply as teachers and learners just as learners, since they both are managers of learning. The traditional image of the teacher as the dominating authority figure in the classroom is dissolved into such a role that necessitates facilitating the communicative process in the classroom where students feel safe, unthreatened and non-defensive.

Furthermore, Hu (2002) proposes that the roles of students in CLT classroom are supposed to be “those of negotiators for meaning, communicators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information” . In his descriptions of students and teacher’s roles in CLT classroom, he asserts that students are vigorously involved in expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning while the teacher takes on more of a facilitator and participant role in the language classroom.

Finally, referring to the student centered characteristic of CLT, he emphasizes that “CLT approach features low profile teacher roles, frequent pair work or small group problem solving, students responding to authentic samples of English, extended exchanges on high interest topics, and the integration of the four basic skills, namely speaking, listening, reading, and writing”

#### **2.1.4 Use of CLT in EFL Contexts and Barriers to Adopting CLT**

It has been argued by researchers and writers that taking a set of teaching methods developed in one part of the world and using it in another

part bring about problems and challenges According to Halliday, education is bound to a particular cultural environment, and good teaching practices are socially constructed in this environment. Accordingly, as cited in Hiep (2007), assuming that what is suitable in one particular educational setting will naturally be suitable in another is to disregard the fact that ELT methodology is rooted in an Anglo-Saxon view of education. He also maintains that since Anglo-American ELT trends lack appreciation of various distinct linguistic, cultural, and educational contexts around the world, they cannot thus produce appropriate teaching and learning materials that will address the local and culture- specific needs of learners. The particular context in which an innovation is introduced determines its success or failure. He also argues that "as a socially situated activity, its success is affected by ethical and systemic constraints, the personal characteristics of potential adopters, the attributes of innovations and the strategies that are used to manage change in particular contexts. Breen and Candlin (2001) similarly suggest that any realization of communicative curriculum must reflect a realistic analysis of the actual situation within which the language teaching will take place.

CLT was initially developed as a Western ELT methodology in the 1970s. However, since then, it has been extensively adopted in both ESL and EFL contexts all around the world. Although implementing CLT in EFL contexts results in a number of problems and challenges, it would be dubious to claim that these problems cancel out its potential usefulness as a language teaching methodology in EFL environments. They also warn that in the battle against imported methods, we may fail to understand the cause of the problem and run the risk of overacting and losing something valuable in the process.

In this framework, along with the growing popularity of CLT in most EFL countries, there have been many studies conducted on the feasibility of CLT innovation and potential problems in its use in EFL contexts such as China, Greece, Japan, Korea, Taiwan, Turkey, Vietnam and so on.

Ellis (1994) examined the suitability of the communicative approach in the Vietnamese context. He found that one of the main problems in using a communicative approach in Vietnam was that teachers were dependent on the inherent traditional teaching practices. Also, there was too much focus on grammar-translation in the Vietnamese examination system. According to the study, teachers reported that they did not have the essential knowledge of the target language culture. Based on the findings of the study, Ellis concluded that CLT in its unique form is not suitable for Vietnamese context. He pointed out that "although there is a strong demand



for communicative competence in Vietnam, it is not matched by adequate teacher training, communicative language materials and suitable learning environments"

In a similar study which investigated teachers' attitudes toward the use of communicative approach in Greece. It was reported that although the English curriculum in Greece was based on the premises of communicative language teaching, teachers showed a tendency to carry on the traditional teacher-oriented instruction style. The findings of this study suggested that teachers either did not understand or were unable to see the practical implications of the CLT principles.

In another significant study, Li (1998) looked into Korean teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CLT. The results of Li's study confirmed that the teachers encountered difficulties in using CLT practices in their classes. The difficulties reported by the Korean teachers were divided into the following four categories:

1. Difficulties caused by teachers:

- a-□ Deficiency in spoken English,
- b-□ Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence,
- c-□ Lack of training in CLT,
- d-□ Few opportunities for retraining in CLT,
- e-□ Misconceptions about CLT,
- f-□ Little time for and expertise in material development

2. Difficulties caused by students:

- a-□ Low English proficiency,
- b-□ Little motivation for communicative competence,
- c-□ Resistance to class participation

3. Difficulties caused by the educational system:

- a-□ Large classes,
- b-□ Grammar-based examinations,
- c-□ Insufficient funding,
- d-□ Lack of support

4. Difficulties caused by CLT itself:

- a-CLT's inadequate account of EFL teaching,
- b-□ Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments. (Li, 1998, p. 687)

According to Li (1998), teachers were reluctant to implement CLT in their language classrooms due to these problems listed above. He claimed that in order for teachers to be willing to make use of CLT in EFL contexts, many adjustments must be made. He further stated that "a conflict apparently exists between what CLT demands and what the EFL situation in

many countries, such as South Korea, allows. This conflict must be resolved before EFL teaching in these countries can benefit from CLT.

A study on the potential problems of teachers in Australia teaching Japanese as a foreign language in using CLT in their classes revealed that there was inconsistency between teachers' perceptions of CLT and their actual classroom practices. Those teachers predominantly employed grammar-based activities in their classes rather than the communicative ones. It was reported that they lacked time to prepare authentic teaching materials for their classes. Moreover, teachers had fragmented knowledge of CLT, and their beliefs about language teaching and learning were mostly anchored in their own second language learning experiences.

In addition, in a study that addressed the issues of CLT use in Taiwan, Liu (2005) found out that despite the prevalent popularity of CLT in Taiwan, it was rather difficult to apply CLT into the actual language classroom. Since the education system is mainly exam-oriented in Taiwan, EFL teachers put a heavy emphasis on preparing their students for the National College Entrance Examination in Taiwan. They essentially teach grammatical structures of English because the exam largely consists of questions that assess that structural forms of the language.

### Chapter Three

#### Procedures

##### 3.1 The sample:

Participants for this study were sixty Iraqi teachers of English teaching at primary and secondary levels.

**3.3 The research instrument:** A questionnaire form was chosen as the tool of the study. The advantages of using questionnaires as data collection tools mainly come from the fact that with the help of questionnaires large amount of data can be collected quickly and economically from a large sample . Also, questionnaires, as one of the most common forms of data collection tools, can easily be assessed in terms of reliability. In this respect, reliability refers to the ability of questionnaire to produce the same results in different implementations, leading to a consistency and dependability of the results . Moreover, the strengths of questionnaires generally include accuracy, generalizability, and convenience However, besides these strengths, the questionnaires usually fall short in examining complex social relationships or intricate patterns of interaction

**3.3.1 Constructing the questionnaire items** The first part of the questionnaire consists of questions that dealt with participants' personal information. The questions in this section asked about participants' age, gender, academic background, years of experience in teaching English,

whether they had any work experience in an English-speaking country, and lastly if they had ever taken a test of English such as TOEFL, IELTS and so on.

The second part involved questions that had to be with participants' school information. The questions in this section asked about the type schools participants were working for (i.e. private vs. public, primary vs. secondary and so on), setting their schools were located (i.e. urban vs. rural). There were also questions in this part about the classes that the participants were teaching, including the grade level(s) and the number of classes they were presently teaching, the average number of students in their classes, and finally how many hours of class they taught per week. The third part of the survey questionnaire included questions pertaining to English language teaching methodologies, particularly CLT. In this section, the participants were asked to specify what teaching methods they were implementing in their classes, as well as how frequently they were using a particular method. The participants' were also queried about their own experiences as language learners with particular teaching methodologies. Moreover, the questions in this section asked about whether the participants tried CLT in their classes and the reasons for using or not using CLT, whether they participated in any kinds of training programs devoted to CLT and if so how they benefited from it. Finally, the participants were asked to define CLT in their own words, and identify what was involved in CLT methodology. The fourth and final part of the survey explored the participants' opinions with regard to the perceived difficulties and challenges in adopting CLT in their classes. The difficulties and challenges in this section were divided into four categories: teacher-related difficulties, student-related difficulties, difficulties related to the educational system, and CLT-related difficulties. For each of these categories, the participants were asked to choose from a 4-point scale: major challenge, challenge, mild challenge, and not a challenge at all.

#### 3.4: Data Analysis:

Questionnaire data analysis included the analysis of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The closed-ended questions were analyzed with the help of the statistical analysis software program SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences). Frequency calculations (i.e. how many teachers selected each answer) were used to produce descriptive central tendency statistics that were used to present an overall picture of the teachers' perceptions of CLT, and the difficulties and problems they faced in their attempts to implement CLT in English classrooms. The open-ended questions, on the other hand, were analyzed through the themes and

categories prompted by the questions with respect to teachers' understanding of and attitude towards CLT and its use in Turkey. In the process of data analysis, patterns were identified, which were divided into categories.

## Chapter Four

### The Analysis of Results

This chapter lays out the results from the questionnaire, dealing with both closed-ended and open-ended questions which are discussed under four major categories; namely, attitudes towards English and ELT profession, concerns over the problems inherent in English teaching in Iraq.

#### 4.1 Attitudes towards English and ELT profession:

When asked about their attitude towards English language and English teaching profession, all of the respondents expressed that they had a positive attitude towards English in general. They reported that they had keen interest in learning English when they were students, which thus led them to choose Foreign Languages as their specialization in high school. In response to why he chose English language teaching profession

#### 4.2 Concerns over the problems in English teaching in Iraq

The major problems that the interview respondents reported in English teaching in Turkey included: large classes; teachers' heavy workload; heavily-loaded program to cover; mismatch between curriculum and assessment; and students' poor communicative abilities..

##### 4.2.1 Large Classes

Respondents indicated that having high numbers of students in their classes was a major problem. The teachers confessed that large classes made it hard for them to make use of group work, especially in the classrooms with fixed and immovable desks and chairs. Additionally, it was expressed that due to the over-crowded classes, it was almost impossible to give individualized attention to each learner. Moreover, disciplinary issues were said to dominate large classes. The teachers complained much about the classroom management problems that were resulted from over-crowded classrooms.

##### 4.2.2 Teachers' Heavy Workload

Respondents revealed their concerns for the heavy workload of the English teachers in Turkey. They reported that having too much work to do decreased their overall performance in teaching English. Considering the fact that they also had extra duties in addition to teaching, i.e. departmental and all-school meetings, recession and lunchtime duties and so on, it was hard to keep up with all the work at an optimal level.

### 4.2.3 Heavily-loaded Program

Teachers were concerned that they were supposed to cover too many language items, i.e. essentially grammar points, in a limited period of time. This being so, they essentially had to skip activities that focused on productive language skills such as speaking and writing so that they could cover the necessary grammar points in a timely fashion. It was highlighted by the respondents that finishing all the grammar points on time was vital in that students were tested only on grammar in nationwide standardized tests that they were supposed to take at the end of each school year.

### 4.2.4 Mismatch between Curriculum and Assessment

Teachers pointed out the disparity between what the curriculum dictates and what is actually assessed on the large-scale standardized tests given at the end of each academic year. However, the English questions on these standardized tests are principally testing grammatical and vocabulary knowledge of students. There is also a number of reading comprehension and sentence-level translation questions, too. Yet, speaking, listening, or writing skills are not assessed in those multiple-choice tests.

### 4.2.5 Students' Poor Communicative Abilities

Teachers expressed their concerns regarding the fact that most Turkish students have poor communicative abilities even after learning English for several years. In most schools, English is still taught with the traditional methods or a combination of them.

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