



CHALLENGES OF COMMUNICATIVE LEARNING AND TEACHING (CLT) IN POLITEKNIK MUKAH

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a practical approach and has been around since 1986. It permits learners to express their ideas while using the English language through enjoyable activities. Many studies have been conducted on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). However, in the Malaysian polytechnic context, only a few studies have been made in regards to CLT, especially after the change in the syllabus, from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to Communicative English (CE). After the adoption of Communicative English (CE) in polytechnics, the English proficiency level of polytechnic graduates are still not up to par that prompts this study to be conducted. Therefore, this study investigates the challenges and issues faced by lecturers in Politeknik Mukah regarding the use of CLT in the teaching of Communicative English I, II, III and English for Digital Technology and also the lecturers' understanding of CLT and the implementation of CLT in their class. A quantitative research method design was employed in obtaining the data. Research data was collected through a questionnaire completed by all English language lecturers in Politeknik Mukah, Sarawak. Overall, the findings show that students' proficiency and attitude towards the English language are the main challenges of CLT, even though the lecturers have an adequate understanding of CLT.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Communicative English (CE), challenges*

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INTRODUCTION

Communication between individuals of different cultures in different regions of the world has been an essential requirement since the beginning of the 20th century. Teaching and studying a foreign language, such as the English language, has grown in popularity. Nevertheless, effectively teaching an English language necessitates a significant amount of effort from teachers since they have a significant impact on their students' achievement. Thus, it is crucial for the teacher to choose the right methodology in their language teaching in various learning and teaching contexts. Recognising the significance of the issue, linguists and teachers have conducted numerous research on language education in order to discover and implement more practical and effective language

teaching techniques that are able to assist teachers in teaching effectively in their roles. In regards of teaching methods and techniques, the last two decades have seen unending changes and innovation in language instruction. These determine how the language is delivered and what resources and activities are utilised in the classroom to assist students achieve the greatest possible results in their language acquisition. As a result, each technique demonstrates its unique perspective on the nature of language and how language is learned.

Since English competence is becoming increasingly important in Malaysia, according to Nur Aqidah (2019), there have been rapid changes in teaching methodologies, including the use of technology into the teaching and learning process. Because ELTC (English Language Teaching Centre) has identified the growing importance of the English language in everyday communications, including science, IT, business, entertainment, and politics, the English Language Teaching Centre (ELTC) in Malaysia continues to provide professional development and ongoing support to all English language instructors (Nur Aqidah, 2019). Highly Immersive Programme (HIP), which has been implemented in 10,000 schools and 125 higher education institutions across Malaysia, is one of the government's endeavours. As a consequence, students' participation in English language activities has increased dramatically, as has their self-confidence in utilising the language. In addition, the Malaysia Education Blueprint 2013-2025 and the English Language Education Reform in Malaysia Roadmap 2015-2025 mandated that all English language teachers have a minimum proficiency level of C1, while officials and lecturers must have a CEFR Level C2 at the very least (Malaysian Ministry of Education, 2013; Zuraidah, 2015). Thus, teachers or lecturers in schools and higher educational institutions are expected to perform well while teaching their students.

As many educational institutions in Malaysia are starting to revamp their syllabus because of the new government education initiatives, polytechnics has not been left behind. According to Rashidah and Mohamed (2018), polytechnic has changed its English curriculum from English for Specific Purposes (ESP) to Communicative English (CE) to conform with Malaysia's English Education Reform. Rashidah & Mohamed (2018) also emphasised that the new syllabus stressed on the speaking abilities of English language and teaching important gestures or expressions that students may use in a wide range of social discussions and settings. Nevertheless, academicians, the community, and future employers question the issue of low-level English language proficiency among polytechnic students. Moreover, Radzi & Amin Embi (2018) stated that the aim of the polytechnic English Language syllabus, is first and foremost, to provide students the necessary competence in the academic and technical contexts once they graduated. Based on Hairuzila et al. (2011), ability in communication is the most required ability by many companies. Graduates speaking ability in English is commonly evaluated during job interviews. Therefore, low self-esteem and the inability to communicate in English will reduce the graduates' chances of being employed as an employee. Hence, graduates must have solid communication skills as a bonus to understand the job's technical prospects. A candidate in a job interview tends to receive extra points if he or she could speak or communicate effectively in English, has high self-esteem, and is able to articulate themselves. This will increase the candidate's chances of getting recruited in a specific organisation (Rashidah & Mohamed, 2018). By looking the overall picture, CLT indeed plays a

major role in polytechnic as it will harness polytechnic graduates' soft skill and prepares them in the employment market in the future.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

Polytechnics in Malaysia have been criticised for failing to generate graduates who meet the criteria and expectations of employers. As stated by Department of Statistics Malaysia (2020), jobless graduates in 2019 were 170,300 graduates which is 5.5% rise over the 2018 figure of 161,300 graduates. This statement has been supported by Rashidah & Mohamed (2018), graduates are unemployed as they are lacking in their English proficiency, their negative attitude, inadequate communication skills, and unprepared. Employers nowadays generally expect graduates to be fluent in English in addition to their technical skills. Hence, polytechnic has shifted to Communicative English (CE) in 2011 in response to the demands of industries, which required students to converse fluently in English rather than those who could merely write reports (Rashidah & Mohamed, 2018). Furthermore, the ultimate goal of the polytechnic English language curriculum is to provide students with the required abilities to be employed in social interactions and so satisfy industry expectations. Rashidah and Mohamed (2018) also discovered that polytechnic professors did not get any training following the rapid move to CE in the syllabus, which might impair their knowledge of the CLT concept and the best way to implement it. Therefore, there is a need to conduct a research to discover (i) the challenges and issues faced by the lecturers regarding the use of CLT, (ii) the lecturers' level of understanding of CLT and (iii) the level of implementation of CLT by the lecturers in polytechnic.

Research objectives

1. To find out the challenges and issues faced by the lecturers regarding the use of CLT.
2. To find out the lecturers' level of understanding of CLT.
3. To find out the level of implementation of CLT by the lecturers.

Research questions

1. What are the challenges and issues faced by the lecturers regarding the use of CLT?
2. What is the lecturers' level of understanding of CLT?
3. What is the level of implementation of CLT by the lecturers?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Researchers have offered a few distinct CLT definitions. Sri (2013) defines CLT as a technique of teaching a second or foreign language that stresses student participation as a means or an end goal of learning the target language. CLT, on the other hand, is defined by Rashidah and Mohamed (2018) as a methodology or theory of communicative competence that may be used to produce materials and processes that are appropriate for a specific learning scenario in an

intercultural environment. Hazlina (2012), on the other hand, refers to CLT as a strategy that has grown in popularity in language schools over the last 30 years and as the best approach for students to acquire a target language.

Characteristics of CLT

As cited by Rashidah & Mohamed (2018), language teaching and learning in CLT has 8 characteristics:

- i. The purpose of language teaching and learning is to increase students' capacity to communicate in the target language.
- ii. The language course's curriculum contains semantic concepts and social functions in addition to linguistic structure.
- iii. During the teaching and learning process, students will work in grouping or pairs.
- iv. Students will engage in role-playing.
- v. The classroom materials are realistic which it connects to real-life circumstances.
- vi. The facilitator is the lecturer.

Whereas,

Siti Martini & Ros Aizan (2013) cited that CLT has three characteristics:

- i. Communicative activities
- ii. The utilisation of genuine resources
- iii. Small group activities by the learners.

Moreover, Siti Martini & Ros Aizan (2013) also proposed that authentic communication acts are defined by three characteristics:

- i. Information gap
- ii. Choice
- iii. Feedback

Fundamentally, CLT ensures that students are able to communicate effectively using the language intended.

Challenges of CLT in classrooms

According to prior research, adopting CLT in the classroom, particularly in language classes, poses a number of challenges and difficulties. CLT is not restricted by institutional variables such as class size (Burnaby & Sun, 1989), and another study found that the difficulties are inherent in the implementation of CLT itself, since it may be ineffective and inefficient in terms of teaching (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). Furthermore, it is unsuitable for the local setting according to Chang (2010) as it focuses on the Western culture. CLT is a method of teaching second or foreign languages that highlights communicative competence as the primary objective of language acquisition and

attempts to make communication and language use meaningful and central in classroom activities. Teachers and educators who are unfamiliar with the CLT method may find it difficult to implement because of their limited language competence (Carless, 2003) and lack of understanding about the CLT method itself (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

Overview of CLT in Malaysian polytechnics

The importance of ESP in the teaching and learning of English in critical professions such as commerce, science, and technology is highlighted in Malaysian polytechnic curriculum. Nonetheless, after the shifted event in 2011, the main motive for these changes is to cater to the needs of industries that required students to well versed in English (Suhaily & Faizah, 2013). Rashidah & Mohamed (2018) stated the aim of the curriculum in English language at polytechnic is to provide students with the abilities needed in social interactions which also to fulfill the demands of the industries. ESP was formerly taught to polytechnic students based on the courses offered by the polytechnics. Every set of students in this syllabus follows a similar curriculum that is used in disciplines such as information technology and engineering. Basically, it is designed to be as near to the students' academic backgrounds as possible, so that it may be applied to all disciplines (Suhaily & Faizah, 2013). However, the Department of Polytechnic Education revised the previous syllabus to the Communicative English syllabus in response to the feedback from industry. The updated syllabus intends to improve students' communication abilities, allowing them to land better employment after graduating from polytechnics. Despite the aim, there are still concerns from sectors about graduates' lack of communication skills, which poses some issues for fresh graduates to flourish in their fields of employment. Besides that, Rashidah & Mohamed (2018) found that students are compulsory to participate in role-playing, group discussions, oral presentations, job interviews practice, creating resumes and cover letters during their three semesters of English study. The purpose of these activities is to prepare polytechnic graduates with the skills that are on demand. Generally, the activities and assessment outlined in the curriculum related with English created by the Polytechnic Education Department is in line with CLT as identified by Rashidah & Mohamed (2018). As a result, there are doubts about CLT that it does not assist the students since the student's result are poor, prompting the researcher to study what is actually going on from the perspective of the lecturers, who are the executors.

METHODOLOGY

Essentially, this section will discuss the approach that was followed in this study. The research has been carried out using a questionnaire as an instrument for data collection. There are four aspects to be explored which are the challenges of using CLT, the issue of CLT, the understanding of lecturers on CLT and the implementation of CLT in classrooms.

Research design

In general, this study uses the quantitative method. Sekaran & Bougie (2016), stated that a quantitative study is a study that uses quantitative information. A sample of English lecturers from Politeknik Mukah will be involved in order to obtain the data for this study.

Research participants

This study's population consist of 10 English lecturers that are presently teaching in Polytechnic Mukah, Sarawak. The sampling technique for this study was designed to be convenient sampling. Referring to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), a convenient sampling approach is when the data is acquired from a community member that is appropriate for inclusion despite the fact that the findings lack consistency and generalizability. Convenience sampling also is the most popular approach for selecting members since this study intend to study a focused group. It is also implying that researcher choosing people of the community that the researcher believes to supply them with the most useful information. Referring to Sekaran and Bougie (2016), sample size indicates the actual number of respondents gathered as a sample to show demographic characteristics. Nevertheless, since the study is conducted in small scale, only 10 English lecturers were involved to answer the questionnaire. Of the participants, 3 were male and 7 were female. Their age ranged from 30 to 50 years old and they had from 2 to 18 years of teaching experience.

Research instrument

A questionnaire was utilised to collect data since it is quicker and more efficient. The instrument was adopted and adapted from previous studies done by Rashidah & Mohamed (2018). However, it was modified to suit the study's setting and samples. The questionnaire consists of five parts. Part A requests on background information, Part B consists of 4 items on challenges of CLT, Part C consists of 8 items on issues of CLT, Part D consists of 4 items on understanding of CLT and Part E consists of 20 items on the implementation of CLT in classrooms. In Part B, C, D, E the items were graded on a 5-point Likert scale, with the range being strongly disagree to strongly agree.

Data analysis

The Google Form method was used to develop our questionnaire, and the structure questionnaire was written in English and distributed over an internet link. The ability to travel anyplace is restricted due to the movement control order (MCO). Consequently, the presence of Google form simplifies researcher search for responses. The questionnaire was distributed to the participants through WhatsApp.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Table 1 shows the summary of the challenges encountered by the English lecturers regarding the use of CLT.

Table 1: Challenges of CLT

Item	Aspect	Mean	SD
B1	I hesitate to use CLT in speaking classes because I have to be orally proficient in the English language.	2.60	1.264
B2	Lecturers are not given sufficient CLT training.	2.70	1.159
B3	I have limited time to develop materials for communicative English classes.	3.50	1.269
B4	I do not have enough authentic teaching materials.	4.00	.942
Overall		3.20	.654

The average score was 3.20, with a standard deviation of 0.564. Based on the descriptive statistics, it seems that the majority of respondents experience difficulties due to a lack of authentic teaching resources. Item B1 with a mean score of 2.60 and a standard deviation of 1.264 indicates that the lecturers do not have significant problems with proficiency. Table 2 shows the overall data in relation to the issues faced by the English lecturers.

Table 2: Issues of CLT

Item	Aspect	Mean	SD
C1	Students have low level proficiency of the English language.	3.90	.875
C2	Students resist to communicate in communicative English classes.	3.80	1.135
C3	The size of the class is too big.	3.60	.843
C4	Students have a difficult time using body language or gestures to communicate.	2.90	.994
C5	It is difficult for the students to express their opinions in the English language.	4.10	.994
C6	Students have a difficult time communicating in the English language.	4.00	1.154

C7	Students are hesitant to give their opinions in English for fear of being wrong.	4.10	.875
C8	I feel that students are embarrassed to make grammatical mistakes in front of their friends and lecturers.	4.40	.516
Overall		3.85	.740

The total data yielded a 3.85 mean score and a 0.740 standard deviation. With a mean score of 4.40 and a standard deviation of .516, the highest item in this construct is "I feel that students are embarrassed to make grammatical mistakes in front of their friends and lecturers." This may be an issue in the CLT classroom since other items related to students' attitudes and confidence in utilising the English language have high readings as well. Other than that, item C3 indicates that the size of a classroom does affect CLT. Table 3 shows the overall data related to the lecturer's level of understanding of CLT.

Table 3: Understanding of CLT

Item	Aspect	Mean	SD
D1	Communicative competence is both linguistic knowledge and the skill in using this knowledge.	4.00	.816
D2	An understanding of the culture of the target language is essential to learn the language.	3.80	.632
D3	Teaching grammar, pronunciation and spelling alongside speaking is very important to being able to communicate.	4.30	.948
D4	Students should first cope with communicative tasks before given he grammatical form.	3.60	.942
Overall		3.92	.736

The overall mean score for this construct is 3.92 with a standard deviation of .736. The highest mean score item in this construct is "Communicative competence is both linguistic knowledge and the skill in using this knowledge" with a score of 4.00 and standard deviation of 0.816. This implies that the lecturers are aware of the importance of CLT and understand that its usage is necessary. Table 4 shows the data related to the implementation of CLT in the classroom setting.

Table 4: Implementation of CLT in classrooms

Item	Aspect	Mean	SD
E1	My speaking classes focus less on form/ grammar but ore on meaning.	3.70	.823
E2	My speaking classes focus mainly on form/ grammar.	2.80	1.032
E3	My speaking classes have pair works.	4.80	.421
E4	My speaking classes have group works.	4.90	.316
E5	I use authentic materials from the real world in class when appropriate.	4.40	.516
E6	Over 50% of my class time is used to conduct activities related to communication.	4.20	.632
E7	I utilise role-play in my classes.	4.00	.942
E8	The students have more speaking time in class than I do.	3.90	.875
E9	I encourage the students to use their own ideas to make conversations in pair or group exercises.	4.20	.788
E10	My classes are more student-centered rather than teacher-centered.	3.70	1.059
E11	I correct my students' pronunciations, even if they can still be understood.	4.00	.666
E12	I introduce 'authentic language' in real context in the classroom whenever possible.	4.30	.674
E13	I encourage students to convey meaning without penalty, reading and writing together since they are regularly used in real life.	4.00	.942
E14	I inculcate all the language skills such as listening, speaking, reading and writing together since they are regularly used in real life.	3.70	.823
E15	I focus more on fluency rather than accuracy in order to keep the conversation going on.	3.90	.567
E16	I use pre-communicative activities during class.	3.90	.737

E17	I facilitate the communication process.	4.20	.632
E18	I teach with various communicative activities (pair work, role play, group work, etc.).	4.40	.516
E19	I create different life situations during class.	4.00	.666
E20	I use audio visual aids during class.	4.20	.632
Overall		4.06	.423

The overall data related to the implementation of CLT has a 4.06 mean score and a standard deviation of 0.423. Based on the results, the lecturers implemented the use of CLT in their classroom. Item E4 has the highest mean score of 0.316 whereby the lecturers mostly conduct group work activities in promoting communication amongst students.

The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges and issues faced by lecturers in Politeknik Mukah regarding the use of CLT in the teaching of Communicative English I, II, III and English for Digital Technology; the lecturers' understanding of CLT; and the implementation of CLT in their class.

This study is done to achieve its objective which is as follow:

1. To find out the challenges and issues faced by the lecturers regarding the use of CLT.
2. To find out the lecturers' level of understanding of CLT.
3. To find out the level of implementation of CLT by the lecturers

The primary goal of communicative English classes at polytechnics is to prepare students for their industrial undertaking, thus CLT has been introduced. According to the results, lecturers encounter challenges in implementing CLT because they lack authentic materials to carry out communication-related activities. They also have a limited amount of time to create suitable resources for their communicative English classes, which makes utilising CLT in the classroom tricky. This statement is supported by few research such as Tomlinson (2011), whereas it states the lack of authentic teaching materials is a challenge in communicative learning and teaching. Yavani (2017), state that authentic material is important in creating meaningful engaging learning experiences that help to improve communicative competence however searching and using authentic materials is a challenge for language lecturers

Aside from that, one of the challenges lecturers encounter while adopting CLT is students' attitudes toward English learning. According to the results, students are embarrassed to make mistakes in front of others, therefore they refuse to engage and interact. The findings also showed that the pupils' English language competence is insufficient, and that the class sizes are too large.

Polytechnic students are required to take communicative English courses. These pupils have varying levels of competence, and those with lower proficiency will struggle to communicate effectively in the target language. Large classes may be difficult since the lecturer might not be able to concentrate on all of the pairs or groups of students at once.

The results also revealed that lecturers do utilise CLT in their classes. This responds to the third research question, in which the lecturers demonstrate a high degree of CLT application. In their communications classes, the lecturers undertake pair and group work. This demonstrates that the lecturers have significant experience and understand that activities involving more than one person provide chances for students to engage with one another in the target language, as well as a more learner-centred environment that benefits the students (Richard & Rodgers, 2001).

Furthermore, descriptive statistics revealed that lecturers do not place strong emphasis on form or grammar in their communicative classes. This suggests that the lecturers are more focused with the essence of communication than with the grammatical elements. This may indicate that lecturers aim to ensure that students can interact with one another and are comfortable making mistakes before learning the language accurately and therefore, improving. The results, on the other hand, indicate that the lecturers believe that grammar, pronunciation, and speaking alongside speaking are essential for effective communication. The results for the item "students should first cope with communicative tasks before given the grammatical form" had a mean score of 3.60 and a standard deviation of .922, indicating that the lecturers recognise the importance of communicative activities before moving on to grammatical components. This result is backed up based on research of Ahmed & Qasem, 2019 whereas most language program focus on prioritize grammar, vocabulary, and ability to use them in conversation.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this research indicate that, despite lecturers' sufficient knowledge of CLT, the major difficulties of CLT are students' competence and attitude toward the English language. Regardless of the lecturers' extensive expertise and comprehension of CLT, lecturers must acknowledge that students need a significant amount of time to develop their competence. Using CLT in diverse classroom activities and catering to the needs of the students may be a solution to the lecturers' problems. This research contributes to the discourse regarding CLT at polytechnics. Given the study's small sample size and limitations in terms of data gathering techniques, future research may use a broader range of data and a diversity of data collection methods. Future study may include student's perception to get a more holistic understanding.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author has no conflicts of interest, whether financial or otherwise, in conducting this research.

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