
TEACHERS' PERSPECTIVE ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH IN INDONESIAN CLASSROOMS

Yenny Rahmawati

Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University of Jakarta, Indonesia
(yenny@uinjkt.ac.id)

Received: 14th March 2018; Revised: 7th May 2018; Accepted: 28th June 2018

ABSTRACT

Communicative Approach (CA) is probably the most popular approach in the recent English language teaching (ELT) in Indonesia. The curriculum underpinning ELT in the country has changed several times, although in the last 35 years its basis has been revolving around the communicative approach. Despite the fact that the communicative curriculum has been implemented for a long time, some research studies (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Musthafa, 2001) indicated that it has not brought significant improvements in the terms of learners' outcome. The reason for this might be a number of the teachers appear to have developed some misconceptions of CLT. This study is, therefore, aimed at exploring EFL Indonesian teachers' perspectives toward communicative approach in their classrooms. Six participants were involved in this study in which two participants were chosen from each level of education (primary, secondary and university levels). The study employed a qualitative design by using questionnaire and in-depth interviews as methods of data collection. The results indicated that the university teachers in this study tend to have a broader view of CLT, while a number of the school teachers appear to have developed some misconceptions of it, i.e. the "not" teaching grammar and the teaching "only" speaking.

Key Words: communicative approach; teachers' perception

ABSTRAK

Pendekatan Komunikatif (CA) mungkin merupakan pendekatan yang paling populer dalam pengajaran bahasa Inggris (ELT) di Indonesia. Kurikulum yang mendasari ELT di Negara ini telah berubah beberapa kali, meskipun dalam 35 tahun terakhir pendekatan yang digunakan adalah pendekatan komunikatif. Terlepas dari kenyataan bahwa kurikulum komunikatif telah dilaksanakan dalam waktu yang lama, beberapa penelitian (Dardjowidjojo, 2000; Musthafa, 2001) menunjukkan bahwa pendekatan tersebut tidak membawa perbaikan yang signifikan bagi peserta didik. Alasan utama hal tersebut mungkin datang dari kesalahpahaman sejumlah guru terkait dengan CLT. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengeksplorasi perspektif guru bahasa Inggris terhadap pendekatan komunikatif di kelas mereka. Enam peserta terlibat dalam penelitian ini di mana dua peserta dipilih dari setiap jenjang pendidikan (tingkat dasar, menengah dan universitas). Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kualitatif dengan menggunakan kuesioner dan wawancara mendalam sebagai metode pengumpulan data. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa guru universitas dalam penelitian ini cenderung memiliki pandangan yang lebih luas tentang CLT, sementara sejumlah guru sekolah tampaknya telah mengembangkan beberapa kesalahpahaman diantaranya: "tidak" mengajar tata bahasa dan pengajaran "hanya" berbicara.

Kata Kunci: pendekatan komunikatif; persepsi guru

How to Cite: Rahmawati, Y.(2018). Teachers' Perspective on The Implementation of Communicative Approach in Indonesian Classrooms . *IJEE (Indonesian Journal of English Education)*, 5(1), 92-100. doi:10.15408/ijee.v5i1.9881

INTRODUCTION

English functions as a foreign language in Indonesia and as part of the national education system in the country. Therefore, English is a subject taught at schools and is tested in the final examination. The current ELT curriculum in Indonesian schools adopts Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach was introduced by Indonesian scholars who studied in the US in the late 1970s and was supported by publishers, who developed a significant number of course books (The Jakarta Post, 1999b).

The promotion of the concept of CLT through ELT materials has spread widely throughout the country. The popularity of CLT keeps increasing as many teachers apply the concepts of CLT in their classroom. However, the use of CLT has also brought some concerns for teachers in their classroom practice. Some problems are related to the readiness of Indonesian teachers to implement CLT (Suwandi & Bharati, 2007), while others concern about teachers' lack of confidence, time constraints, the lack of availability of authentic materials and the drive for exam-oriented lessons (Dardjowidjojo, 2002; Musthafa, 2001).

COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The notion of communicative competence arose as a challenge to the concept of competence suggested by Chomsky (1965), who stated that competence is "the speaker-hearer's knowledge of his language" (p.4). He also differentiates the idea of "performance" from "communicative", maintaining that "the actual use of language in concrete situations... In actual fact, it obviously could not directly reflect competence" (p.4). He argues that competence is associated with the mastery of grammatical rules or linguistic competence; as a result, performance acts as a sole system which has no association with competence. This dichotomy has been discussed by many researchers in the field of linguistics, such as Berns (1990), Brown (2007), Brumfit and Johnson (1979), Canale and Swain (1980), Richards and Rodgers (1986) and Trosborg (1986) who opposed the ideas proposed by Chomsky (1965) and who then give credit to the idea of communicative competence. They argue that there is a necessity to go beyond the narrow notion of linguistic competence to have real-life communication, as the nature of life is to interact with others.

The application of communicative competence in language teaching is

known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The idea of putting communicative competence into classroom practice was introduced by Savignon in the 1960s-70s (Berns, 1985; Brown, 2007; Trosborg, 1986). She explores the concept of communicative competence in her work in teaching English as a second and foreign language in Canada (M. S. Berns, 1985). Savignon (2005) maintains that CLT focuses mainly on how learners are involved in communication and how they maintain and develop their communicative competence. In addition, Richards (2005) states that CLT is “a set of principles” (p.1) which cover aspects of teaching, such as the purposes of language teaching, classroom activities and teachers and learners’ roles in the classroom.

Below are the characteristics of CLT synthesized from Brown (2007), Canale and Swain (1980), Hedge (2007), Larsen-Freeman (2000), Richards (2005), Richards and Rodgers (1986) and Savignon (2005):

1. Meaning is paramount;
2. Appropriateness is important;
3. Various activities are used in teaching, such as games and role-play;
4. Students’ experience in using language is emphasized;

5. Meaning is negotiated through discussion;
6. The four language skills are integrated;
7. Authentic materials are used;
8. Fun and relaxed situations for learning are created;
9. The use of English in the classroom is maximized and the students’ native language is minimized;
10. The teacher acts a facilitator and monitor.

In Indonesia, CLT has deemed an appropriate respond to the dissatisfaction of the previous methods, such as the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). This approach has been a part of the Indonesian curriculum for about 35 years. However, it appears that in practice the communicative approach has never really been applied. This is because the “guidelines given by the government were very structural” (Dardjowidjojo, 2000, p.25). A research study on English teachers in secondary schools in Java Island by Hamied (1997, as cited in Rudianto, 2007) indicates that only 19.6% teachers stated that they used the communicative approach. This is because the teachers encountered some constraints in the implementation,

such as lack of facilities, students' ability and authentic materials.

METHOD

The objective of this study is to investigate the participants' experiences and perspectives in their interactions with their students in implementing the concepts of CLT. The qualitative research employed as the research design for this study.

The participants discussed in this study were six Indonesian EFL teachers from primary, secondary and university levels (five females and one male). Two English teachers from each level were chosen. They teach at school or university in Jakarta, Banten, Medan (North Sumatera), Yogyakarta and Subang (West Java). The data from this study were gained through observation, interviews, questionnaires, documents, and audio-visual materials.

After in-depth interviews had been conducted, all data were transcribed for analysis. While reading all the data, subthemes were created corresponding to the research questions. In this process, the data were modified and reduced the potential subthemes until similar general subthemes that conformed to the research questions were found. The data from the questionnaire and interviews were used

to triangulate the findings. In addition, extracts from the questionnaire and interviews were used to support the findings.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The Participants' Perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The data indicate that the teachers viewed CLT in different ways; some of them provided a definition to illustrate the concept of CLT, while some others described the characteristics of CLT in understanding this concept. Despite these differences, the participants from the three levels of education highlighted the idea of "communication" when defining CLT. This perception is congruent with the many theories found in the field of CLT, that is, communication is the intended aim when teaching using CLT (Harmer, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Savignon (2005) states that CLT involves learners in communication and the learners have the opportunity to develop their communicative competence. Having this concept, it appears that all of the participants had a basic understanding of CLT.

When asked further about the concept of CLT, the two primary school teachers, however, seemed to place

emphasis on speaking only- they spoke of communication as an oral process.

For me, the most important thing is communication because grammar is too theoretical. (Participant PT-S)

According to me, the most important thing is communication and the next one is grammar. (Participant PT-R)

This perception does not seem to match with the existing literature on CLT. Thomson (1996) calls this phenomenon as a misconception of CLT because teaching using CLT does not mean avoiding other skills. CLT is promoting the integration of the four macro skills, which means that this concept does not disregard the importance of the other skills (Canale, 1983; Richards, 2005; Savignon, 2005). All macro and micro skills are needed in teaching English as they help the students to achieve the language competencies.

Even though the teachers in this study understood the concept of CLT differently, the teachers from the three levels of education acknowledged that CLT was important and, therefore, should be used as an approach in teaching English. They believed that CLT covered aspects needed in learning a foreign language, such as communication and authenticity, which

could help students achieve the learning objectives.

The Participants' Perceptions of the Teaching of Grammar

Table 1: The teachers' perceptions of the teaching of grammar

Statement	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		University Teachers	
	PT-R	PT-S	ST-D	ST-T	UT-E	UT-V
Grammar teaching should be minimized	A	A	A	A	D	D

SA: Strongly agree A: Agree D: Disagree

From the questionnaire, the teachers at primary and secondary schools mentioned that the teaching of grammar should be minimized, because according to them, communication was more important than grammar. Furthermore, they contended that, based on their experiences in learning English, focusing too much on grammar was boring. They believed it would discourage students to speak in English.

It appears that these primary and secondary school teachers' views on the teaching of grammar have been shaped by their past experiences. They also seem to believe that grammar does not support the speaking ability.

When asked further about the teaching of grammar, these primary

and secondary school teachers looked guilty as they admitted that they also taught grammar; it was seen as 'a sin'. They reluctantly explained that grammar was important. This view is in contrast to what is discussed in the literature on CLT, which states that grammatical knowledge establishes the foundation of communication (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Canale, 1983; Hymes, 1979). Furthermore, such a perception corresponds to the misconceptions developed by Thomson (1996), who states that the avoidance of teaching grammar is the most damaging misconception in teaching using CLT. The 'not' teaching grammar is often associated with CLT.

In contrast, the two university teachers seemed to be aware of the importance of grammar in learning English. Grammar, according to them, was the basic skill that supports other skills so learners could become proficient users of English. Furthermore, these two university teachers argued that grammar teaching could be introduced through media, such as songs, newspapers or magazines or by using various activities, such as games, pair work or group work. Again, their views on the importance of grammar seem to have been affected by the policy of their universities. These teachers explained that the focus of English teaching at

their universities was TOEFL; the students were expected to pass a TOEFL test as a requirement for graduating. Because of this, I assume that grammatical knowledge is given a priority in the classroom. Therefore, there is a necessity for them to teach grammar. It also appears that the teachers' own educational background influenced their perceptions. As previously mentioned, these university teachers are pursuing their master degree in the area of English teaching; thus, it is likely that their views reflected what they have attained through their studies abroad.

The Participants' Perceptions of the Use of *Bahasa Indonesia*

From the questionnaire, the teachers in this study responded to the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* as follows:

Table 2: The teachers' perceptions of the use of *Bahasa Indonesia*

Statement	Primary Teachers		Secondary Teachers		University Teachers	
	PT-R	PT-S	ST-D	ST-T	UT-E	UT-V
The use of <i>Bahasa Indonesia</i> should be minimized	D	A	A	A	A	A

SA: Strongly agree A: Agree D: Disagree

The data from the questionnaire show that almost all of the teachers agree that the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* should be minimized in the English

classroom. Only one teacher, Rasty, said that the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* should not be minimized. The data indicated that opposing views regarding the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* were expressed by the two primary school teachers. Savanna argued that the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* should be minimized in the English classroom. In the interview, she explained that the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* in English lessons would discourage students from speaking in English. She also mentioned that at first the students had difficulties in understanding her to speak in English, but later on they became used to it. Rasty, on the other hand, stated that *Bahasa Indonesia* played a significant role in helping her students understand the materials. She added that teaching completely in English would make the students confused because her students' proficiency in English was low.

Their perception is quite the contrary to the theory related to the use of the native language in the communicative classroom. It is stated that one of the characteristics of CLT is maximizing the use of English and minimizing the students' native language (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The concept, however, needs to be questioned for the data revealed that most teachers argued that *Bahasa*

Indonesia is important and should be used to explain complex materials.

In addition, these teachers' perceptions of the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* are also supported by the Act of the Republic of Indonesia number 20, 2003 on National Education System chapter VII article 33 verse 1, which states, "*Bahasa Indonesia* as the language of the nation shall be the medium of instruction in the national education" (Ministry of National Education Republic of Indonesia, 2003).

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Although the concept of CLT has been a part of the Indonesian curriculum for about 35 years, the concept is difficult to implement. This study reveals that the Indonesian teachers - from primary, secondary to university levels - in this study perceived some difficulties toward the implementation of CLT in their classrooms. The teachers mentioned that CLT is interesting and important to implement in Indonesia, however, there should be careful considerations in implementing it. A number of teachers in this study confirmed some of the misconceptions reported by Thomson (1996), namely that CLT means *teaching only speaking* and *the not teaching grammar*. The data, however, revealed three elements that are contradictory to

the concepts of CLT, as theorized by many researchers. They are: *the use of Bahasa Indonesia, the role of the teacher and facilities*. CLT suggests the extensive use of the target language and restricts the use of mother tongue. However, the participants argued that the use of *Bahasa Indonesia* was important both in helping the students understand the materials and in building their self-confidence.

This study has revealed some critiques of the implementation of CLT in Indonesian education. While the study can only represent the participants' views, it may indeed reflect the views of many other teachers, whose experiences would need to be addressed through professional development. Whether or not these perceptions are widespread would need to be tested in a larger-scale study.

REFERENCES

- Berns, M. (1990). *Context of competence: social and cultural considerations in communicative language teaching*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Brown, D. H. (2007). *Principles of language learning and teaching* (5th ed.). New York: Pearson Education.
- Brumfit, C. J., & Johnson, K. (Eds.). (1979). *The communicative approach to language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. W. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication* (pp. 2-27). London: Longman Group Limited.
- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). *Approaches to communicative competence*.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspect of the theory of syntax*. Massachusetts: The M.I.T Press.
- Dardjowidjojo, S. (2000). English teaching in Indonesia. *EA Journal*, 18(1), 22-30.
- Dardjowidjojo, S. (2002). Academic and non-academic constraints in the teaching of English in Indonesia. In A. Syahid & A. Al-Jauhari (Eds.), *Bahasa, pendidikan, dan agama: 65 tahun Prof. Dr. Muljanto Sumardi* (pp. 117-132). Ciputat: Logos Wacana Ilmu.
- Harmer, J. (2001). *The practice of English language teaching* (3rd ed.). Edinburgh Gate: Pearson Education Limited.
- Hymes, D. (1979). On communicative competence. In C.J. Brumfit & K. Johnson (Eds.), *The communicative approach to language teaching* (pp. 5-26). New York: Oxford University Press.

- Lichtman, M. (2010). *Qualitative research in education: a user's guide* (2 ed.). Los Angeles: SAGE Publication.
- Musthafa, B. (2001). Communicative language teaching in Indonesia: issues of theoretical assumptions and challenges in the classroom practice. *Journal of Southeast Asian Education*(2), 2-10.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (1986). *Approaches and methods in language teaching: a description and analysis*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Savignon, S. J. (2005). Communicative language teaching: strategies and goals. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 635-651). New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
- The Jakarta Post. (1999b, November 12). Tips for Indonesian English teachers. *The Jakarta post*. Retrieved from <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/1999/12/11/tips-indonesian-english-teachers.html>.
- Thompson, G. (1996). Some misconceptions about communicative language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 50(1), 9-15.
- Trosborg, A. (Ed.). (1986). *Communicative competence in foreign language learning and teaching*. Aarhus, Denmark: The Dolphin.