

*Article*

# **Communicative Language Teaching in Malaysian ESL Context: A Qualitative Exploration into In-service Teachers' Beliefs and Practices**

**Khalid Ibn Hassan\***

Central China Normal University, China

**Xiaofang Gao**

Central China Normal University, China

## **Abstract**

In contrast to the plethora of research on teachers' beliefs and practices to implement communicative language teaching (CLT), research into in-service primary school teachers' beliefs has earned less focus to evaluate its impacts on their instructional and evaluation practices, particularly in Malaysian ESL context. This qualitative study intended to mitigate the knowledge gap by investigating prevalent communicative language teaching practices in the primary schools in Malaysia. Analysis of our survey and interview data reveals some common problems that affect the proper implementation of CLT. Although teachers faced challenges and had their shortcomings, they endeavored to integrate various instructional and assessment practices to improve students' competency on all four language skills. The study also highlights some key issues which may provide practical implications for the application of CLT in Malaysian primary schools.

## **Keywords**

Communicative language teaching, primary teachers' beliefs, instructional practices, assessment strategies, Malaysia

## **1 Introduction**

English is taught as a foreign language in more than 100 countries (Crystal, 2012) and over a billion people are estimated to be learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) (Graddol, 1997). Moreover, as a first language, English is spoken by 700 million speakers, and many million more as a second language (Wong, 2010). Bhatia (2001) considers English as the most influential global language for academic and professional purposes. Thirumalai (2002) (as reflected in Mustapha & Yahaya, 2013, p. 789) points out, "English is learned everywhere because people have found out that knowledge of English is a passport for better career, better pay, advanced knowledge, and for communication with the entire world." Therefore, English language proficiency is a determinant factor in job market (Ismail, 2011). Sensing the international communicative needs, most countries have adopted different methodologies, especially Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), for English instruction. As CLT aims to enhance learners'

---

## **\*Corresponding Author**

Address: School of Foreign Languages, Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China  
Email: kihassan.bd@gmail.com

communicative competence (Bachman, Lyle, & Palmer, 1996; Hymes, 1971), it has become a popular approach for English language learning and teaching in English as an Additional Language (EAL) context (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013).

## **2 Characteristics of CLT**

CLT was formulated to teach immigrants in ESL environments, i.e. North America, Australia and the UK. To increase learners' communicative competence, it goes beyond grammatical knowledge and depends mostly on social context for communication (Bachman et al., 1996; Purpura, 2004). CLT emphasizes meaning and the learner's communicative intent. Unlike audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods, it avoids drilling and memorizing rules of grammar. Students are involved in communicative activities to promote their language competence. CLT requires relatively small class size and group work to properly carry out the communicative activities with learners' engagement (Holliday, 1994). In order to create more interaction and negotiation of meaning, students are often involved in pair and group activities, which is a shift of power from teachers to students. Therefore, teachers are the facilitators for meaningful communication and organizers of the learning process ensuring learner autonomy (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2013).

Likewise, Brown (2000) lists six interconnected characteristics of CLT: all components of communicative competence such as functional, grammatical, strategic, sociolinguistic, and discourse must be ensured; learners should be engaged in authentic, functional and pragmatic use of language for meaningful communication; fluency and accuracy are complementary principles; a teacher's role is mainly a facilitator in the classroom; activities should be learner-centered and focus on the learning process; language should be used in productive and receptive manners. In addition, Larsen-Freeman (2000) highlights that with the use of CLT, "almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent" (p.129). CLT focuses more on meaning than on structure only; learners communicate through communicative activities such as dialogues, games, role-plays and problem-solving (Lindsay & Knight, 2006). Larsen-Freeman (2000) proposes three characteristics of CLT: communicative activities, use of authentic materials and small group activities.

## **3 Teachers' Beliefs and CLT**

Language learning and teaching is widely considered as a "cognitively driven process" (Richards, 2008, p.167) and beliefs are important concepts in understanding teachers' thought processes and instructional decisions in classroom (Othman & Kiely, 2016). Kagan (1992) defines teacher cognition as "pre-service or in-service teachers' self-reflections, beliefs and knowledge about teaching, students and content" (p.421). Borg (2003) argues, "teachers are active thinking decision-makers who make instructional choices by drawing on complex practically-oriented, personalized and context-sensitive networks of knowledge, thoughts and beliefs" (p. 81). Lortie (1975) points out (as cited in Roberts, 2016, p. 66) that "what students learn about teaching, then, is intuitive and imitative rather than explicit and analytical; it is based on individual personalities rather than pedagogical principles". Thus, teachers' beliefs comprise teacher cognition, i.e. teachers' knowledge, believing and thinking (Borg, 2003). Teachers' beliefs vary widely in terms of definition (Pajares, 1992) and are, sometimes, used interchangeably with knowledge which is connected to traditionally accepted norms. Teachers' beliefs in this research are regarded as teachers' perceptions, views and knowledge about their work and on which they rely to carry out their instructional and assessment practices.

Though as an instructional strategy CLT has been used, there remain some anomalies among its advocates. Some believe that CLT only focuses on meaningful communication and disregard form-

focused instruction which is a prerequisite for achieving advanced levels of development and accuracy in the target language (Spada & Lightbown, 1989). On the contrary, some consider that grammar is very hard to master (Prabhu, 1987) and, hence, advocate that it can be disregarded for explicit teaching. However, grammar can be learned unconsciously through meaningful communication with exposure to the target language (Krashen, 1982). While some support complete rejection of any form of corrective measures (Truscott, 1999), others stress on recast, a useful type of corrective feedback to teach the beginners correct forms along with meanings during the conversations between students and teachers (Liskinasih, 2016; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Therefore, linguistic skills and communicative abilities should not be handled in isolation from each other (Savignon, 2001). Moreover, the use of L1 in L2 learning is still a comprehensible debate in the sphere of ESL and EFL classrooms. Optimum use of L2 is desirable whereas complete rejection of L1 is not supported while teaching the beginners and engaging them in collaborative activities (Swain & Lapkin, 2002; Wu & Wu, 2008).

#### 4 CLT in Malaysia

As a former British colony, Malaysia adopted communicative approach in 1971–1990 to enhance learners' communicative competence (Rashid, Rahman, & Yunus, 2017). In recent years, content-based instruction (CBI) for teaching mathematics and science students and aesthetic approach for promoting language appreciation were incorporated into ELT curriculum with the formulation of English for Teaching Mathematics and Science policy (known as ETeMS) in 2003. Later, in 2012, ETeMS was replaced by Mempertabatkan Bahasa Malaysia Memperkasakan Bahasa Inggeris (Upholding the Malay language and Strengthening the English language) known as MBMMBI (Rashid et al., 2017). The education policy of Malaysia aims “to fulfill the language requirements needed in the industries/workplace as well as the needs of diverse learners” (MOHE, 2011, p. 1). In 2011, School-based Assessment (SBA) was introduced at primary standard one to enable English teachers to prepare school-based formative and summative assessment. Moreover, English curriculum for community colleges was reformed with the aim “to produce more competent and marketable individuals to confront global competitiveness” (MOHE, 2011, p. 1). However, CLT still remained as the suggested approach in the reformed curriculum (Mustapha & Yahaya, 2013). Therefore, the success of recent education policy reforms to enhance English language competency among its future citizens largely depends upon teachers' beliefs and practices, and more specifically, primary language teachers' beliefs of CLT and their practices.

In Asia-Pacific contexts, studies have been conducted to explore EFL teachers' beliefs and their CLT practices (Anderson, 1993; Chang & Goswami, 2011; Chau & Chung, 1987; Farrell, 1999; Gorsuch, 2000; Liu, 2005; Mak, 2004; Nishino, 2008; Peacock, 2001; Pennington, M. C., & Richards, 1997; Tang, Lee, & Chun, 2012; Ting, 2007; Zain & Rohani, 2007). Mak (2004) investigated Hong Kong's pre-service teachers' beliefs about CLT and their classroom language choices. It was found that most student teachers used L1 with low level learners during English lessons despite their strong consensus of using English all the time. Zain and Rohani (2007) and Ting (2007) studied ESL teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching via examining the effects of beliefs on classroom practices and ESL pre-service teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching grammar. Both studies found that teachers' previous personal and professional experiences have affected their classroom practices. Similarly, exposure to CLT during teacher education programs may not be that much effective in changing their classroom practices. Mustapha and Yahaya (2013) found that the CLT practices in Malaysian community colleges lack in qualified teachers. Othman and Kiely (2016) explored the interplay between ESL pre-service teachers' beliefs and instructional practices. Their findings also supported previous studies, revealing that teachers follow structure-based grammar teaching that hinders teaching grammar through context. Moreover, Raissi, Nor, Aziz, and Saleh (2013) conducted research about in-service secondary school teachers' perceptions and CLT practices in Malaysia. They found that the teachers had difficulties in employing CLT in classrooms.

None of the above research focused uniquely on primary school teachers' beliefs of CLT on their instructional and assessment practices in Malaysian ESL context. The instructors who teach and assess students should be considered collectively in a single study to evaluate the influence of their beliefs of CLT on their instructional and assessment practices. Therefore, the present qualitative study intended to investigate the effects of in-service primary school teachers' beliefs of CLT on their instructional and assessment practices in Malaysia. This study aimed to address two research questions: How do ESL in-service primary school teachers' beliefs of CLT influence their instructional practices? How do ESL in-service primary school teachers' beliefs of CLT influence their assessment practices?

## 5 Method

### 5.1 Participants

Eleven ESL in-service instructors from different primary schools in Malaysia were invited to participate in our study. They age ranges from 24 to 35 and had teaching experience between 2 and 8 years. All were females, Malaysian natives and English language majors. Among them, one studied in a native English-speaking country (New Zealand) and the rest graduated in Malaysia. At the time of this study, the participants were studying Master of English as a Second Language (MESL) at a reputed public university in Malaysia. Though the participants were different in terms of age and experience, they had equivalent linguistic competence and similar higher study aim.

### 5.2 Instruments

#### 5.2.1 Teaching beliefs survey

This study adopted Kim's Teaching Beliefs Survey (Kim, 2014) in preparing the questionnaire. The questionnaire included demographic information, nine open-ended, and two close-ended questions. It was a proven material in terms of reliability and validity and, therefore, was adapted to explore the influence of instructors' perceptions about CLT on their instructional and assessment procedures. It mostly comprised four parts: (a) teaching beliefs, (b) its influence on instructional practices, (c) its influence on assessment practices, (d) challenges during implementation. Each part contained several open-ended questions.

#### 5.2.2 Semi-structured interview

The open-ended questions for a semi-structured interview were prepared to get an in-depth insight into teachers' beliefs and their effects on instruction and assessment. The questions were divided into three sub-sections: (1) CLT beliefs, (2) effects on instruction, and (3) effects on assessment. Moreover, after analyzing the beliefs survey data, some questions were designed to get further explanation during the interview.

### 5.3 Data collection

The corresponding researcher met the participants at the university in Malaysia and informed them about the aims, procedures and confidentiality issues of this research. Upon their approval, the survey was administered. They were asked to write their responses in detail at their comfortable time as they all were both fulltime teachers and students. All the data were properly compiled and analyzed according to the common themes related to teachers' beliefs and their influences on the instructional and assessment procedures.

Among the eleven instructors, three were selected for the interview. One participant who studied abroad was purposively chosen. Among the rest, two (20%) were randomly selected. The MESL classes were held between late afternoon and evening on weekdays and some were working in rural primary schools. As they were both full-time teachers and students, managing time for a face-to-face interview had been impossible. Therefore, one was interviewed face-to-face whereas two were interviewed using WhatsApp as they lived and worked in different places. Interviews can be conducted either over telephone or via online means (Creswell, 2012). The interview data were audio-recorded, transcribed and analyzed according to the common themes related to teachers' beliefs about CLT and how CLT influences their teaching and evaluation procedures.

## 6 Results

### 6.1 Survey data analysis

To analyze the survey data, instructors' beliefs on CLT and their effects on instructional and assessment process were precisely kept under consideration. To maintain confidentiality, all comments of the participants were coded with pseudonyms. In response to the question of whether they followed any specific instructional method (Question 3), among eleven instructors, six (N=6) responded that they maintained a specific instructional method – CLT:

Not only that, I personally feel that students should be exposed to CLT as early as possible so that they will feel confident to use English and see the importance of it. (Nishi)

The other four (N=4) did not confine their teaching to one method, especially CLT, but they applied CLT whenever necessary:

I use many different methods such as audio-lingual, grammar-translation, direct methods and so on alongside materials like realia, visuals and ICT to make my lessons interesting and unique. (Paroshi)

Table 1

*Definition of CLT (N = 11)*

Features of CLT	Use of authentic materials to foster communication	Instructors working as facilitator to enhance students' involvement	All activities are designed to focus on major skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing)
Participants' responses	8	9	5

In response to the basic features of CLT (Question 4), it was found that most instructors had a good understanding about CLT. As reflected in Table 1, eight instructors regarded target language use in oral activities as the main feature of CLT. Some mentioned that creating real-life situation in classroom was necessary to promote target language use as was pointed by one respondent:

CLT emphasizes on the use of target language in the classroom. Teachers focus more on students' orality in using the language. In addition, CLT highlights real-life communication whereby students are encouraged to use the target language for their real-life language use. (Jeba)

Nine teachers considered group work and communicative activities as determinant features of CLT-based classroom where teachers engage students to speech-focused activities:

In my opinion, it is employing more communicative tasks ... communication between students and students and students and teachers are important in this type of language teaching. (Siti)

The teacher needs to promote a lot of communicative activities for the pupils in the lessons that the teacher conducts. (Nushra)

However, less comprehensibility regarding their understanding of CLT was traced among some teachers. One emphasized using target language as the only medium of instruction:

For the slow learners, the pupils tend not to show interest when the teacher communicates with them fully in English. (Fatima)

Another instructor defined CLT as involving grammar translation method:

Communicative language teaching involves a lot of communication in the lesson. It is not a teacher centered approach. It is more than a buddy approach and involves the teacher and students to understand the lesson and the success criteria of the lesson in order to achieve this method of teaching. It may involve grammar translation method along the side as well. (Paroshi)

The instructors also reported the scenarios in rural areas where students were reluctant to speak in L2 even in front of their classmates. Except in English classes, in all other classes in schools and even outside schools, students usually used L1 (Bahasa Melayu) to communicate. When they came to English classes, they had to shift from L1 to L2 to communicate with the same classmates. Therefore, this particular situation is demanding to them and it created shyness among them to speak English. To cope with these challenges, the instructors turned to artificially created real-life situations, hoping that these measures may encourage students to use English:

Communicative activities allow and provide more opportunities for students to use the language. This is because, English lesson is the only time and source that my students will use English. Thus, more communicative activities in class means more time and experience spent for my students to use the language. (Nishi)

Table 2

*Importance of Competency Level (Scale: 0-5)*

Competency	Listening	Speaking	Reading	Writing	Grammar	Vocabulary
Average	4.54	4.82	4.64	4.73	4.36	4.36

All the instructors thought that the major skills of English were equally important, which was indicated in their marking as per the importance (scale of 0-5, ranging from 'not important' to 'very important'). As summarized in Table 2 of Question 5, the major skills received a mean score of 4.68. They suggested that all skills were equally important whereas vocabulary and grammar were slightly less important with an average score of 4.36. Speaking achieved the highest with a score of 4.82 whereas writing, reading and listening scored 4.73, 4.64, and 4.54 respectively. However, all components of language learning were considered necessary for instruction. Teachers perceived speaking as a relatively high skill among all. They also thought that all language skills are necessary for learning a new language. Therefore, they gave equal importance to them while formulating instructional strategies. However, it was evident that writing was given much more importance, nearly equal to speaking, which might be due to the country's examination system as reflected in our interview findings.

Table 3

*Influence of CLT on Instruction (N=11)*

Influence of CLT on instruction	Designing communicative activities for meaningful communication	Engaging into interactive activities	Preparing lesson plans that emphasize all skills
	8	9	6

With regard to question 6 about how teachers' beliefs of CLT affected their instructional process, all instructors replied affirmatively that it influenced their instructional procedures in many ways. As shown in Table 3, 8 teachers specifically replied that CLT influenced their lesson designs which emphasized interactive activities and communication:

Yes, it affects the way how I teach. I will make sure to include interactive activities and also by use as many interactive teaching aids such as digital story books which I can have shared reading session with the students. This is to make the students use the language throughout the learning process and, thus, provide communication purpose. (Nishi)

Most instructors preferred using tools to integrate speaking and listening lessons. The teachers focused on the production of target language rather than accuracy and grammar. Nine teachers said that CLT encouraged them to engage students to interactive activities through initiation of proper motivation and encouraging comments:

I do focus on communication skill in my teaching. I prefer to have activities like group discussion, drama, presentation which involve speaking. (Nila)

Six teachers also made it clear that CLT guided them to make interesting lesson plans:

It might in a way affect the way I teach. If I use CLT, I need to allocate activity where students have to communicate during the lesson. (Siti)

For every lesson, I would implement the use of graphic organizers, sounds and also visuals to provide supports especially for my students. (Jeba)

Table 4

*Influence of CLT on Assessment (N=11)*

Influence of CLT on assessment	Evaluating students' communicative competence	Assessing all major skills	Applying various assessment techniques
	9	7	6

CLT influenced not only their instruction but also their assessment practices. In response to question 7 about whether CLT affected their assessment process, the teachers admitted that CLT affected their assessment practices in diverse ways. As summarized in Table 4, all but two emphasized the influence of CLT on their assessment, especially oral skill in addition to writing in various means. During the assessment, although some instructors laid emphasis on the accuracy of skills, most instructors appreciated students' willingness to communicate:

I also need to assess them in how they are actually able to communicate with people by using English appropriately in different situations. (Nushra)

I believe that students' confidence and willingness in using the language are more important. In fact, I believe on the process of how students use the language rather than the product the students utter. (Jeba)

Seven teachers also focused on all major skills while assessing their students' performance:

The evaluation and assessments should not be solely based on receptive skills but also productive skills where speaking and writing are taken into consideration. (Jeba)

Schools' formal assessment strategies mainly included various written tests e.g. writing letters and paragraph, answering descriptive questions, Multiple Choice Question (MCQ), quizzes, etc., to evaluate learners' performance. However, the instructors of this study preferred designing needs-based instructions and assessment techniques in classrooms in addition to preparing their students for public written examination. Six teachers used some tools and let students use the target language in peer-reviews. Some

of them agreed that gestures and real-life examples were helpful for engaging the students in assessment through group activities:

For example, by using a combination of the target language and gestures, I convey the task at hand, and get my students to introduce themselves and ask their classmates for information. This assessment puts students in a real-world listening situation where they must report information overheard. Most likely they have an opinion of the topic, and a class discussion could follow, in the target language, about their experiences and viewpoints. (Shyamoli)

However, the instructors revealed that they had to spend more time on preparing various assessment techniques to evaluate students' communicative competence, and, therefore, some teachers adhered to conventional assessment procedures:

It will also be more arduous as it will not be as simple as marking writing assignment. (Paromita)

To be honest, I rarely use CLT during my assessment of students. I still believe in conventional method of testing (quiz, test, exam). (Tibani)

Table 5

The challenges of implementing CLT (N=11)

Challenges	Curriculum	Evaluation system	Class size	Class hour	Textbook	Instructor's Others competency
Total	2	7	6	6	0	0 low students' motivation & less class materials

The respondents also reported some challenges of implementing CLT (questions 9 and 10), which are reflected in Table 5. Instructors stated that the main difficulties were the evaluation system (N = 7), class size (N = 6), class hours (N = 6), and curriculum (N=2). A great problem they faced was the country's evaluation system which mostly focuses on writing rather than on other skills. Moreover, only one-hour class time was insufficient to implement CLT activities well. Some teachers also said that they had difficulties in dealing with students' lack of vocabulary and getting feedback from them. The students felt shy to speak English outside classrooms. Furthermore, in rural areas, the environment was less conducive to practice English in school environment due to students' lack of motivation, scarcity of learning materials, poor internet facilities, and inclination to L1 use:

They are reluctant and somehow shy to use English due to underuse of the language outside of school context. The other hindrance is the exam-oriented evaluation system in the country's education which focuses more on writing skill rather than the other skills. (Siti)

Honestly, time constrain is the most pertinent problem for me with regards to CLT. By having 1-hour lesson is not enough for effective CLT to happen. This is because I need to spend some time in giving the instructions and ensure that my students understand what they are required to do. (Nishi)

In response to question 11 about instructor's preference to implementing more communicative activities and question 12 related to their recommendations, one important finding was that some teachers were more motivated and endeavored to take initiatives out of the prescribed guidelines:

However, I try to balance between what the curriculum has outlined with my students' needs at the same time since I realized the fact that I still need to prepare them with the latest and challenging educational contents and skills although the fact that my students are weak in English language. (Nishi)

And another teacher reported that she didn't put CLT into practice:

Firstly, I think I should change my mindset to be more positive towards CLT and try to encourage my pupils to try to communicate in English to the fullest. (Fatima)

## 6.2 Interview data analysis

Among eleven instructors, three were interviewed using open-ended questions about their beliefs, teaching and assessment practices for in-depth exploration and supporting the survey data.

Sifat was a primary school teacher who had had two years of instructional experience at a rural primary school. She graduated from a native English-speaking country, majoring in TESL. She was a highly self-motivated instructor who used communicative approach on all skills. She found her students less competent and the environment less favorable:

The pupils that I am teaching really lack in English vocabulary. The environment that they are in are actually less conducive for them to practice the language. (Sifat)

I also believe that to ensure the effectiveness of CLT approach, number of pupils should be around 15-20, and not 35 like I have now. (Sifat)

However, she planned to give the best she knew:

This is because I view that my pupils need to actually use the language actively instead of just using the language passively. I usually engage with pupils in activities given to them to speak in class even if the lesson is on writing or reading. (Sifat)

She also mentioned that much administrative involvement prevented her from designing needs-based lessons for her students. Therefore, she recommended to have:

less time doing administration work at school to focus more on English teaching and a better internet connection at my school, I am teaching at a rural setting school, so that I can easily access the materials that can be found on the internet to implement CLT in my lesson. (Sifat)

Another in-service teacher, Jeba said that she always divided lessons into three stages: pre-stage, while-stage and post-stage. In pre-class activity, she taught her pupils sentences needed for them to use during communicative activities. In the second phase, she categorized pupils into different groups to practice with their peers. According to her, the best classroom activity was when the students initiated their own conversation:

One of the best classroom activities is when they can initiate their own conversation based on the conversation guided by me prior to the lesson. At first stage, teach the pupils the sentences that are needed for them to use in the conversation. Then at second stage, the pupils practice the dialogue with their peers. (Jeba)

She also pointed out that the examination had an influence on students' learning practices. Both students and teachers focused too much on exams:

Malaysian curriculum is overly exam oriented, thus, the pupils are focusing more on memorizing and preparing what they are going to write on the test papers. (Jeba)

Paromita had taught English at a government-run primary school for about eight years. She basically focused on all four skills as far as the assessment was concerned. According to her, assessing all skills could help her students to concentrate on all aspects of language learning. She usually designed communicative activities and applied various communicative means such as observation and comprehension to assess her students:

For writing and speaking skill, I use observation as an assessment tool. For reading, I use comprehension questions to assess my students' understanding. For listening, one of the ways to assess is to ask them to listen to a text and respond to questions that I shall give them based on the text that they have listened. (Paromita).

Regarding the evaluation-focused system which deterred implementing communicative instruction, she recommended:

Education system should be more holistic rather than emphasizing on only one aspect. (Paromita)

According to their views, CLT had not been properly implemented in their programs. They found various deficiencies in their programs such as lack of proper evaluation system, large class size, limited materials (e.g. only textbooks, and traditional curriculum). As practitioners in TESL, they had CLT knowledge and tried to maintain their instructional and assessment practices to develop their students' proficiency level while coping with various deficiencies in the curriculum of primary schools. For this, they willingly applied relevant situation-based strategies to improve their students' communicative competence.

## **7 Discussion and Conclusion**

### **7.1 Summary of the findings**

The present research explored the effects of in-service primary school instructors' beliefs of CLT on their instructional and assessment practices. Findings of this research have been compiled according to the two research questions.

Findings related to research question 1 showed that almost all instructors were aware of the features of CLT and managed to manifest them through classroom management, lesson preparation, necessary adaptation to contexts, use of real-life situation, paying attention to learner autonomy, designing students-centered activities, and giving equal attention to all major skills rather than to a single skill. It was also evident that some teachers preferred complete rejection of L1 during class time. Though there remained some challenges when implementing CLT in rural primary schools, most of the teachers well understood CLT and could put it into use in classroom situations. Most teachers emphasized the importance of learning four skills. They designed rather rich communicative activities for students to speak more in the target language and employed gestures and real-life elements to create a friendly atmosphere. Almost all teachers emphasized the use of authentic materials. Some teachers shared interesting elements e.g. graphic organizers, audio and visual aids, digital storytelling, etc., to promote authentic language use during class and enhance interaction. They preferred to design lesson plans that are conducive to interactive activities. However, they also faced problems and challenges, for example, less class hours, less conducive environment, low student motivation, etc.

Interview findings also confirmed the survey findings and revealed that some instructors faced additional problems like huge administrative pressure, low internet connection, and lack of authentic materials at rural schools. Though the instructors agreed that their role in classroom was merely a facilitator and an initiator of learning activities, some teachers were more inclined to structuring the classroom activities into pre, while and post-activities. Moreover, the instructors motivated the students to use English inside and outside classrooms. Their classes combined teaching, participation, group activities, dialogues and writings. Students were motivated to use English in group activities.

Findings related to research question 2 indicated that teachers' beliefs affected their assessment procedures as well. CLT encouraged instructors to teach and assess all four language skills. Most instructors noted that their prescribed assessment practices were not holistic and CLT was not fully implemented in their programs. The schools' assessment practices were examination-oriented and mostly based on writing. However, they took initiatives to evaluate all skills of their students by employing different measures. Some instructors liked to assess students' confidence and willingness to communicate regardless of the errors made by students, whereas some still focused more on the accuracy of students' production. Some teachers liked to evaluate students' communicative proficiency using role-play and situational activities. Most instructors emphasized assessing all language skills rather than assessing only the writing skill.

Interview findings revealed that in spite of much shortage of CLT materials in rural primary schools, some teachers took initiatives to evaluate their pupils in various ways. Assessing all four skills was the major concern among most of the teachers. Therefore, their assessment procedures included observing students' writing and receptive skills, listening and speaking practices and diverse comprehension questions. This also indicated that competent instructors could take extra efforts in helping their learners while fully or partially following the prescribed curriculum. In addition, limited class time affected their assessment practices. Due to time constrain, teachers were unable to apply CLT fully in their classes and, therefore, some teachers still preferred adopting conventional assessment techniques. However, most instructors preferred assessing both receptive and productive skills, which were not sometimes possible in the prescribed class hours due to large class size.

## 7.2 Implications and recommendations

It is evident among EFL / ESL students that they feel shy when talking to their classmates in English (He, 2011). In this study, most teachers understood the situation and endeavored to apply context-dependent approach to encourage their students to speak English. In practice, if students are unwilling to communicate, it is challenging for the instructors to reorganize activities for better outcomes. Teachers, then, can negotiate with their students on how to design more suitable activities and how to interest them. A student-friendly atmosphere can help promote student-student and student-teacher relationship and interaction. Mixing students of different competency is helpful to engage relatively shy and linguistically less competent students in communicative activities. It also motivates students to participate in group-work, peer-work, and peer-instruction, etc., after seeing others' active performance.

Moreover, like Othman and Kiely (2016), the study found that some teachers still followed structure-based approach to comply with Malaysian examination system and the structured examination questions (Yamat, Fisher, & Rich, 2014). Pre-structured class-taking strategies may sometimes create imbalance in the expectation of students, which might immobilize student-centeredness in classroom activities. Therefore, whole class discussion on lesson plan development and activity selection can be an ideal approach to increase learner autonomy. Translanguaging can also be adopted to allow students to apply their L1, which can also work to create a favorable situation for them to enjoy new paradigms in their usual classroom situations (García, 2011). This is also a way of using all their linguistic resources.

Another key point that needs to be discussed in EFL and ESL is environment – realities of individual classrooms, schools, cities, and countries (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Most of the subjects or courses except English are taught in mother tongue. Even, all the outdoor activities in schools are performed in their mother tongue. Therefore, students face a great challenge of suddenly shifting into the target language in a particular classroom for one hour in the entire school time. Moreover, for a particular course, they have to switch to the target language to talk to the same classmates in similar social interactions. It is artificial and rather forceful. Actually, we have not created a balanced school environment for students to nurture a new language in a systematic manner. Moreover, most schools offer one or two English courses which are taught with the aim to pass a writing examination. How far we can go with this one course only and exam-focused strategy is a timely question to initiate a paradigm shift of the curriculum and school environment. Though Malaysia launched ETeMS, it had to replace with MBMMBI due to lack of language proficiency among the respective instructors and students' low performance in mathematics and science education (Rashid et al., 2017). However, for enhancing students' communicative competence, school-based continuous professional development and academic-retreat programs can help to identify the local needs, develop cooperation among teachers and administrators, and improve teachers' beliefs for better instructional and assessment practices.

Some instructors may not be fully aware of the components of CLT and its implementation procedures e.g. mixing grammar-translation method along with CLT, giving much stress on target

language use in the classroom, and emphasizing accuracy over production, etc. Similarly, insufficient class hours, lack of authentic materials, lack of student motivation, unidirectional assessment system, and lack of internet access in the rural areas are the barriers to successfully implement CLT in Malaysian primary schools, as such also found in Othman and Kiely (2016). The challenges instructors faced can be good resources for the program coordinators for proper implementation of CLT in their programs.

Teachers' involvement in administrative activities negatively influence contextualizing CLT materials according to the needs of the students. Huge administrative involvement hampers teachers' intuition and initiatives to concentrate on preparing time-consuming and sustainable course materials and assessment strategies more creatively. It is also important to understand students' motivation and anxiety level as they might feel reluctant and shy to use English in peer interaction and classroom activities (He, 2011). It can be because they may have cultural barriers in practicing English, or the contents of the materials may not be interesting. Examples and contents from learners' own cultures can be useful resources for the students to easily understand the contents and to initiate interactive lessons. Moreover, instructors must make necessary adoption of the communicative approach in terms of materials development, instruction and assessment.

The investigation into how instructors' beliefs on CLT influencing both instructional and assessment practices in Malaysia has revealed various fundamental issues related to CLT. However, the number of participants was small and, thus, may lack insight of the general scenario. Another limitation is the fact that all participants have similar educational background, proficiency level and higher study aim, which may not represent larger body of teachers in that context. Furthermore, this study was confined to survey and interview. Teachers' material assessment, peer evaluation and classroom observation can be utilized to understand the exact scenario of the issues and teachers' instruction and assessment practices more precisely. Particularly, future research may focus on exploring the real picture of CLT in terms in-service teachers' beliefs and their assessment practices in rural primary schools.

## Acknowledgements

The authors cordially thank all the respondents for sharing their valuable information and the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments.

## References

- Anderson, J. R. (1993). Problem solving and learning. *American Psychologist*, 48(1), 35–44.
- Bachman, L. F., Lyle, F., & Palmer, A. S. (1996). *Language testing in practice: Designing and developing useful language tests* (Vol. 1). Oxford University Press.
- Bhatia, V. (2001). The power and politics of genre. In C. Burns, A. and Coffin (Ed.), *Analysing English in a global context*. London: Routledge.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe, and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81–109.
- Brown, H. D. (2000). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. New York, NY: Longman.
- Chang, M., & Goswami, J. S. (2011). Factors Affecting the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Taiwanese College English Classes. *English Language Teaching*, 4(2), 3–12.
- Chau, L. M., & Chung, C. M. (1987). Diploma in education graduates' attitude towards communicative language teaching. *Chinese University Education Journal*, 15(2), 45–51.

- Creswell, J. W. (2012). *Educational Research: Planning, Conducting and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Boston, MA: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Crystal, D. (2012). *English as a global language*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge university press.
- Farrell, T. S. C. (1999). The Reflective assignment: Unlocking pre-service English teachers' beliefs on grammar teaching. *RELC Journal*, 30(2), 1–17.
- García, O. (2011). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Gorsuch, G. J. (2000). EFL educational policies and educational cultures: Influences on teachers' approval of communicative activities. *TESOL Quarterly*, 34(4), 675–710.
- Graddol, D. (1997). *The future of English?: A guide to forecasting the popularity of the English language in the 21st century*. The British Council.
- He, D. (2011). *Foreign language speaking anxiety: An investigation of non-English majors in mainland China* (Doctoral dissertation, City University of Hong Kong). Retrieved from [https://scholars.cityu.edu.hk/en/theses/foreign-language-speaking-anxiety\(5e9699a2-3f24-4868-b265-bcaedc1e212d\).html](https://scholars.cityu.edu.hk/en/theses/foreign-language-speaking-anxiety(5e9699a2-3f24-4868-b265-bcaedc1e212d).html)
- Holliday, A. (1994). *Appropriate methodology and social context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Hymes, D. (1971). Competence and performance in linguistic theory. *Language Acquisition: Models and Methods*, 1, 3–28.
- Ismail, N. A. (2011). Graduates' characteristics and unemployment: A study among Malaysian graduates. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 2(16), 94–102.
- Kagan, D. M. (1992). Implication of research on teacher belief. *Educational Psychologist*, 27(1), 65–90.
- Kim, A.-Y. A. (2014). Examining how teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching affect their instructional and assessment practices: A qualitative study of EFL university instructors in Colombia. *RELC Journal*, 45(3), 337–354.
- Krashen, S. (1982). *Principles and practice in second language acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford University.
- Larsen-Freeman, D., & Anderson, M. (2013). *Techniques and principles in language teaching 3rd edition-Oxford handbooks for language teachers*. Oxford university press.
- Lindsay, C., & Knight, P. (2006). *Learning and teaching English: A course for teachers*. Oxford University Press New York.
- Liskinasih, A. (2016). Corrective Feedbacks in CLT-Adopted Classrooms' Interactions. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 60–69.
- Liu, M. S. (2005). *EFL student teachers in Taiwan: Exploring their learning to teach in a junior high school context*. The University of Queensland.
- Lyster, R., & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 37–66.
- Mak, H. (2004). *The development of Hong Kong pre-service EFL teachers' beliefs about communicative language teaching in a postgraduate diploma programme in education*. The Chinese University of Hong Kong (Hong Kong).
- MOHE. (2011). *English for work syllabus*. Putrajaya: Ministry of Higher Education.
- Mustapha, S. M., & Yahaya, R. A. (2013). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Malaysian context: Its' implementation in selected community colleges. *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 90, 788–794. Elsevier.
- Nishino, T. (2008). Japanese secondary school teachers' beliefs and practices regarding communicative language teaching: An exploratory survey. *JALT Journal*, 30(1), 27.

- Othman, J., & Kiely, R. (2016). Preservice teachers' beliefs and practices in teaching English to young learners. *Indonesian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 6(1), 50–59.
- Pajares, M. F. (1992). Teachers' beliefs and educational research: Cleaning up a messy construct. *Review of Educational Research*, 62(3), 307–332.
- Peacock, M. (2001). Pre-service ESL teachers' beliefs about second language learning: A longitudinal study. *System*, 29(2), 177–195.
- Pennington, M. C., & Richards, J. C. (1997). Reorienting the teaching universe: The experience of five first-year English teachers in Hong Kong. *Language Teaching Research*, 1(2), 149–178.
- Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Purpura, J. (2004). *Assessing grammar (Cambridge Language Assessment Series)*. Cambridge, UK.
- Raissi, R., Nor, F. M., Aziz, M. A., & Saleh, Z. A. (2013). A comparison between students' and teachers' ideas regarding communicative language teaching implementation in Malaysian secondary schools: A qualitative survey. *Journal of Basic and Applied Scientific Research*, 3(4), 608–614.
- Rashid, R. A. B., Rahman, S. B. A., & Yunus, K. (2017). Reforms in the policy of English language teaching in Malaysia. *Policy Futures in Education*, 15(1), 100–112.
- Richards, J. C. (2008). Second language teacher education today. *RELC Journal*, 39(2), 158–177.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge university press.
- Roberts, J. (2016). *Language teacher education*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Savignon, S. J. (2001). Communicative language teaching for the twenty-first century. *Teaching English as a Second or Foreign Language*, 3, 13–28.
- Spada, N., & Lightbown, P. M. (1989). Intensive ESL programmes in Quebec primary schools. *TESL Canada Journal*, 11–32.
- Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2002). Talking it through: Two French immersion learners' response to reformulation. *International Journal of Educational Research*, 37(3–4), 285–304.
- Tang, E. L. Y., Lee, J. C. K., & Chun, C. K. W. (2012). Development of teaching beliefs and the focus of change in the process of pre-service ESL teacher education. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 37(5), 90–107.
- Ting, S. H. (2007). Is teacher education making an impact on TESL teacher trainees' beliefs and practices of grammar teaching. *English Language Teacher Education and Development*, 10, 42–62.
- Truscott, J. (1999). The case for “The case against grammar correction in L2 writing classes”: A response to Ferris. *Journal of Second Language Writing*, 8(2), 111–122.
- Wong, M. S.-L. (2010). Beliefs about language learning: A study of Malaysian pre-service teachers. *RELC Journal*, 41(2), 123–136.
- Wu, W. C. V., & Wu, P. H. N. (2008). Creating and authentic EFL learning environment to enhance student motivation to study English. *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(4), 211–226.
- Yamat, H., Fisher, R., & Rich, S. (2014). Revisiting English language learning among Malaysian children. *Asian Social Science*, 10(3), 174.
- Zain, S. R. M., & Rohani, S. (2007). Teaching of grammar: Teachers' beliefs, instructional contexts and practices. *Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation*. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.

***Khalid Ibn Hassan*** has a PhD from Central China Normal University and he is an EAL instructor at IWS and GGP in Canada. Previously, he was an Assistant Professor of English at Exim Bank Agricultural University, Bangladesh and a Senior Lecturer at International University of Business Agriculture and Technology. His research focuses on flipped classroom, educational technology, task-based language learning, teachers' beliefs, and professional development.

***Xiaofang Gao*** is a Professor of English in the School of Foreign Languages, Central China Normal University. She studied M.Ed. at University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK and earned PhD from Communication University of China. Her research interests include pragmatics & ELT, discourse analysis, English language education in China, cross-cultural communication and social linguistics.