

**ESL TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARDS
COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN
MALAYSIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

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UNIVERSITI TEKNOLOGI MALAYSIA

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I dedicate this dissertation to my beloved family;
my dear father;
and my merciful mother,
& my supervisor assoc. prof Dr Faizah Mohamad Nor
for their patience, passion, support and encouragement during this difficult journey

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ABSTRACT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) develops communicative competence of the learners in the second/foreign language. It focuses on learners' needs to improve their communicative skills. In recent years, many Asian countries adapted CLT to be used in their English classes. However, CLT implementation faced several challenges in many East Asian countries. By reviewing previous studies in this regard, the researcher found that although it is essential to consider teachers' and students' perceptions as well as challenges and instructional practices of CLT, few studies focused on teachers' and students' perceptions, their challenges and teachers' instructional practices. In this study, Malaysian secondary teachers' and students' perceptions, their challenges and teachers' instructional practices of CLT were investigated. An explanatory mixed method was used for collecting the required data. In the first phase quantitative data were collected by questionnaire, and then for further clarification observations and interviews were conducted. Results of the qualitative part were used to clarify the quantitative results. First, participants' perceptions about the CLT principles were investigated by conducting survey, then teachers' instructional practices were examined by observing the CLT classes, and finally teachers' challenges regarding the CLT were investigated through semi-structured interviews. Participants of the study were 152 teachers and 380 students. Among them a sub-sample of 30 teachers and 30 students were chosen for conducting the semi-structured interviews and finally 30 classrooms were observed to evaluate teachers' instructional practices. Results of the study shows that, overall students and teachers held favourable perceptions about CLT, and several situational constraints like big classes, students' level of proficiency, lack of facilities and lack of in-service trainings hindered CLT implementation in this country. Moreover, based on the results obtained some inconsistencies were observed between teachers' perceptions and their instructional practices. Findings of the study signified the importance of adapting CLT into the Malaysian ESL context.

ABSTRAK

Komunikasi Pengajaran Bahasa (CLT) membangunkan kompetensi komunikatif pelajar dalam bahasa asing / kedua. Ia memberi tumpuan kepada keperluan pelajar untuk meningkatkan kemahiran komunikasi mereka. Sejak akhir-akhir ini, kebanyakan Negara di Asia menyesuaikan CLT untuk digunakan dalam kelas bahasa Inggeris mereka. Walau bagaimanapun di Negara-negara Asia Timur, terdapat pelbagai cabaran untuk melaksanakan CLT. Berdasarkan kajian-kajian lepas, pengkaji mendapati bahawa walaupun CLT merupakan sesuatu yang boleh mempertimbangkan persepsi guru dan pelajar serta melihat masalah dan amalan interaksi CLT, kajian tersebut lebih tertumpu kepada persepsi guru dan pelajar serta amalan pengajaran mereka. Dalam kajian ini persepsi pelajar dan guru-guru di sekolah menengah di Malaysia dalam konteks masalah amalan pengajaran guru terhadap CLT telah dikaji. Satu kaedah kajian campuran telah digunakan untuk mengumpul data yang diperlukan. Dalam fasa pertama data kuantitatif dikumpulkan menerusi soal selidik dan untuk penjelasan lanjut, pemerhatian dan temu bual telah dijalankan. Keputusan bahagian kualitatif telah digunakan untuk menjelaskan keputusan kuantitatif. Pertama, persepsi dan masalah tentang prinsip-prinsip CLT responden telah dikaji dengan menjalankan kaji selidik dan amalan pengajaran guru telah dianalisis dengan kaedah pemerhatian dalam kelas CLT manakala kaedah temu bual separa berstruktur digunakan untuk mengkaji masalah dan isu-isu tentang CLT. Responden kajian ini terdiri daripada 152 orang guru dan 380 pelajar. Dalam kalangan mereka 30 orang guru dan 30 orang pelajar telah dipilih untuk menjalankan temu bual separa berstruktur dan 30 bilik darjah telah diperhatikan untuk menilai amalan pengajaran guru. Keputusan kajian menunjukkan bahawa secara keseluruhannya persepsi pelajar dan guru adalah positif terhadap CLT dan beberapa situasi kekangan diperolehi seperti saiz kelas yang besar, tahap pelajar terhadap kemahiran, kekurangan kemudahan dan kekurangan dalam perkhidmatan latihan telah menghalang pelaksanaan CLT di negara ini. Selain itu, berdasarkan keputusan yang diperolehi beberapa percanggahan diperhatikan di antara persepsi guru dan amalan pengajaran mereka. Hasil kajian itu menunjukkan pentingnya mengamalkan CLT dalam konteks ESL di Malaysia.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ALM	-	Audio Lingual Method
CLT	-	Communicative Language Teaching
EFL	-	English as a Foreign Language
ESL	-	English as a second language
GTM	-	Grammar Translation Method
IPA	-	International Phonetics Association
KBSM	-	Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah
LSP	-	Language for Specific Purposes
MELTA	-	Malaysian Language Teaching Association
SEDC	-	State Education Development Commission
SLA	-	Second Language Acquisition
TBLT	-	Task Based Language Teaching
TESL	-	Teaching English as Second Language
TESOL	-	Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages
EFA	-	Exploratory Factor Analysis
CFA	-	Confirmatory Factor Analysis
KMO	-	Kaiser Meyer Olkin

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

According to Littlewood (2007) some methods of language teaching like Grammar Translation Method (GTM), and Audio Lingual Method (ALM) could not encourage ESL learners to communicate with each other in English well. Dam (2001) emphasized that GTM is considered an effective language teaching for focusing on grammatical forms, but this approach is criticized for its main shortcoming in that it turns students to passive recipients of the grammatical rules, and it ignores the importance of using the target language in the English classes. According to Rao (1996) after several years of language learning, most students who were trained by old language teaching approaches may have good grammatical competence, and they can easily translate from a target language to their mother tongue, but they cannot speak the target language fluently. Those students cannot understand exactly what native speakers say, and they cannot communicate with them easily. GTM and other old language teaching methods mainly focus on reading and writing, and they do not focus on the speaking and listening skills.

Consequently, fluency based approaches seem essential for the English learners, especially for those who are studying English for immigration purposes, and people who want to immigrate for studying and living abroad. Larsen-Freeman (2011) believed that in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), communicative competence of the students can be improved by using authentic materials and tasks. Savingson (2001) declared that CLT can improve English competence of the learners

over authentic interactions. Littlewood (2007) was of the idea that CLT is recognized as an effective language teaching method in which ESL learners can communicate with each other, and this method of language teaching is much more effective compared to the pre-CLT methods. Brown (2000) stated some guidelines for the CLT instruction namely that CLT instruction mainly focuses on communicative competence, and not linguistic competence. According to his idea, this approach was designed to force students to use the target language to improve their communicative competence in an authentic, real life situation. According to the CLT principles, fluency has priority over accuracy to push students communicating in a real life situation. In the communicative classes, students are engaged to use the language productively and receptively in a stress-free condition.

Since 1970s, English teachers, especially teachers of English as a second language (ESL) were assigned to use CLT in their classes. According to some researchers, Asian teachers had some pr in implementing the CLT in the ESL contexts, like the size of the classes and school facilities. Thus, most of the teachers resorted to form-based and knowledge-based teaching methods, which conflicted with the CLT principles (Anderson, 1993; Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007; Liao, 2003). Cohen and Teller (1994) believed that teacher and student perceptions have very important roles in applying an approach, consequently, teacher and student perceptions regarding the CLT implementation can significantly influence their performance. In this regard, Barkhuizen (1998) investigated student interest regarding language learning in South Africa, and concluded that teachers' classroom practices influenced student performance to a high extent. Results of this study showed that South African students were more eager to do form-based activities than communicative ones.

English language teachers in Malaysia are concerned with the task of training learners with good English proficeicency. Due to the importance of knowing the students and teachers' perceptions regarding the CLT principles, their instructional practices, and their tentative challenges, the researcher had several motives to conduct the current study in Malaysian secondary schools. The first aim is related to the nature of CLT and concerns creating a learner-centred environment, which was

assigned by the Malaysian Ministry of Education. By conducting the current study, the researcher reported the applicability of this method in Malaysia with diversity of L1 languages and cultures, which will be discussed in the following chapters. The second aim of the researcher for conducting the study was related to the other important characteristic of the CLT, which focuses on improving the English learners' communicative competence, to see whether this approach is suitable for the pedagogical purposes of the Malaysian teachers, and pedagogical goals of the Malaysian Ministry of Education. Having a good command of English can help Malaysian society to be more proficient in English in the global community as the ninth ranked tourist country in the world, and results of the current study can help the Ministry of Education of Malaysia to know the CLT implementation challenges. The third aim was related to the Malaysian educational system, in which Malaysian Ministry of Education assigned all of the secondary school language teachers to apply CLT in their classes, and investigating the effectiveness of this method seems necessary.

1.2 Background of the study

CLT was established in the Western countries during the 1970s, and became popular in many countries (Brown, 2007; Richard & Rodgers, 1986; Savignon, 2001). The Council of Europe planned notional-functional syllabi to improve the language proficiency of second language learners as the number of immigrants and workers increased in the European countries significantly (Savignon, 2001). Notional-functional syllabi focused on the function as the main purpose of foreign language instruction, and consequently, the focus on grammar decreased significantly (Brown, 2007). "Notions" referred to the exact concepts like time, space, and contexts like travel and schooling. Additionally, "Functional" referred to the functions of language like classifying, reporting, rejecting, and asking for permission (Brown, 2007). According to Savignon (1997) function refers to the students' needs, which is considered the main goal of language instruction programs, and functional syllabus worked based on varying needs of the learners (Savignon, 1997). Similarly, in the United States, sociolinguists forwarded the idea that by

focusing on grammatical and linguistic features of the language, the communicative perspective would be ignored (Brown, 2007; Savignon, 1997; Savignon, 2001).

During the 1980s, CLT became very popular in English as Second Language (ESL) contexts (Brown, 2007). ESL learners had instant needs to use English for their survival reasons in social contexts and academic areas. Additionally, in ESL classes, students could not use their native languages (Ellis, 1996). In a comparison between CLT and other language teaching approaches, CLT has two distinct features. The first and most important feature of CLT is communicative competence, which is recognized as the goal of language teaching and learning. Second important feature of CLT relates to its focus on improving the four language skills over authentic communications. Littlewood (1981) declared that one of the most important characteristics of CLT refers to its focus on the language function in real-life situation, and it helps learners to learn the language in an authentic context.

According to the curriculum assigned by the Malaysian Ministry of Education Kurikulum Bersepadu Sekolah Menengah (KBSM), all Malaysian secondary schools have to use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach in their national curriculum. CLT mainly focuses on improving the communicative competence of the students to make them proficient in speaking. Richards and Rodgers (2001) believed that CLT is not a new approach of language teaching, and some linguists started to use it from 1960s, in England. Malaysian Ministry of Education began to introduce and implement a curriculum for all governmental secondary schools under the name Kurikulum Sekolah Menengah 'KBSM', in 1988. This curriculum was adapted and implemented according to the national philosophy of education in this country. The main goal of this curriculum was to improve the communicative competence among English learners to learn and use language in authentic and real-life situations. This syllabus aimed to improve four major skills of the students, namely; speaking, reading, writing and listening, and other sub-skills like grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary over authentic communications in the classroom.

The KBSM curriculum is arranged based on several topics. The topics which should be taught and covered during the academic year for each level are classified accordingly. Topics are chosen from a variety of challenges, and include several real-life situation contexts such as home, students' studying place, their living place and the world they are living in. The topics cover four language skills, and the contents cover communicative and moral values of the multicultural society of Malaysia. In the Form Five curriculum specification, the focus is on the language skills through "recycled topics". During the recycling procedure, the topics which are introduced in the previous levels are introduced in different levels of difficulty to involve students with a better level of intellect and maturity. Another goal of the KBSM syllabus relates to its focus on the philosophy of Reconstructionism, in which the focus is on using language in an authentic manner and in real-life situation contexts. The topics of the curriculum are mainly related to authentic subjects which relate to the students' daily needs and challenges. The main topics inserted in the curriculum relate to the society and culture. Curriculum makes the learners ready to face controversial challenges to make them ready for use in real-life contexts.

Educational researchers have investigated factors affecting teachers' perception; in 1980, they considered teachers active decision-makers in the classrooms. Accordingly, Borg (2003) conducted a research by reviewing 64 studies of teacher cognition, and identified several factors in this regard like knowledge of the teachers, their perceptions and their way of thinking that had pivotal role in their teaching career. Additionally, he believed that contextual factors can influence both teachers' cognition, and the way they teach in the classroom. In the Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) studies, a challenging question for researchers is which factors of language teaching can change their performance in the classroom, what can push them to use modern language teaching approaches, and what can cause them to decline it.

In fact, several factors can motivate teachers to use or deny an approach in language teaching, namely, governmental decisions, their previous teaching experiences or related social factors. During the current study, the researcher investigated teachers' and students' perceptions, challenges and instructional

practices about CLT which are assigned to be applied in Malaysian secondary schools. Teachers' and students' challenges in applying this approach, their instructional practices, and positive as well as negative points of this approach from the teachers' and students' viewpoints in the Malaysian secondary schools were investigated.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

In the 1970s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was created to respond to and push back against teaching English using the audio-lingual and grammar-translation methods. CLT emphasizes communication proficiency instead of text translation, rote memorization and error-free speech (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). CLT incorporates all four language skills at the beginning of the learning process according to Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983), rather than a single aspect such as speech or grammar as in other methods. CLT sees errors as part of the learning process instead of mistakes to be rigorously avoided. CLT focuses on the understanding of meanings and functions necessary for communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). As stated by Savignon (1991), in CLT ESL students are not passive receivers of what is told to them by language teachers, but "active participants in the negotiation of meaning" (p. 261). This is because effectively learning a language requires inter-student involvement. This is often done by giving small student group's problem solving tasks to complete in English (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Despite Richards and Rodgers stating that CLT arose during a "paradigm shift" in language education (2001, p. 172) and CLT's continued popularity, it has been argued that the CLT principles of teachers' role, learners' role, implicit grammar instruction, implicit error correction, and group/pair work activities may not be completely beneficial. Kumaravadivelu (2006) stated that CLT was a "a classic case of a centre-based pedagogy that is out of sync with local linguistic, educational, social, cultural, and political exigencies" (p. 64) and that CLT may not function perfectly in some cultures and contexts. CLT's primary goal is communicative proficiency and it was expected to see widespread use in classroom environments. A

growing number of studies (e.g. Bums, 1990; Hird, 1995; Kamaradivelu, 1993; Karavas-Doukas, 1993 & 1996; Kuo, 1995; Lamb, 1995; Lersg, 1997; Li, 1998; Ng & Tang, 1997; Nunan, 1987; Thornbury, 1998; Wang, 2002) show that although teachers profess to using CLT methods, they often in practice employ traditional techniques. CLT is not often employed in the classroom despite widespread promotion in curriculums. Thornberry (1998) observed in L2 classrooms as well as initial and in-service training programs that CLT is rarely seen and direct grammar-based methods remain widespread. Teaching alternatives such as task-based pedagogy have made little lasting impact to English language teaching customs and practices (Thornbury, 1998).

Celce-Murcia, *et. al* (1998) observed that “a great deal of language teaching around the world follows, to a large extent, traditional grammar-translation principles”. Data indicates that CLT, despite its usefulness is difficult to implement in non-western cultures, as evidenced in teacher and student frustrations. A study of South Korean, Japanese, and Taiwanese teacher’s views on CLT effectiveness by Butler (2005) found that they found it hard to implement due to methodical misunderstandings. A study on Bangladesh schools by Hamid and Baldauf (2008) found that all six of the teachers they interviewed “admitted that they did not have a clear idea about or understanding of CLT; nor did they know the ‘whats’ and ‘hows’ of implementing it in the classroom for developing learners’ communicative competence” (p. 18), possible due to a lack of training and support for CLT practices.

Some investigations have demonstrated that teachers consider a lack of authentic materials or a lack of preparation time a difficulty in implementing CLT (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Eveyik-Aydin, 2003; Li, 1998). A study by Li (1998) found that some South Korean teachers had to create their own education material because all available textbooks were structured with traditional methods in mind. A study in China by Yu (2001) found that teachers lacked time for syllabus or curriculum reform due to having to work several jobs to make ends meet. Another difficulty in implementing CLT is a lack of access to native English speakers (Li, 1998). A study on South Korea by Li (1998) found a lack of government support for teacher training and re-training on CLT, and a lack of support due to CLT’s promotion of proficiency

over accuracy impacting test scores. Oyuang (2003) found in China university students dislike CLT due to being more comfortable with traditional ESL teaching methods. Chinese students found that foreign, native-speaker English professors improvised too often in class, made it difficult to take notes, focused too much on “fun” activities, did not correct errors to the extent that students wished, and gave higher marks to students that favour creativity and critical thought over accuracy. CLT has failed to be implemented in multiple countries due to a lack of teaching materials, a lack of access to native speakers, and a lack of teacher training, student resistance, and washback from national exams.

ESL theories and methodologies have been developed in the last couple of decades to assist ESL teachers and students. Pre-CLT teaching methods in East Asia focus on rote memory using book and teacher-focused grammar-translation methods (Rao, 2002). Each of the four basic language skills is taught separately and their concepts are reinforced through difficult, rigid exams. This results in Asian students who verbally struggle with English despite years of education. CLT was developed to improve educational results in Asian ESL students by focusing on functional language use through interaction and collaboration. Researchers believe CLT plays a critical role in ensuring proficiency in second language education (Celce-Murcia, 1991; Ellis, 2001; Musumeci, 1997; Savignon & Bems, 1983).

Furthermore, teachers’ and students’ perceptions mainly show what they think about language teaching and it is very important to know what they really know and think about CLT principles, and what they apply in their classrooms. The main challenges in CLT implementation relate to the teachers’ and students’ perceptions regarding the CLT principles as the main role makers of the CLT in the classes (Karavas-Doukas, 1996). Littlewood (1981) stated that CLT principles may contradict the existing perceptions of language teaching in many contexts. According to the curriculum assigned by the Malaysian Ministry of Education, all public secondary schools have to apply CLT. It is important to investigate Malaysian secondary schools teachers’ and students’ perceptions, challenges and instructional practices. The present Malaysian secondary school teachers of English are the products of previous methods of English teaching which were not learner-centered.

This category of English teachers have the belief that accuracy is more important than fluency, when it comes to their instruction, they may not want to change their beliefs and adapt the CLT approach, which emphasizes fluency rather than accuracy.

Then, there are other factors like contextual factors which include the setting of the school. Teachers who teach in rural schools have found it a big challenge to adapt the CLT approach in their English classes. This is because the students in rural schools are generally very weak in English, as they have very limited exposure to the language, and they do not speak the language at home and even at school. The only possible limited exposure they have is the use of English when watching English TV programs or listening to English songs, if at all. Thus, English is a foreign language to the learners in rural schools. These learners do not see the importance of mastering the language and in general do not have the motivation to learn the language, and English is a very difficult subject for them to learn. With these challenges and restrictions among the learners, English teachers are faced with the challenge of implementing and using the CLT approach in their classes, whereby the techniques would usually include group discussions and role plays that would force learners to use the language and assume that they already have the knowledge of the language. In short, the challenges in implementing the CLT approach when teaching English at school lie in the learners and teachers. As for the learners, it is their limitation in their English proficiency and their role of motivation in learning the language. As for the teachers, the challenges reported lie in their perceptions and beliefs. Most teachers believe that CLT will not produce proficient English speakers and that CLT would only produce learners who can speak the language with confidence, but without the grammatical knowledge (Hird, 1995; Holliday, 1997; Ellis, 1996; Wu & Fang, 2002; Rao, 1996; Sakui, 2004; Lewis & McCook, 2002; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004; Rao, 2002; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001, Barkhuizen, 1998; Hu, 2002; Lo, 2001; Shamim, 1996). This study focuses on CLT because it is an offshoot of learner-centred educational methods and is useful for educational reform in Malaysia. CLT promotes communicative competence, which provides students with competitive advantages in the global marketplace.

1.4 Objectives of the study

During the current study, the researcher attempted to investigate Malaysian secondary school students' and teachers' perceptions, challenges and instructional practices regarding the CLT implementation, and to see the relationship of their perceptions and instructional practices. Thus, in this study, the researcher had the following objectives.

1. To investigate Malaysian secondary school teachers' perceptions regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).
2. To investigate English language learners' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).
3. To compare CLT teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the CLT principles. both
4. To investigate CLT teachers' instructional practices in Malaysian secondary schools.
5. To identify the differences between Malaysian secondary school teachers' perceptions and their instructional practices on CLT in Malaysian secondary schools.

1.5 Research Questions

The following questions are generated from the objectives of this study, and hopefully answered during the research procedure.

1. What are English language teachers' perceptions regarding the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation in Malaysian secondary schools?
2. What are English language learners' perceptions regarding the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation in Malaysian secondary schools?

3. Are there any significant differences between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?
4. What are English language teachers' instructional practices in the classrooms?
5. Are the teachers' instructional practices consistent with their perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?

The first and second research questions aimed to investigate students' as well as teachers' perceptions and challenges regarding the CLT approach. The third research question was an attempt to portray the differences between teachers' and students' perceptions about CLT, if there are any. The fourth research question aimed to understand teachers' current instructional practices of the CLT approach, and thus provides information about teachers' future professional developments. Finally, the last research question was an attempt to investigate the differences between teachers' perceptions of CLT and their instructional practices. It must be noted that two hypotheses were developed to address research questions 3 and 5 as shown below.

1.6 Research Hypotheses

1. There is not a significant difference between teachers' and students' perceptions regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation in Malaysian Secondary schools.
2. There is not a significant difference between Malaysian teachers' instructional practices of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their perceptions regarding CLT.

1.7 Significance of the Study

Teachers' and students' perceptions toward the CLT are important for transferring from pre-CLT to the CLT approach in English classes. Based on the related literature, teachers' perceptions can affect their classroom instruction to a high extent (Barkhuizen, 1998; Cohen & Teller, 1994). In this study, the researcher attempted to understand Malaysian teachers' and students' perceptions regarding the CLT and the factors which affected their instructional practices. The researcher attempted to contribute to the aspect of language teaching and learning in Malaysia, which was rarely studied in this country to identify the required condition of effective language instruction from both students' and teachers' viewpoint.

This study is significant for the following reasons. First, this study aimed to understand the relationship between English language instructors' and students' perceptions and challenges of CLT, and their instructional practices which is a unique contribution to the particular ESL context of Malaysia. Another significance of this study is to reveal the challenges that the teachers encountered when implementing or trying to implement CLT in Malaysia. This information is helpful for several people namely; 1. The curriculum developers of general English programs in the Ministry of Education, 2. Administrative executives in the Ministry of Education, and 3. The professional organizations that focus their interest on English language teaching of Malaysia. Additionally, Malaysian students and teachers as the main role makers in applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) could express their perceptions and challenges they faced and their roles in applying CLT.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

In this study, CLT was modified using social constructivism to examine the culture of Malaysia. Cognitive and social constructivism share a similar epistemology but they differ in how important they see the role of the individual and social interactions in the construction of knowledge (Russell, 1993). Several social constructivists including Vygotsky (1978), Bruffee (1986), and Wertsch (1991) see

social interaction as the primary factor behind the cognitive development of individuals who internalize concepts encountered during social interactions. Piaget stated that social interaction is "the imposition of adult functions on biologically determined stages of cognitive development" (Russell, 1993, p. 189). According to Piaget's view, lessons should be designed to give students the assistance they need according to their stage of development. The students' stage of development will determine how they assimilate new information. Piaget's views are different from those of the social constructivists who see learning as a constant reinterpretation of experiences rather than occurring in stages. Vygotsky defined the learning experience as the continuous reweaving of "the web of meaning", whereas Dewey defined it as the constant "reconstruction of experience." that humans use to create new social practices that meet their needs and that allow them to adapt and transform their environment (Russell, 1993, p. 179).

Social constructivists and Piaget also differ in their views regarding the relationship between social interactions and self-regulation. Self-regulation occurs when an individual uses language to solve problems and finds their authentic voice. Social constructivists such as Vygotsky (1978) claimed that learning in isolation will not result in cognitive development. Instead, they assert that social interactions with other individuals is required for learning and cognitive development and the construction of knowledge. Vygotsky went on to state that learning in the Zone of Potential Learning (ZPD) is the distance between the individual's stage of development determined by independent problem solving and the stage of development that could be potentially reached by the individual under the supervision of adults or by collaborating with their peers. Vygotsky believed that human cognitive development was the result of interactions with others and the cultural environment that occurred within the ZPD. Currently, language students and teachers are encouraged to improve their cognitive development by interacting with others who are more proficient. In this way, the ZPD of less capable students grows to include new information and ways of thinking. The ZPD of more proficient students improves as they uncover missing information, acquire new insights and different understandings.

It seems like the adaption of western teaching methods is inevitable in Malaysian secondary schools. It is not enough to slavishly follow western teaching methods, the theories and assumptions underlying the western education system must also be understood if Malaysia is to effectively adapt these practices. Johnson and Golombek argue that the education of teachers is done in three ways, internalization and transformation, Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), and mediational. Internalization and transformation is the process in which an individual engages in external and internal activities in such a way that they build on and complement each other. Johnson and Golombek state that “Internalization involves a process in which a person’s activity is initially mediated by other people or cultural artefacts but later comes to be controlled by the person as he or she appropriates resources to regulate his or her own activities” (p. 731). Vygotsky defines ZPD as a process of social mediation that occurs due to collective collaboration mediated by cultural elements. ZPD occurs at three levels, object-regulation (e.g. lesson plan), other-regulation (e.g. talking with other teachers), and self-regulation (e.g. keeping personal teaching diaries) (Johnson and Golombek, 2003). ZPD allows teachers to collaborate, access external resources, and illiterate their own methods.

Constructivism is based on the idea that humans rely on sensations and cognition to create and understand their world and meaning is generated by each individual. Constructivist theories consist of a practical learning theory and an epistemology to address how individuals learn as well as determine what they learn. Learning theories and epistemologies can be categorized according to where they fall on an orthogonal continua. Constructivist educational theories occupy one quadrant as show in Figure 1 (Hein, 1994, 1998).

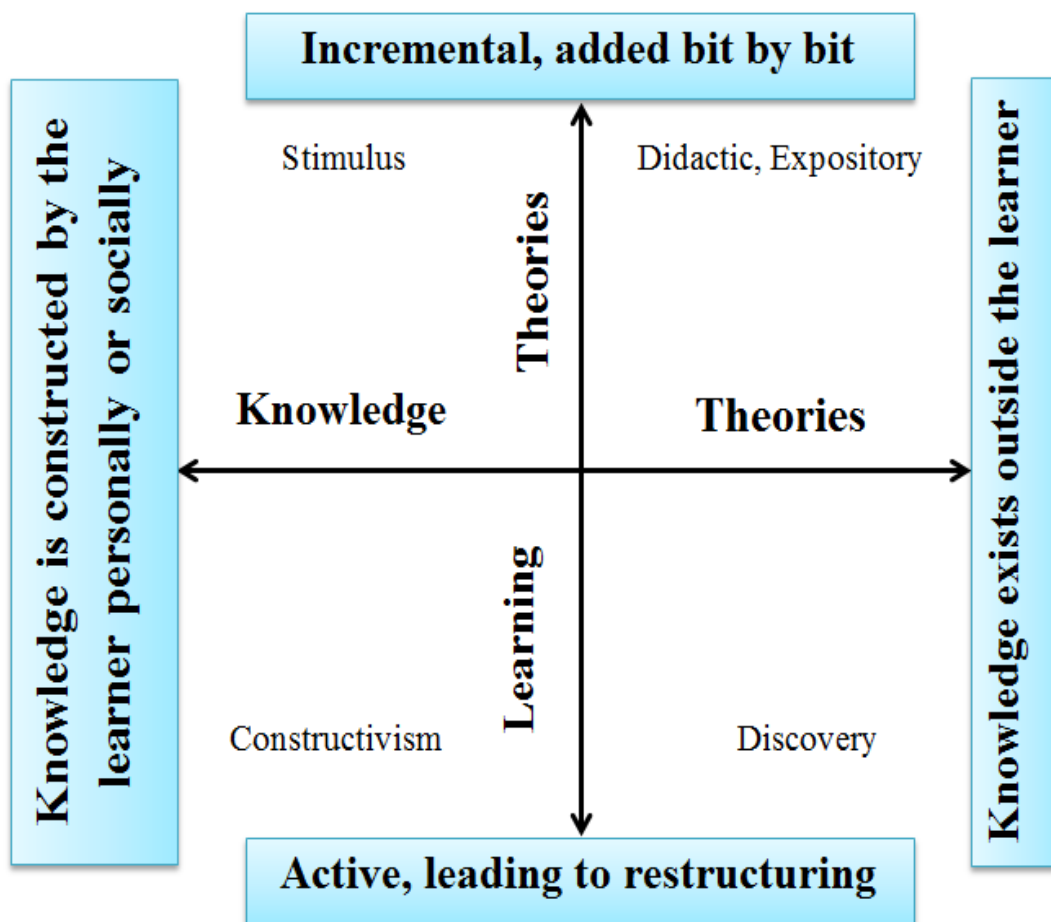


Figure 1.1 Social constructivism factors

1.8.1 Active Learning

Several studies conducted last century asserted that humans construct knowledge and that the human brain is actively engaged when it participates in a learning activity. The field of developmental psychology demonstrated that humans are not born with an innate ability to interpret their world. Meaning is gathered gradually as the individual gains experience with their world. The immature interpretation of the physical world was clearly illustrated by Piaget (1929) when he interviewed young children. Educators who work with young children also report that their young students interpret their world in highly idiosyncratic ways based on their limited experiences (Rosebery & Warren, 1998). The charming stories retold by parents and grandparents are frequently examples of how young children see their world. These stories are almost universal. The universality of how humans construct

meaning is further supported by the experiences of individuals denied the opportunity to fully interact with their world. For example, Oliver Sacks studied individuals who had been blind for most of their lives and then had their sight restored. He found that these individuals faced emotional, intellectual, and sensory challenges as they endeavoured to make sense of their new, visual reality. The confusion experienced by these individual is difficult for a fully sighted person to imagine as we have a life time of experience to fall back on as we interpret our reality. According to Sacks, “We are not given this world: we make our world through incessant experience, categorization, memory, and reconnection” (Sacks, 1995, 114). The claims made by Sacks have been collaborated by cognitive psychologists who claim that by studying how people learn and how the human brain functions they can state that we construct knowledge (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking).

1.8.2 Constructed Knowledge

In Figure 1.1, constructivism is located in the lower right hand quadrant. It differs from traditional, didactic expository approaches and from other popular educational approaches known as discovery approaches. Discovery educational approaches acknowledge that learning is active but it also suggests that the knowledge that is constructed as a result of active learning does not always correctly reflect the physical world. Followers of constructivism argue that it is inevitable that an individual will construct their own meaning of the world around them. They also claim that the purpose of education is to guide the construction of knowledge and meaning by accepting the needs of each individual. Since knowledge is the result of active creation on the part of a learner (Von Glasersfeld, 1990), students must be given the opportunity to experience, measure, observe their environment as well as communicate their knowledge through drawing and performing as well as other means. It is important that their attempts to communicated are validated and evaluated in a way that does not rely on a ridged set of criteria (for implications of these differing criteria for teaching science, see Duckworth *et al.*, 1990). Table 1.1, demonstrates how different theories see the creation of personal meaning.

Table1.1: Meaning-Making and Educational Theory

Status of Meaning-Making	Attitudes Towards Meaning-Making	Educational Theory
Meaning making is an inevitable consequence of human interaction with nature and culture.	Ignore or Suppress	Traditional, Content-centred.
	Tolerate or Accept	Discovery, Active Learning, Learner-Centred
	Encourage or Embrace	Constructivism

1.9 Conceptual framework

In this section, the conceptual framework of Borg (2003) regarding teacher cognition is presented as this directly refers to the teachers' performance and instructional practices. The perceptions of teachers were investigated at length in second language teaching investigations in previous years. According to Freeman (2002), in the language teaching procedure, teachers are considered the main decision makers. Since 1980s, several researchers in the field of second/foreign language teaching worked on the experience of the teachers, and the effects of the content knowledge on the teachers' performances in their language instruction. Borg (2003) conducted a literature review of over 64 experimental studies that were done between 1976 and 2002, and he reported them in the shape of a conceptual framework which is associated with 'teacher cognition'.

In Figure 1.2, the conceptual framework of Borg (2003) which has 5 main elements is shown. The first factor/element refers to the teacher cognition that is associated with the teaching perspective which is not visible and associated with their knowledge, perceptions and their thinking styles (Borg, 2003). Based on Borg's theory (2003) the concept of teacher/student cognition refers to the perception, information, conceptions, metaphors, theories and images of the teachers regarding their lives. The second element refers to the schooling which relates to the previous formal and informal learning experiences of the teachers and students. According to Borg, previous teaching experiences of the teachers form their first

conceptualizations in second language instruction, and it affects their professional teaching/learning career. The third one is professional coursework that relates to the experiences of the teachers in both pre-service and in-service training programs, like their training in undergraduate and postgraduate TESL courses, and in-service training courses that take place during the academic year. According to Borg (2003) the professional course works and training can affect teachers' cognition, and if they do not participate in those classes, their teaching cognition would not be changed significantly. The fourth element refers to the contextual factors associated with the context and condition of the classroom and society of the teacher/student. Those contextual factors can affect perception and instructional practices of the teachers/students to understand the principles that are considered compatible with their teaching perceptions (Borg, 2003). The fifth element is classroom practice that relates to the teaching experiences of the teachers that affect their classroom practices. According to Borg (2003) classroom practice can be affected by perceptions of the teachers and related contextual elements which happen to the person unconsciously, and has conscious reflections.

In the current study, the researcher attempted to investigate both teachers' and students' perceptions regarding CLT and challenges in its implementation. Unlike several studies that have been conducted in many countries before that merely investigated teachers' perceptions (e.g. Bums, 1990; Hird, 1995; Kamaradivelu, 1993; Karavas-Doukas, 1993 & 1996; Kuo, 1995; Lamb, 1995; Lersg, 1997; Li, 1998; Ng & Tang, 1997; Nunan, 1987; Thornbury, 1998; Wang, 2002), and they ignored students' perceptions, the researcher attempted to investigate both groups perceptions and challenges. Consequently, the researcher adapted the Borg (2001) framework for the students as well as teachers. To this aim two factors of this framework which merely refers to the teachers namely professional coursework and teaching experiences that refer to the teachers have been dropped for the students and only two factors of schooling and contextual factors have been considered for the students as significant factors that can affect their perceptions regarding CLT.

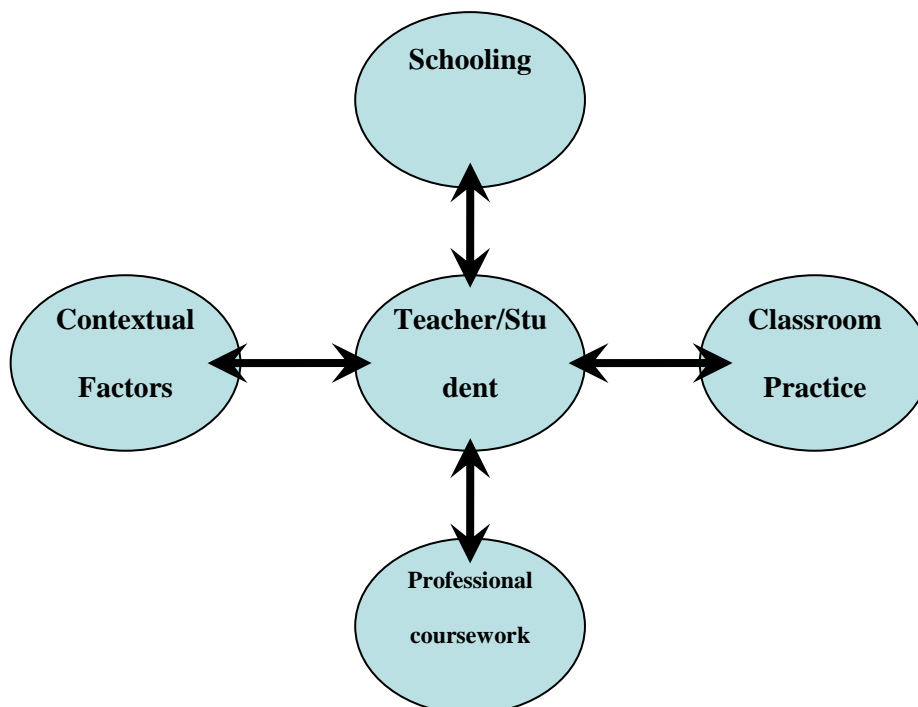


Figure 1.2 Conceptual frame work

1.10 Scope of the study

In this study the researcher attempted to investigate students' and the instructors' perceptions, challenges and teachers' instructional practices of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Malaysian secondary schools. To this aim, the researcher investigated seven schools in Johor Bahru district, Malaysia to understand students' and teachers' perceptions, challenges, and instructional practices of the CLT.

1.11 Overview of the Study

There are five chapters in the current dissertation. Chapter one includes background of the study, problem statement, objectives of the study, research questions, significance of the study, conceptual framework and scope of the study. Chapter Two first introduces the relationship between contextual factors and teachers' instructional practices, and then discusses reflective practices in teacher

education, teachers' perceptions and their knowledge, history of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the 20th century and finally teachers' perceptions and implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) with the aim of providing the conceptual framework of the study. Chapter Three explains the rationale for the research methodology, and describes the profile of research participants, methods of data collection and data analysis, and overview of the study. Chapter four presents the findings based on five objectives of the study, as well as discussion of the findings. Chapter Five highlights the summary of the findings, implications of the study, recommendations for the future studies, and limitations of the study.

1.12 Operational definition of terms

1.12.1 Teachers' perception

Perception is considered an important factor which can influence human behavior. It is very difficult to identify perceptions, and scientists have several perspectives regarding perception. For example, Abelson (1979) was of the idea that perception relates to the performance of knowledge in several people but for the same reason. Wenden (1998) asserted that perceptions in learning relates to the metacognitive awareness of the students.

1.12.2 Knowledge of the Teacher

It is very hard to make a distinction between knowledge and perception. Shulman (1986) declared that teacher's knowledge usually has three dimensions namely; subject-matter of the content knowledge (main ideas and principles related to the case), pedagogical content knowledge (subject-related perceptions of teaching), and curriculum knowledge (knowledge of the program dimensions). Additionally, "applied knowledge" (Elbaz, 1981; Fenstermacher, 1994; Meijer, Verloop, & Beijaard, 2001) or "personal practical knowledge" (Clandinin & Connelly, 1987; Beattie, 1995; Golombek, 1998) are considered other dimensions.

1.12.3 Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a language teaching approach that has two main goals, namely (a) considering the communicative competence the main goal of language teaching and learning (b) improving four main language skills by improving the communications and communicative competence in the class (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

1.12.4 ESL

The term ESL stands for English as a Second Language. In the English-speaking countries, like the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and the U.S., English is taught as a second language for the learners with other language backgrounds.

1.12.5 Instructional practice

Instructional practices are considered as of the positively affecting factors in the classroom. Organizing the student-oriented practices are anticipated to aid preserve student discipline, student care and cooperation. Consequently, these two variables are anticipated to have positive influences on the classroom disciplinary context. Enhanced events might not need similar kinds of disciplinary situation to be effectively completed by students. Instructional activities usually need self-reliance, structure, time administration as well as stamina, but a calm and organized classroom context might be less significant than for reception-oriented, teacher-centred teaching. Instructional activities principally includes listening to the instructor and answering to his/her questions. Additionally, group work and the necessity for discussion and advice might even cause a certain level of disruption once students are asked to do enhanced activities. Consequently, this variable was not anticipated to be related with the disciplinary features of classroom context. Again multiple regressions at the individual teacher/classroom level were used (Liao, 2004; Karim, 2004; Yu, 2001).

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