Teachers’ Conceptions of the CLT Approach in English Language Education

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Abstract

The communicative language teaching (CLT) approach and its fundamental principles, including learning to communicate through interaction and engagement, are generally upheld by theories in the area of second language acquisition even though by and large implementing CLT is to some degree difficult and ineffective in many ESL (English as a second language) and EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts. This action research is undertaken to assist a small group of Thai EFL school teachers in developing and implementing context-sensitive CLT through a teacher training program designed for their own professional development as secondary school teachers. Two methods are employed, an observation and a task evaluation. It is found that from the teachers’ practice using CLT in teaching, their classes are hardly communicative in nature as communication is constrained and rather unilateral, mostly directed by the teachers. Some recommendations are made to the teachers under study based on the methods used, addressing fluency rather than accuracy if students’ communicative competence is the goal.

Keywords: Communicative language teaching (CLT), contexts, EFL teachers

1. Introduction

The communicative approach (CA), in common with CLT and task-based language teaching (TBLT), has been corroborated by a number of ELT (English language teaching) practitioners in the past few decades. Interestingly, substantial research conducted in various EFL settings worldwide points to the difficulties of implementing CLT. In Thailand, this has also been the case in secondary schools where attempts to undertake CLT have not proven satisfactory.

The CA in truth emerged as a combination of two strands of thought. The first dealt with the rules of use and the second indicated that if the activities used by the language teacher were directed at involving the learners in solving communication difficulties in the target language, then language learning occurred per se (Allwright, 1979). As a result, instead of teaching grammar structures through a process between audiolingualism and PPP (presentation, practice, and production), the teacher could teach various language functions, spend time having the learners discuss and share ideas and do role-plays. In the first place, the communicative approach indeed brought about a phenomenon of role-plays and information gap activities, which attempted to provoke actual necessary communication and interaction. It would appear that for some of the students who preferred grammar learning, this could mean a conflict they had to face. Though grammar teaching