



Why Communicative Language Teaching Has Yet to Work in Korea: Exploring Teachers' Viewpoints

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To ascertain the existing challenges of employing communicative language teaching (CLT) in English classrooms in Korea, 52 English teachers in middle or high schools in Seoul were asked to complete a survey, two of whom were also interviewed to elicit more specific comments. The results of the survey and the interviews showed that CLT is still difficult to adopt in Korea. Although teachers were aware of the importance of implementing CLT to facilitate improving students' communicative competence, they depended on giving lectures and explanations primarily based on textbooks and failed to use a variety of activities that CLT features. Under the current educational system in Korea—which places heavy emphasis on helping students get into the universities of their choice—both teachers and students do not feel it necessary to take advantage of CLT in teaching and learning English. This unfortunate fact invariably leads to the teacher's preference for traditional L2 teaching methods and to many Korean students' inability to communicate effectively in English.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, Korean teachers' perception, EFL contexts, survey and in-depth interview

Introduction

In this digital age, people share everything they experience with their friends and family via the Internet with their mobile devices whenever and wherever they want. In terms of communication on the Internet, it is safe to say that English is the lingua franca to communicate with among users from all parts of the world, a fact which has contributed to the importance of learning and using English as an International Language or as a Global Language (Fang, 2011; Hiep, 2006; Huang, 2009; McKay, 2004). As a result, helping students acquire communicative competence in English is of growing importance in the classroom, and an urgent need arose for the Korean government to offer enhanced language programs for public schools in order to help students adapt to a rather globalized environment.

Since the advent of the new millennium, the Korean government has introduced several language programs—such as TaLK (Teach and Learn in Korea), EPIK (English Program in Korea), and TEE (Teaching English in English)—in an effort to promote the development of English language competence for Korean students and to help implement communicative language teaching (CLT). These efforts to reform English teaching methodologies in Korea, however, were largely ineffective. For example, the participants of the TaLK program stated that they needed a more standardized program and more

appropriate textbooks in order for their teaching to be more effective (Jeon, 2011). The participants also pointed out that they needed better preparation for their classes because they lacked cultural knowledge of Korea and sufficient teaching skills.

CLT refers to an approach to language instruction that accentuates the cultivation of communicative competence in language learning (Celce-Murcia, Brinton, & Snow, 2014). Indeed, Richards and Rodgers (2014, p. 87) argue that “the goal of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as ‘communicative competence.’” Communicative competence can be developed through meaningful language interaction; thus, it is important for teachers to encourage students to actively involve themselves in meaning negotiation and in collaborative exchanges of ideas. CLT can foster an environment conducive to achieving this goal because it requires the teacher to have less teacher-oriented classroom management skills (Brumfit, 1984) and to play the role of a mere facilitator, i.e. someone who “facilitate[s] the communicative process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts” (Breen & Candlin, 1980, p. 99). Assuming the responsibility of creating an atmosphere that allows students to feel secure and unthreatened, the teacher needs to adopt a “low profile” and encourage students to work on tasks on their own by “avoiding involvement in linguistics discussions” and “ask[ing] ‘attention-directing’ questions rather than supplying relevant information” (Allwright, 1977, p. 8).

This learner-centered role of teacher in CLT, however, can be seen unacceptable to both the teacher and the students in some cultures. In Bangladesh, according to Chowdhury (2003, p. 284), students consider the teacher an authority figure who simply “give[s] orders to students, who then comply,” and they feel more comfortable with this traditional way of learning. When CLT is used in class, some of them even complain that the teacher is not doing his or her job. This situation is certainly not foreign to Korea, where many teachers do not feel comfortable playing the role of a facilitator and students are not accustomed to performing tasks that require them to communicate with each other.

More importantly, the university entrance exam in Korea, or the Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT), does not allow teachers to use CLT in their classrooms because the contents of the test do not evaluate communicative competence but assess “only listening and reading comprehension skills” (Jeon & Lee, 2017, p. 51). As McNamara and Roever (2006) aptly point out, there clearly exists a disagreement between CLT goals and those of standardized tests because the latter do not necessarily encompass communicative features, as is the case with the KSAT. Thus, it is not surprising that English teachers in Korea have been reported to find CLT too difficult to adopt in their classes (Li, 1998).

A lot has changed in Korea since Li’s (1998) study, which was published over 20 years ago. There are many younger teachers with a proficiency high enough to conduct their classes in English; teachers have easier access to authentic materials in English that were not available to them 20 years ago; students can come into contact with English much more easily and frequently than ever before via the Internet using their smartphones. Given these changes, it is reasonable to expect that English teachers in Korea should now have an easier time implementing CLT in their classes. In order to ascertain whether this is indeed the case, this study will address the following three research questions by investigating the perception of middle and high school teachers toward using CLT in their classes:

1. What is the current status of CLT in English classes in Korea?
2. What are the obstacles to implementing CLT in an EFL context like Korea?
3. What are the suggestions for overcoming the obstacles of CLT in Korea?

Previous Studies on Adopting CLT in EFL Contexts

A number of previous research studies have identified a variety of factors that discourage adopting CLT in EFL contexts. Anderson (1993), for example, cited the following as obstacles of implementing CLT in China: a lack of well-trained teachers, a shortage of suitable texts and materials, students’ unfamiliarity

with CLT approaches, and difficulties in evaluating students. Similarly, Humphries and Burns (2015) found the following to be obstacles to using CLT in Japan: class sizes, administrative and extracurricular duties for teachers, government policies, mandated materials, and teachers' expectations that a form of teacher-led grammar translation will help their students succeed.

Students' attitudes also proved problematic for adopting CLT in EFL contexts. Shamin (1996), for instance, found learners' resistance as a major obstacle to her attempt to adopt CLT in her English class in Pakistan. In the same vein, the Japanese students that Sano, Takahashi, and Yoneyama (1984) surveyed did not feel the need to speak English, a fact which made the objective of gaining communicative competence through CLT irrelevant to them. In a more recent study, King (2013) pointed out that Japanese students usually find class interaction uncomfortable and do not like to participate in speaking activities. These students' unwillingness to learn English might have stemmed from the fact that they were not exposed to an environment in which English was used. Indeed, Gonzalez (1985) reported that students living in Philippine rural areas found learning English to be irrelevant to their lives because they rarely used English.

All these obstacles contribute to teachers' negative perception of adopting CLT in EFL contexts. Chau and Chung's (1987) study, which analyzed Hong Kong educators' attitudes on using CLT, revealed that most teachers felt that it took too much time to prepare adequately to use CLT in their classrooms. Teachers in China also experienced a difficult time implementing CLT because of large class sizes, traditional teaching methods, and their low proficiency in spoken English and in sociolinguistic competence (Burnaby & Sun, 1989). Likewise, Japanese teachers cited large class sizes, insufficient class hours, and extracurricular duties as the main culprit for not allowing them to use CLT in their classrooms (Nishino, 2008).

In a study that explored South Korean teachers' perception of implementing CLT in English classrooms, Li (1998, pp. 685-695) found that the teachers who had employed CLT in their classes experienced various difficulties in adopting the approach and that the sources of difficulties of using CLT could be categorized as those caused (1) by the teacher, (2) by the students, (3) by the educational system, and (4) by CLT itself. Category (1) was mainly related to the teachers' deficiency in spoken English and in strategic or sociolinguistic competence. The teachers were afraid of losing face in front of their students as a result of failing to provide students with prompt answers due to lack of knowledge or expertise when asked unexpected questions. As the major causes of difficulties created by the students, category (2) cited several factors including students' low English proficiency, resistance to class participation, and lack of motivation for developing communicative competence. Category (3) was associated with more systematic problems such as large classes, grammar-based tests, and inadequate funding. Lastly, category (4) addressed two primary concerns over CLT itself: CLT's insufficient account of EFL teaching and the absence of effective and efficient evaluation tools. It has been over 20 years since the publication of Li's (1998) study; thus, it is unclear whether the findings reported in this study are still relevant in Korea, a question that can only be answered by conducting a similar study that reflects the current status of CLT in English classes in Korea.

Methodology

Participants

Data for the current study were collected from a questionnaire survey and follow-up in-depth interviews. Participants in the written questionnaire survey consisted of 52 English teachers from middle and high schools in Seoul. In April 2017, they were asked to fill out a questionnaire (see Appendix). Of the 52 respondents of the survey, two teachers were selected to elaborate on their opinions about CLT in in-depth interviews.

The survey participants were recruited by "random sampling," whose selection was based primarily on

probability, thus reducing the effects of any subjective factors (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 97). In order to select the schools at which questionnaires were to be distributed, we assigned numbers to middle and high schools in Seoul and chose four schools by using a smartphone application that generates numbers randomly. Approximately 40 questionnaires were distributed, and 22 were collected.

We also used the following two most famous teachers' online communities in Korea to recruit more participants: <http://cafe.daum.net/joyce95> and <http://cafe.naver.com/etkatok>. We posted a notice for recruiting teacher participants in Seoul and received emails from those who wanted to participate in the survey. We distributed about 40 questionnaires to those applicants and received 30 responses from them. All in all, 52 questionnaires were collected: 32 from middle school teachers and 20 from high school teachers (22 from offline survey and 30 from online survey).

The respondents varied between 26 and 61 years in age, most of whom were in their 30s. Their experience as English teachers ranged from one to 33 years with an average of over 12 years. The two interviewees were selected by "typical sampling" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 128), i.e. we chose two teachers, one teacher in her late 40s from middle school and the other in her early 30s from high school, who shared a typical experience with reference to the research focus.

Data Collection

The survey questionnaire was constructed partly with five-point Likert scale statements to help answer the three research questions and also with open-ended questions to allow teachers to express more specific opinions. In addition, the participants were asked to mark given options that encouraged them to specify their teaching methods and identify the problems that they faced when using CLT in their classrooms. As for the interviews, questions for each interviewee were prepared in advance for "structured interviews" (Dörnyei, 2007, p. 135), which help interviewees focus on the target topic field and ultimately allow for a comparison of the responses given by different interviewees. Interview questions such as the following allowed interviewees to expand on their opinions about using CLT in their classes: "What do you think are the challenges of adopting CLT in the classroom?" and "What do you think is the effect of the current educational system on adopting CLT in Korea?"

Results and Discussion

The Current Status of CLT in English Classes in Korea

Korean middle and high school teachers all seemed to be well aware of the importance of employing CLT in class, even though adopting the approach presented various challenges. They also understood the drawbacks of CLT and suggested how to improve them. In reality, however, most teachers depended on giving lectures and explanations merely based on textbooks, failing to use a variety of communicative activities that CLT calls for. Table 1 below shows the responses to the inquiry of the techniques and activities they employ in class.

TABLE 1
Techniques and Activities Used by Teachers (Questions 6 and 7 in the Appendix)

Ranking 1st–10th	Categories of Techniques and Activities	Average Points out of 5
1st	Textbooks – text only	3.673
2nd	Textbooks – CD rom	3.654
3rd	Explaining and lecturing	3.615
4th	Playing games	3.250
5th	Watching videos	3.058
6th	Workbook activities	2.788
7th	Brainstorming	2.769
8th	Role-playing	2.731
9th	Student presentation	2.615
10th	Meaning negotiation	2.596

As Table 1 shows, the top three techniques and activities that teachers most frequently use in class were all related to lecturing with textbooks. This finding is in line with the finding that the class material most commonly used by the teachers is textbooks, as shown in Table 2. The respondents said that the activities and materials were selected on the basis of how easily they could be used in class and how appropriately they were matched with the school curriculum.

TABLE 2
Frequently Used Materials for Class (Questions 8 and 9 in the Appendix)

Ranking 1st–10th	Categories of Class Materials	Average Points out of 5
1st	Textbooks	4.385
2nd	YouTube videos	3.462
3rd	Games	3.423
4th	Online text materials	3.365
5th	My own materials	3.058
6th	Movies or sitcoms	3.038
7th	EBS workbooks	2.135
8th	Other workbooks	1.904
9th	Poems, novels, or essays	1.769
10th	TOEIC, TOEFL, or TEPS	1.327

The respondents who most frequently used the top three techniques and activities in Table 1 argued that these were more efficient at delivering knowledge to students in class than the other techniques or activities commonly associated with CLT, such as brainstorming, role-playing, and student presentation. Quite a few respondents, however, answered that they also used YouTube videos and games to pique students' interest and get them involved in class activities.

In fact, the majority of the teachers did emphasize the need to get students intrigued to promote better student participation in class activities, yet they still hold the belief that the traditional method of teaching is more efficient at delivering knowledge to students. This seemingly contradictory view of how English should be taught held by Korean teachers is also shared by high school students in Korea as they consider excessive anything more than one communicative task in class despite the fact that they acknowledge the effectiveness of communicative tasks in helping them improve their English skills (Ko & Yoo, 2016).

This phenomenon of valuing efficiency over efficacy seems to have stemmed from the fact that most teachers in Korea, especially in high school, are overwhelmed by ambitious school curricula and extra curricula activities. However, if CLT is going to succeed, as McDonough and Chaikitmongkol (2007) argue, it is imperative that teachers not be burdened by an overly ambitious syllabus:

If they [teachers] feel pressure to follow a syllabus strictly, then they may not take opportunities to focus on the language forms that arise incidentally during each lesson [in task-based courses]. In the context reported on in this study, the revised course provided the teachers with time to respond to their learners' needs (through feedback, additional explanation, or further practice) by reducing the amount of

material to be covered in each lesson (p. 124).

Obstacles to Implementing CLT in EFL Contexts

As Table 3 shows, the top three problems that the respondents chose as obstacles to implementing CLT in EFL contexts are exam-oriented learning and teaching norms, a shortage of exposure to English, and traditional grammar-based instruction. All these obstacles originate from external factors that teachers cannot control. It would be misleading, if not naïve, to argue that teachers have the power to change how instruction is conducted in their classrooms because in many EFL contexts what gets taught in the classroom is mostly dictated by students' ultimate goal: getting into a good university by doing well on the national university entrance exam.

TABLE 3
Obstacles to Implementing CLT in EFL Contexts (Question 10 in the Appendix)

Ranking	Categories of Obstacles	Responses
1st	Exam-oriented learning and teaching norms	43
2nd	Definite shortage of exposure to English	29
3rd	Grammar-translation teaching norms	28
4th	No need to use English in everyday routines	19
5th	Students' lack of proficiency in English and no interest in it	16
6th	Absence of interaction in English between peers	12
7th	Lack of time in regular English classes	11
8th	Absence or lack of native English teachers	9
9th	Non-native teachers' lack of proficiency in English	6
10th	Poor sources of class activities and materials	2

When asked to provide specific reasons for the difficulty of using CLT in their own classrooms in question 11-j, many teachers asserted that they ultimately had no choice but to be influenced by the school curriculum, which in turn is dictated by the whole educational system that focuses on producing the right results, i.e. helping students get into the universities of their choice.

Interestingly enough, unlike the finding reported by Burnaby and Sun (1989) and Li (1998) that non-native teachers' lack of proficiency in English hindered the adoption of CLT, only six of the 52 respondents considered the same problem to be an obstacle to implementing CLT in EFL contexts. This is an interesting finding in that it seems to contradict the responses the participants gave to questions 11-d and 11-f. For question 11-d, 85% of the teachers responded that they mostly speak Korean in their classrooms; for question 11-f, which asks if they feel uncomfortable using English in class, 70% of the respondents said yes.

Both these results clearly indicate that most participants in this study feel somewhat uncomfortable when they use English in class, yet only a few of them consider non-native teachers' lack of proficiency in English to be an obstacle to implementing CLT in EFL contexts. One possible interpretation for this seeming contradiction is that many of the participants in this study believe that there are now a sufficient number of younger English teachers with high English proficiency to successfully adopt CLT in EFL contexts, although they themselves may not feel comfortable speaking English.

The fundamental factor that makes it challenging to adopt CLT in Korea is associated with the language barrier, as shown in the comments by both teachers interviewed for this study:

- (1) First, I think it is difficult to adopt CLT in Korean classrooms because the teacher is not a native speaker of English and neither are the students, who are generally not fluent in speaking English and are basically put in a limited environment in terms of using English in EFL contexts. Thus, both the teacher and the students do not want to use English in the classroom. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

As Ms. Lee points out, the fact that both the teacher and the students are non-native English speakers is the major cause of making CLT difficult to adopt in Korea. Moreover, the fact that they all share the same mother tongue makes it even more difficult to use CLT in Korea because the students answer in Korea even if the teacher asks questions in English, as pointed out by Ms. Jung:

- (2) When the teacher asks questions in English, the students answer them in Korean. Both the teacher and the students are not fluent English speakers, so it is difficult to create a communicative classroom, where the teacher and students use English back and forth in unrehearsed contexts. The lack of fluency is the key barrier to adopting CLT. The levels of students' speaking ability are usually not high enough to use only English in class. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

In fact, many students in Korea feel uncomfortable reading passages out loud, let alone engage in speaking activities, a fact which seems to stem from their lack of confidence in speaking English:

- (3) In general, the students are shy about talking in English. They feel really awkward even when they are asked to read passages from the textbook out loud. ... I think that all arises from the fact that Korean students are L2 speakers with somewhat low confidence in their ability in English. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

Most middle schools in Korea have separate English classrooms that the students can use exclusively for English classes, but even in those classrooms, students mostly do not sit for group discussions with the desks rearranged because they are reluctant to participate in speaking activities. Moreover, the gap between students' levels of proficiency is another factor contributing to the difficulties of adopting CLT at school, as is also pointed out Ms. Jung:

- (4) The gap between students in proficiency levels of spoken English should decrease. In other words, there is a large proficiency gap between the graduates from preschools of English or private elementary schools and the rest of the group. If we can narrow the gap by enhancing the programs of public schools, most of the students will benefit from it and get to be well trained for interactions in English at school. Then, eventually, they will no longer be tormented when making utterances in English. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

There exists another problem that bars the teacher from employing CLT in Korea: cultural expectations. In Asian countries, as was also argued by Chowdhury (2003) and Humphries and Burns (2015), teacher-fronted classes are considered the norm. The teacher is supposed to give lectures, and the students in turn are supposed to listen to the lectures while taking notes quietly:

- (5) In CLT classrooms, it gets very noisy and buzzy because the students keep talking to implement group work. Conversely, under a traditional whole-class methodology, the students quietly work in an orderly manner and speak only when told to by the teacher. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

But why does being noisy in the classroom pose problems? The answer to this question again lies in the cultural stereotype of the teacher doing her job by "teaching," not by "facilitating" interaction among students. In (6) below, Ms. Jung shares her fear of being misunderstood by the principal in seemingly noisy and messy situations that the students create from all the discussions and talks while participating in group tasks:

- (6) If the principal or vice principal of the school passes by the corridor at the moment [when students are actively engaged in speaking activities] and looks at the scene from the window, they will hastily conclude that the teacher is not doing his or her job well in the classroom. Thus, the risk

bars the teacher from giving the students group work and adopting the CLT approaches in class. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

Finally, one of the critical factors that discourage the teacher from adopting CLT is the evaluation system, as was also pointed out by Li (1998). CLT is difficult to employ in Korea because the students are not motivated to improve their communicative competence as speaking skills are not usually evaluated:

- (7) The fact that students take paper-based exams in the midterm and final at school makes the students and the teacher stick to the class norms of grammar learning and translating, lecturing and taking notes, and practice for taking multiple-choice tests. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

In high schools, the teachers and the students are much less motivated to adopt CLT in class because they are directly influenced by university entrance exams. When it comes to determining the forms and contents of class, the students want their classes to be tailored to help them achieve their goal of getting into the universities of their choice. Under these circumstances, CLT is more difficult to adopt because it is not directly relevant for helping students do well on university entrance exams:

- (8) There exist realistic factors that make adopting the CLT approaches challenging, especially in high school, where the students are keen to successfully fulfill the needs of university entrance, and want to focus on learning closely related to college entrance exams. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

Assessing students' communicative competences necessarily involves some type of performance-based evaluation. As this kind of evaluation does not render itself well to quantitative tests, however, fair and uncontroversial assessment is difficult to perform. Indeed, performance-based assessments can raise criticism from students and their parents asserting that the tests lack fairness and fail to measure the exact levels of students' communication ability unless the assessment tools are elaborately designed and objectively calibrated. Because of this difficulty in grading, many teachers feel that they have no choice but to give memorization tests as a quasi-form of performance-based evaluation.

- (9) There should be clear-cut and definite grounds for giving scores to be fair in the evaluation. Therefore, the teacher gets to depend on quantitative evaluation methods rather than qualitative assessment models, which results in the simplification of the tests and makes them lack authenticity. In reality, for their performance evaluation, the students are told to memorize a script and make an oral presentation based on their memorization. Strictly speaking, this kind of evaluation does not have to do with assessing the students' real speaking ability, but it is more like checking memorization and fluency of mere pronunciation. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

Overcoming the Obstacles of CLT in Korea

The last two items on the survey questionnaire addressed the teachers' suggestions for overcoming the current obstacles of CLT in Korea and what they consider to be most important for the successful implementation of CLT in Korea. As Table 4 shows below, the majority of the respondents suggested either of the following two for overcoming the current obstacles of CLT in Korea: (1) develop better assessment tools or (2) combine traditional methods of teachers' "explanation" and innovative approaches of students' "discussion."

TABLE 4

Suggestions for Overcoming CLT's Obstacles in Korea (Question 14 in the Appendix)

Ranking	Suggestions	Responses
1st	Develop better assessment tools.	22
2nd	Combine traditional methods of teachers' "explanation" and innovative approaches of students' "discussion."	12
3rd	Design more sophisticated and efficient class activities.	9
4th	Devise a variety of intriguing activities with authentic materials.	7
5th	Develop better strategies to cope with the passive attitudes of students in the classroom.	2

In order to remedy the current shortcomings of performance-based evaluation, better assessment tools need to be developed, and their results should be reflected in school records to help determine whether students will be accepted into the universities of their choice. Important as it is for overcoming the most challenging obstacles to implementing CLT in Korea, however, creating better assessment tools may not be an easy task as a similar effort at the national level once already failed to come to its fruition.

In order to compensate for the fact that the English section of the then (and the current) KSAT was assessing only students' receptive skills of the English language, the Korean government initiated about 15 years ago a nation-wide project for developing a national exam called the National English Ability Test (NEAT) that would assess both the productive and the receptive skills of Korean English learners. In addition to replacing the KAST, the exam was designed to wean Koreans from overseas proficiency tests such as the TOEFL; however, the government unexpectedly decided in 2013 not to administer the exam in order to protect students from "further burden of stress" and to prevent "unwanted need for private education" (Jeon & Lee, 2017, p. 52).

As for instruction in class, new methods tailored to Korean contexts should be created by combining the traditional method of teacher presentation with innovative ways to encourage student participation. In Korea, where exams are a dominant element of determining class activities and materials, teachers should try to combine traditional grammar teaching and meaningful communicative instruction, as Ms. Lee points out below:

- (10) I recommend that the teacher employ both the traditional methodology and the communicative approach in class. To get the students ready to take exams at school, teaching by the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) is absolutely necessary. These days, students work on translation by participating in group work, such as jigsaw activities, which I think is a sophisticated and evolved version of the old GTM. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

In high schools, the university entrance exams do dominate everything from the entire school curriculum to the contents of everyday learning in class. Thus, the importance of balancing meaning-oriented instruction with form-oriented instruction in order to help students prepare for their university entrance exam cannot be overstated. However, somewhat different stories unfold in middle schools, where the exam-free semester system has recently been implemented.

- (11) Under the new exam-free semester system in middle schools, students are free from worries about taking exams and getting good grades while participating in school activities. If the same system applied in high schools, where the teachers were allowed to design classes and materials at their discretion, using CLT in class would be much easier. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

Indeed, if we all lived in a world in which grading students was unnecessary and all the students could get into the universities of their choice without having to take a university entrance examination, teachers in Korea and in similar EFL contexts could have a much easier time adopting CLT in their English classrooms. The reality is, of course, far from that ideal world.

In order to successfully implement CLT in Korea, the majority of the teachers also thought that class size should be reduced and that classes should be grouped according to students' language proficiency.

Most teachers, however, did not think increasing the number of conversation classes taught by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs) would be as helpful. Pros and cons do exist in hiring NESTs. Some NESTs hired through programs such as EPIK (English Program in Korea) were not as qualified as they should have been, but Ms. Lee saw more advantages than disadvantages in co-teaching with NESTs. The mere presence of a NEST in the classroom can encourage students to speak more English, and students can certainly benefit from interacting with a NEST in English. Through interactions with a NEST, the local teachers can also improve their English-speaking ability. At the very least, Ms. Lee maintained, students can improve their listening ability by interacting with a NEST:

- (12) At the very beginning of the co-teaching program, the students could hardly understand what the native English-speaking teacher said. But I saw them improve their listening capability, and soon they had no trouble understanding most of what the foreigner teacher said. Thus, I feel quite sorry for losing the good program with no backup ready yet. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

Another problem lies in the fact that Korean students tend to be passive in the classroom. The teacher should thus take the role of a facilitator, not an authoritative figure, in class who takes initiative to start and maintain meaningful interactions among students, as Ms. Jung points out:

- (13) The teacher can provide necessary stimuli for initiating interaction in the classroom by asking appropriate questions. Teacher's questions can be given either in Korean or in English to help students feel less scared of presenting their opinions in front of other students, and then they will gain easier access to CLT class. (Ms. Jung, April 13, 2017)

In order to foster an environment that encourages more student participation, some schools have evolved into a new version of educational facilities called "innovative schools" that can serve to meet students' varied needs. As Ms. Lee points out, students attending an innovative school can play more active roles in learning rather than passively take notes of what the teacher presents:

- (14) This school I am working for is one of the innovative schools. . . . This current "student-centered" learning environment at school leads the teacher to make better contents for class, and has the students take initiative and seek information by implementing group tasks. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

For the sake of creating a more interactive classroom, teachers can attend various training sessions to increase their proficiency in English and to gain better knowledge of designing communicative language classes. Ms. Lee, for example, mentioned that she had learned several teaching techniques such as CIT (Classroom Interaction Techniques) from a teacher training session:

- (15) For example, I ask a student this question and have the student relay the question to another student by saying something like "Would you ask the same question to Dana?" This helps the students use English in the classroom and gets them involved in conversations. (Ms. Lee, April 17, 2017)

Ms. Lee was also fortunate enough to participate in an overseas program at the University of Hawaii for a month, where she took courses given by prestigious professors at the university. She described her experience there as a turning point in her career as an English teacher and said that it helped her improve her spoken English. She added that by working under tight schedules of microteaching, making presentations, and conducting group tasks, she had come to grasp the current trends of teaching English as a second or foreign language.

Conclusion

This study sought to investigate the current status of CLT in English classrooms in Korea by conducting surveys and interviews with middle and high school teachers in Korea. The overall conclusion of the study confirms the suspicion that CLT is still difficult to adopt in Korea. The teachers who participated in this study were aware of the importance of employing CLT to facilitate improving students' communicative competence; however, they depended on giving lectures and explanations primarily based on textbooks and failed to use a variety of activities that CLT features. Hiep (2007, p. 196) aptly noted that "while teachers in many parts of the world may reject the CLT techniques transferred from the West, it is doubtful that they reject the spirit of CLT," and this indeed is also true of teachers in Korea.

The main culprits that the teachers cited as obstacles to implementing CLT in their classrooms were primarily related to external factors such as the school curriculum and the educational system. Under the current educational system in Korea—which places heavy emphasis on helping students do well on the English section of the KSAT so that they can get into the universities of their choice, not on helping them develop their communicative competence in English—both teachers and students do not feel it necessary to take advantage of CLT in teaching and learning English. This unfortunate fact invariably leads to the teacher's preference for traditional L2 teaching methods and to many Korean students' inability to communicate effectively in English. Thus, it should not come as a surprise that many of the teachers were deeply concerned about the educational system in Korea and believed that improving the current evaluation tools can lead to an environment more conducive to adopting CLT.

Many teachers also pointed out that one fundamental factor making it difficult to adopt CLT in Korea is the language barrier as the students' deficiency in spoken English kept them from using CLT in class. No matter how broad the spectrum of students' language proficiency appears across different levels, teachers should not give up on creating a classroom environment that helps students improve their communicative competence in English. After all, as Littlewood (2011, p. 542) argues, "CLT still serves as a valuable reminder that the aim of teaching is not to learn bits of language but to improve students' ability to communicate."

The Authors

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Appendix

Survey Questionnaire

1. Age _____
 2. Male Female
 3. For how many years have you been teaching English? _____
 4. Are you teaching at a middle school or high school?
 Middle school High school
 5. Which grade(s) are you teaching? _____
 6. How frequently do you use these techniques or activities in your class? (1 = least frequently, 5 = most frequently)
- | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. | Explaining and lecturing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B. | Student presentation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| C. | Brainstorming | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| D. | Playing Games | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E. | Meaning negotiation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| F. | Role-playing | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| G. | Watching videos | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| H. | Workbook activities | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I. | Textbooks – CD rom | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| J. | Textbooks – text only | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
7. Which do you use least frequently and most frequently from #6 and why?

 8. Which materials do you use most frequently in your class? (1 = least frequently, 5 = most frequently)
- | | | | | | | |
|----|--------------------------|---|---|---|---|---|
| A. | Textbooks | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| B. | EBS workbooks | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| C. | Other workbooks | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| D. | TOEIC, TOEFL, or TEPS | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| E. | My own materials | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| F. | Poems, novels, or essays | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| G. | YouTube videos | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| H. | Movies or sitcoms | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| I. | Games | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| J. | Online text materials | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
9. Which do you use least frequently and most frequently from #8 and why?

10. What do you think are the obstacles to using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL contexts? (Multiple responses allowed)

- Poor sources of class activities and materials
- Absence or lack of native English teachers at school
- Lack of time in regular English classes
- Non-native teachers' lack of proficiency in English
- Definite shortage of exposure to English
- Grammar-translation teaching norms
- No need to use English in everyday routines
- Exam-oriented learning and teaching norms
- Absence of interaction in English between peers
- Students' lack of proficiency in English and no interest in it

11. Do you use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in class?

- Yes No

11-a. If yes, how many times do you use CLT techniques in a week?

_____ / _____

11-b. Why is that? _____

11-c. Have you ever tried co-teaching with a native English teacher for CLT classes?

- Yes No

11-d. How often do you use English for CLT classes?

- Mostly, I speak Korean.
- I use classroom English.
- Mostly, I speak English except when lecturing on grammar.
- I use English only.

11-e. Do you feel uncomfortable when you speak English in class?

11-f. Do you feel comfortable answering questions about American or British culture?

11-g. Would you recommend using CLT in an English class?

11-h. Do you think CLT is helpful for improving the English proficiency of your students?

11-i. Do you prepare or make your own CLT materials for your class?

11-j. If you do not use CLT at all, why is that?
