



Revisiting Key Issues in Applying the Communicative Approach in Korea: Follow up after 26 Years of Implementation

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While CLT has continued to be one of the most widely applied approach in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) worldwide, there has been numerous studies that have pointed out various obstacles in applying CLT in the East Asian context. Jeon (1997) identified key issues in implementing CLT in the Korean context and followed up on the same issues in Jeon (2009) to examine whether there had been any changes after 12 years of implementation. In particular, three research questions were considered: 1) What are the key issues in applying the communicative approach in Korea? 2) Is there an order of priority in the importance of these issues? and 3) Are there any changes in the importance of these issues after 12 years of implementation? The results showed that while some new issues had come up, the top key issues had remained the same. This was a surprising finding since there had not been any major changes in the top key issues 12 years after the first study and pointed out the persistent need to seek out obstacles over the years. As there had been a global upheaval in the educational context due to COVID-19, major changes in English education was expected. Accordingly, this study is another follow up study that focused on revisiting key issues regarding the implementation of CLT in the Korean EFL context. In order to identify the key issues, a three-round Delphi technique was used. A total of 36 teachers participated in identifying the key issues, ranking the issues and revisiting the ranked issues to see if there needs to be any adjustments. The results showed that, after 26 years of implementation, some of the key issues had been modified and have either increased or decreased their importance. While there were some issues that have newly emerged, the issues that had stayed in the top ranking have remained the same. This calls for an urgent need to address such issues as the curriculum continues to stress the importance of CLT in Korea. Without ameliorating the hindering factors, proper implementation of CLT will be challenging for English teachers in Korea.

Keywords: communicative approach, Delphi, communicative language teaching (CLT), key issues

Introduction

As a foreign language teaching approach, the concept behind Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was to help students use language for successful communication since learning the language alone does not guarantee appropriate usage (Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). When implemented in East Asian Countries for teaching English as a foreign language, however, there had been numerous constraints such as conceptual (Beaumont & Chang, 2011; Guilloteaux, 2004; Li, 2001), classroom-level (Hiep, 2007), societal-institutional level (Butler, 2011), and internal factors such as teachers' beliefs and



poor understanding of CLT (Humphries & Burns, 2015). As for the case in Korea, CLT was implemented in the early 90's and the national curriculum has been emphasizing learner-centered approach, collaborative and task-based learning since its application (MEST, 2008). As other East Asian Countries, research findings have suggested that similar constraints have also hindered successful implementation of CLT in Korea (Jin & Yoo, 2019). In particular, since its implementation, English teachers in Korea have pointed out how test-oriented curriculum and class-size as main issues that need to be dealt with for over 20 years (Jeon, 1997, 2009). Accordingly, there is a need to narrow the gap between the concepts proposed by the curriculum and the actual practices in the classroom. In order to illuminate the experiences of English teachers in Korea and consider what has or has not changed after 26 years of CLT implementation, the following research questions were considered:

- 1) What are the key issues in applying the communicative approach in Korean context?
- 2) Is there an order of priority in the importance of these issues?
- 3) Are there any changes in the importance of these issues after 26 years of implementation?

While the issues that are identified in this study are locally restricted to the Korean context, the related discussions are expected to provide essential information to other East Asian countries where similar obstacles are being reported.

Literature Review

CLT in Teaching English as a Foreign Language: General Concepts

Rooted in the concept of “communicative competence” (Hymes, 1972), the aim of CLT is to help students use language for successful communication (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Widdowson, 1983) as merely learning the language does not guarantee appropriate usage (Richards, 2006). It emphasizes fluency but does not exclude accuracy by judging it not “in the abstract but in context” (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, p. 92). In the language classroom, the CLT approach focuses on helping students develop their “knowledge of (and ability for use of) rules of language use in context (Canale & Swain 1980, p.16). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001) the goals of CLT are to “(a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills” (p. 155). Particularly for students in EFL settings, it aims to enhance learner’s abilities to use English in real settings (Littlewood, 2007). Contrast to the traditional way of teacher-centered lessons, teacher-as-facilitator (Richards and Rodgers, 1986; Richards, 2006) and “learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 69.) are essential components of CLT.

In a broader view, Littlewood (2011) divides CLT framework into two dimensions: analytic and experiential. As shown in Figure 1, both dimensions complement each other since the relating forms to meaning is emphasized in the analytic dimension while using language for communication is highlighted in the experiential dimension.

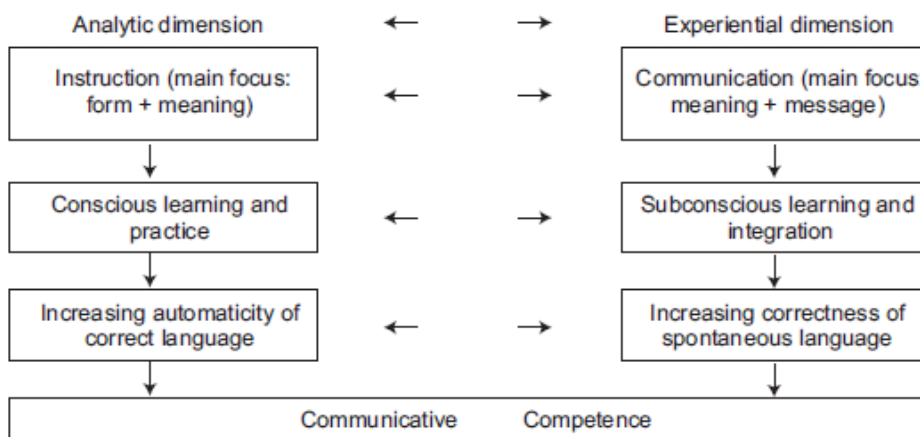


Figure 1. Two dimensions of learning in CLT (Littlewood, 2011).

CLT in East Asian Countries

While many East Asian Countries adopted the CLT approach in their national curriculums, there have been a wide variety of challenges that have been reported in relation to implementing it effectively. Butler (2011) identifies three constraints that impeded successful implementation of CLT in East Asian countries: “(a) conceptual constraints, (b) classroom-level constraints, and (c) societal-institutional level constraints. As a result of such practical constraints and external influences in the implementation of CLT, teachers were found to be reluctant to innovate (Cook, 2009; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Underwood, 2012). In addition to such constraints, internal factors such as teacher’s beliefs and poor understanding of CLT have been discussed as major impediments (Humphries & Burns, 2015).

Discussions regarding various struggles and constraints of implementing CLT can be found throughout East Asian Countries. In China, while some advocate the adaptation of CLT in Chinese EFL context and strongly recommend its implementation (Liao, 2004; Rao, 2002), others claim that caution needs to be taken due to various constraints. Namely, the unchanged exam-oriented system and gap between curriculum and assessment policy are what teachers perceive as the predominant hindrance in effective implementation of CLT (Li & Baldauf, 2001). Similar results were found in Japan as many teachers believe that the exam-focused curriculum (Gorsuch 2001; Nishino, 2011; Underwood, 2012) is a major obstacle in using CLT activities in the classroom. There were other challenges including teacher’s low English proficiency (Nishino, 2012), and poor understanding of how to implement CLT (Nishino, 2008; Sakui, 2004, 2007) since the national curriculum addresses what the teachers need to teach but does not clarify how they are to teach (Gorsuch, 2000). In Taiwan, Huang and Yang (2018) claim that teachers feel the need to re-educate the students and parents regarding the significance of developing communication proficiency in language learning as their negative perspective of CLT act as major challenges. In Vietnam, Hiep (2007) points out that teachers perceive large classes, inappropriate materials, grammar-oriented examinations, time constraints, lack of training, lack of teacher confidence in their own language skills as constraints in CLT implementation. The teachers in Indonesia also considered lack of teachers’ competence and national exam that does not focus on communication as challenges and Rizqi (2020) argues that these challenges had existed since the 1990s and are still present even after 20 years of adopting CLT approaches.

CLT in Korea

As for the situation in Korea, the CLT approach was implemented in the early 90’s and the national curriculum emphasizes learner-centered approach, encourages collaborative learning, and task-based

learning (MEST, 2008). In bird's eye view, the national curriculum seems to advocate CLT approaches and support teachers in their implementations in the classroom, most teachers urge various types of revisions to be since "the predominance of text-centered and grammar-centered practices in Korea does not provide a basis for the student-centered, fluency-focused, and problem-solving activities required by CLT" (Li, 1998, p. 66). Indeed, teachers' choice for implementing CLT seem to be heavily affected by "external factors such as the school curriculum and the educational system" that are narrowly focused on the college entrance exam" (Jin & Yoo, 2019, p. 1342). In addition to external constraints, there are conflicts between the type of activities that teachers are familiar with and those that are CLT-based. Whitehead (2017) notes that one of the issues the teachers mentioned when discussing why it is difficult to use CLT approaches in their classroom was the burden of developing authentic materials because it takes up too much time.

Along with external factors, there have been findings that suggest the influence of internal factors on teachers' implementation of CLT. Li (2001) states that some teachers were shown to have unclear conceptualizations of CLT. In particular, Beaumont and Chang (2011) claim that teachers' examples of "communicative" activities were outside of normal class activity and mostly oral-skills based. Similarly, teachers' perception of CLT in Lee (2014) was shown to be limited to "communication, or speaking skill" (p. 14). Han (2018) argues that teachers' and policy makers' "narrow or unestablished conceptualization of CLT" as well as test-oriented teaching which involves reading-centered lessons and overwhelming administrative workload made implementation of CLT extremely difficult (p. 47). In addition, Han (2018) points out that after almost 20 years of effort, there is still "lack of established guideline for teachers' flexible CLT implementation" (p. 41). While attempts have been made to provide aid in teachers' proper conceptualization of CLT, Guilloteaux (2004) points out that teachers in the training program were shown to have difficulties in translating "theories into classroom practices" (p. 72). As such, Nam (2011) claims training alone cannot help teachers to implement CLT methods since they do not have enough time to practice, which results in teachers implementing the teacher-centered methods they are familiar with. Kim (2008) argues that even with the teacher training program, the teachers would not be able to change the way they teach since "most of the programs are conducted like the curriculum reform, in a top-down manner" (p. 61).

In order to identify issues in implementing CLT in Korean English classrooms, Jeon (1997) asked teachers, through Delphi technique and the issues that emerged were presented to teachers in a later study (Jeon, 2009)¹. The comparison of the ranked issues showed that most of the issues such as the need to reduce the number of students, to provide in-service teacher training, and enhancing teachers' communicative competence remained the same.

Methods

Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, the Delphi technique was used again to identify key issues involved in applying CLT in the Korean EFL situation. The Delphi technique is valuable in figuring out issues and driving participants toward consensus (Delbecq et al., 1975) and prioritizing the collective judgments (Orlich, 1978). There was a total of three rounds in collecting data and 36 English teachers (13 Elementary, 10 middle, and 13 high school) served as panel members. In the first round of the survey, an open-ended survey was administered to these teachers and asked them to specify 5 to 10 issues they consider as important in establishing the communicative approach in the Korean EFL context and provide a rationale for choosing such issues. When the key issues were collected, the issues that were suggested by at least five

¹ As the data collected from Jeon (1997) were actually from 1996 and Jeon (2009) from 2008, the years 1996 will be used to refer to the Jeon (1997) study and 2008 referring to Jeon (2009).

participants were synthesized and were presented in random sequence in the second-round structured questionnaire to gather initial ratings of the participants. The participants were asked to rate the listed issues by using a rating scale from 1 (unimportant) to 10 (most important). Additional space was provided for the participants to add new concerns or issues (See Figure 1.). When the rankings were completed, the third round was administered by having the rankings presented to the participants one last time to see if they feel any need to revise their initial ratings. The survey was administered in Korean.

<p>Directions: The following are important issues involved with applying a communicative approach in the Korean EFL context. Read each issue and the rationale provided, and rate the importance of each one. 10 means the most important issue; on the other hand, 1 means the least important issue. Circle the number that reflects your opinion.</p> <p>Example Item:</p> <p>1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10</p> <p>Developing assessment techniques to match with communicative objectives.</p> <p>Rationale:</p> <p>The current English curriculum emphasizes process-oriented, communicative, activity-based education. In practice, however, students' performance is assessed by discrete, structured tests that are not in harmony with communicative goals. Classroom assessment techniques should be in concordance with communicative objectives.</p>

Figure 1. Example item on the questionnaire.

Results and Discussion

There was a total of 24 issues identified through the Delphi technique and the following are the issues that were listed in the order in which they appeared on the structured survey.

Issue 1. Changing from education centered on passing a university entrance exam.

Most of the Korean education system has focused on preparing students to successfully pass university entrance exams. Communicative English classes are possible only when they are away from college entrance exam-oriented education.

Issue 2. Developing assessment techniques to match with communicative objectives.

While the communicative approach is emphasized for instructions, the main mode of assessment is still discrete point test or standardized test, in conjunction with preparing students for the university entrance exam. In order for Communicative English classes to be possible, communication based and process-oriented evaluations must be developed. However, this is not an appropriate way to assess progress in communicative competence.

Issue 3. Developing curriculum that allows flexible use of the textbook.

Many teachers still feel the need to finish, or cover, all the material provided in the textbook. In order for Communicative English classes to be possible, teachers must be able to use them autonomously and flexibly depending on the situation of each classroom and school.

Issue 4. Developing practical and interesting materials including online/digital

English education content should be developed to provide the English input needed for the students, taking full consideration of the situation in which, our students actually communicate in English, such as reading short sentences and short paragraphs, writing text messages and providing comments for YouTube or SNS.

Issue 5. Developing supplemental materials.

Usually, only a textbook is provided for teachers. Since teachers are too pressed for time to make interesting and relevant materials themselves, supporting materials (such as workbook, mobile application, or platform where students can interact in English) needs to be developed.

Issue 6. Providing digital tools and technology.

Through the experience of non-face-to-face situations, communication through devices became important. Digital devices such as online, virtual reality, and metaverse tools should be provided to create an environment where ESL effects can be enjoyed in an EFL environment.

Issue 7. Providing instruction on Media literacy

Media literacy education is needed. Having the digital tools and technology available is simply not enough without the appropriate training and support for teachers to be able to use them effectively and easily.

Issue 8. Improving teachers' English communicative competence.

Many EFL teachers in Korea have had little experience themselves in communicating in English. It is difficult to focus on listening and speaking in the classroom when a teacher's own level is low in these areas. In order for a communicative English classes possible, English teachers' English communication skills needs to be improved.

Issue 9. Developing detailed teaching techniques for communicative competence.

Most of the resources describing communicative teaching techniques are published by foreign publishers. Korean EFL teachers want specific support and explanations of techniques that are appropriate to their unique situation.

Issue 10. Providing experience in the learner-centered approach.

The learner-centered approach is contrary to Korean educational tradition; most teachers have had little personal experience in this approach. Therefore, there is a need for modeling of this approach in the classroom, and personal experience for the teachers to better understand how the approach can work.

Issue 11. Providing opportunities for systematic in-service teacher training.

There is only one kind formulaic in-service training program that teachers can attend. There is a need for greater depth and support of the communicative approach for in-service teacher training programs.

Issue 12. Promoting teacher motivation to comply with the communicative approach.

Even if teachers thoroughly agree with the theory behind the communicative approach, it can be incredibly difficult to implement. School administrators, parents, and students still want high test results. Therefore, teachers are often more motivated to teach to the test instead of working hard to create materials and lessons encouraging communicative competence. Teacher motivation is needed so that communicative English classes can be conducted.

Issue 13. Having a reasonable number of students in the classroom.

There are more students than a teacher can handle in one language classroom. In order to make a language class communicative, the number of students per class should be reduced.

Issue 14. Appropriate seating arrangements.

Most classrooms in Korea have fixed desks in rows, all facing toward the teacher's podium. This makes group work and monitoring difficult.

Issue 15. Promoting learner motivation and participation.

Students' motivation to acquire English as a global language is weak. Students should feel the need to speak and write in English in order to be motivated. The English class should provide sufficient English exposure to the students so that they can see the clear goal to communicate in English.

Issue 16. Lowering students' anxieties about communicative approach

Korean students can feel insecure and nervous in a communicative atmosphere since they have not had previous experience to such an educational approach. Also, most Korean students are extremely afraid of making any mistakes in front of the teacher or another classmate. It is needed to create an atmosphere where students can feel comfortable communicating in English without being afraid of making mistakes.

Issue 17 Increasing parents' and administrators' understanding of the communicative approach.

Since test scores are still so important and necessary in Korean culture, it is hard to convince parents that a communicative classroom is helping their child improve in language skills. Public awareness needs to be raised about communicative language learning and teaching.

Issue 18. Improving pre-service teacher training programs.

Hopefully, the training of teachers in the communicative approach can begin before they arrive in the classroom. Recently, there has been an emphasis on including training during an in-service training program. There needs to be more work done to include communicative language teacher training in university classes.

Issue 19. Improvement of national teacher certificate exam

Through the current national teacher certificate exam candidates can become English teachers even if they are not interested in communicative English classes and do not have English communicative competence. Candidates with necessary competency should be selected as English teachers.

Issue 20. Consideration of student level differences

Students' English level differences should be considered. When teachers are implementing communicative English classes ignoring students' level difference, the difference will get more severe. In order for communicative English classes possible, students should be able to learn according to their own level, while students in need of additional help can get additional learning experience.

Issue 21. Consideration of the linkage between school levels

There is a wide gap between English classes centered on speaking in elementary schools and English classes that combine writing in middle schools. For communicative English classes possible, the linkage of English classes in elementary, middle, and high schools should be considered.

Issue 22. Placement/utilization of native teachers

Native teachers should be assigned, or should be utilized properly to provide good help to students and English teachers.

Issue 23. Cooperation among English teachers

As teachers make decision together for purchasing classroom equipment, creating classroom environment, and managing class progress, English teachers throughout the school must cooperate and work together.

Issue 24. Improving the way companies hire people

When a company hires new employees, it should require English communication skills rather than simple test scores. An atmosphere in which true English communication skills are needed for the job should be created to move away from English education that is evaluated as test scores.

The final rankings of the key issues identified in this study when compared to the previous studies in Jeon (1997) and Jeon (2009) are outlined in Table 1.

TABLE 1
Perceived Importance by Teachers: A Comparison among 1996, 2008, and 2022 Investigation

Issues	1996			2008			2022		
	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank	M	SD	Rank
Issue 13. Having a reasonable number of students in the classroom	9.14	1.29	1	9.36	1.30	1	8.97	1.483	1
Issue 1. Changing from education centered on passing a university entrance exam	8.38	1.62	13	8.43	1.53	6	8.78	1.726	2
Issue 2. Developing assessment techniques to match with communicative objectives	8.30	1.47	12	8.16	1.73	11	8.67	2.084	3
Issue 8. Improving teachers' English communicative competence	8.50	1.38	7	8.40	1.52	7	8.28	1.701	4
Issue 18. Improving pre-service teacher training programs	8.75	1.27	5	8.76	1.36	3	8.17	1.844	5
Issue 10. Providing experience in the learner-centered approach	8.17	1.46	11	7.88	1.57	14	8.14	1.57	6
Issue 15. Promoting learner motivation and participation	8.21	1.56	16	8.30	1.58	7	8.06	1.866	7
** Issue 21. consideration of the linkage between school levels							8.06	2.028	7
Issue 11. Providing opportunities for systematic in-service teacher training	9.06	1.32	2	8.43	1.53	6	7.92	1.873	9
Issue 16. Lowering students' anxieties about communicative approach	7.42	1.99	17	7.74	1.75	16	7.92	1.962	9
Issue 9. Developing detailed teaching techniques for communicative competence	8.36	1.53	6	8.38	1.43	8	7.89	1.687	11
** Issue 20. Consideration of student level differences							7.89	1.909	11
Issue 12. Promoting teacher motivation to comply with the communicative approach	8.17	1.46	9	8.12	1.63	12	7.72	1.814	13
Issue 3. Developing curriculum that allows flexible use of the textbook	8.30	1.47	12	8.16	1.73	11	7.36	2.14	14
* Issue 4. Developing practical and interesting materials including online/digital	8.77	1.33	4	8.63	1.45	5	7.36	1.885	14
Issue 17. Increasing parents' and administrators' understanding of the communicative approach	7.92	1.83	14	7.80	1.67	15	7.31	1.802	16
** Issue 24. Improving the way companies hire people							7.25	2.13	17

**Issue 23. Cooperation among English teachers							7.19	1.925	18
*Issue 7. Providing instruction on Media literacy	7.30	2.07	18	6.86	2.24	18	6.94	1.912	19
*Issue 5. Developing supplemental materials	9.00	1.28	3	8.64	1.47	4	6.69	2.227	20
*Issue 6. Providing digital tools and technology	8.32	1.69	10	8.07	1.74	14	6.61	2.155	21
**Issue 19. Improvement of government teacher examination							6.44	2.144	22
**Issue 22. placement/utilization of native teachers							6.31	2.291	23
Issue 14. Appropriate seating arrangements				6.53	2.348	14	5.97	2.455	24

*modified issues ** newly emerged issues

As shown in Table 1, the key issues that had been identified in the previous studies has been modified over time. For example, the need for developing practical and interesting materials had been expanded to include online and digital resources. Similarly, in the framework on developing supplementary materials and providing tools and technology, the mobile and digital realms were also mentioned in connection with such issues. Finally, the necessity for providing instruction on media literacy was another modification to the previous need for instructions on using technology and resources. To reflect the current interest on online/digital/mobile technologies, we modified Issues 4, 7, 5, and 6 to include the term online/digital/mobile. These issues were modified because they still address the importance of the materials/tools and the teachers' ability to use them appropriately for their classes. A detailed look at the modified issues is provided in Table 2.

TABLE 2.
Issues Modified from 1996, 2008 to 2022 Investigation

Issues	1996		2008		2022	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Issue 4. Developing practical and interesting materials including online/digital	8.77	4	8.63	5	7.36	14
Issue 7. Providing instruction on media literacy	7.30	18	6.86	18	6.94	19
Issue 5. Developing supplemental/mobile materials	9.00	3	8.64	4	6.69	20
Issue 6. Providing digital tools and technology	8.32	10	8.07	14	6.61	21

There were also key issues that were identified only in 2022. These newly emerged issues are Issues 21 (consideration of the linkage between school levels), 20 (consideration of student level differences), 24 (Improving the way companies hire people), 23 (cooperation among English teachers), 19 (improvement of national teacher employment examination) and 22 (placement / utilization of native teachers). Since these issues did not appear in the previous studies, the fluctuation of the rank changes cannot be reported here. While issues identified in Jeon (1997) were more on the immediate issues to deal with, as can be seen in the Table 3, newly emerged issues in 2022 show a more holistic view on the issues. Instead of the immediate needs, they begin to see what should be done in the society, the school system, and among teachers as a whole. For example, some teachers expressed the need to consider connecting school levels

(elementary and secondary) since the importance of CLT seems to decrease as the students enter higher school levels due to the reading-based college entrance exam. Rather than focusing on the classroom alone, the teachers in this study expanded their concerns beyond their own classrooms. Similarly, the issue related to the employment process of companies and the improvement of national teacher employment exam also showed that teachers are seeing the connection between the role of CLT in the classroom and its position in society.

TABLE 3
Issues Newly Emerged in 2022 for Implementing CLT in Korea

Issues	1996		2008		2022	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Issue 21. Consideration of the linkage between school levels					8.06	7
Issue 20. Consideration of student level differences					7.89	11
Issue 24. Improving the way companies hire people					7.25	17
Issue 23. Cooperation among English teachers					7.19	18
Issue 19. Improvement of national teacher employment examination					6.44	22
Issue 22. Placement/utilization of native teachers					6.31	23

The issues staying among the top 10 important issues for all three investigations performed in Jeon (1997), Jeon (2009), and 2022 were Issues 13 (having a reasonable number of students in the classroom), 8 (improving teachers’ communicative competence), 18 (improving pre-service teacher training programs), and 11 (providing opportunities for systematic in-service teacher training). Interestingly, Issue 13 was found to be the most important issue in all three investigations. As it has shown that it has remained the most important issue for over 26 years, there is an urgent need to consider reducing the number of students in English classes in order to properly implement CLT in Korea. The ranking of Issue 8 was slightly higher in the 2022 investigation than Jeon (1997) and Jeon (2009) investigations. Issue 18 stayed more or less in the same ranking in all three investigations. The ranking of Issue 11 is declining in the investigation of Jeon (2009) and in 2022. These issues are listed in Table 4.

TABLE 4
Issues Staying in the Top 10 for 26 years

Issues	1996		2008		2022	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Issue 13. Having a reasonable number of students in the classroom	9.14	1	9.36	1	8.97	1
Issue 8. Improving teachers’ English communicative competence	8.50	7	8.40	7	8.28	4
Issue 18. Improving pre-service teacher training programs	8.75	5	8.76	3	8.17	5
Issue 11. Providing opportunities for systematic in-service teacher training	9.06	2	8.43	6	7.92	9

Over the 26 years of implementation, some issues were found to be growing more and more important in later investigations. For example, Issue 1 (changing from education centered on passing the university

entrance exam) was ranked 13 in 1996 investigation, but ranked 6 in 2008 and ranked 2 in 2022 investigation. Issue 2 (developing assessment techniques to match communicative objectives) did not have a drastic shift in 1996 and 2008 investigations, but ranked 3 in 2022 investigation. Issue 8 was among the top 10 in 1996 and 2008 investigation, and ranked 4th in the 2022 investigation. Issue 15 and Issue 16 ranked low in 1996 investigation but they ranked in the 10 in 2022 investigation. The issues with increasing importance seem to do with teachers, students, and the exams. Issues that were found to be increasing in importance are listed in Table 5.

TABLE 5
Issues with Increasing Importance

Issues	1996		2008		2022	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Issue 1. Changing from education centered on passing the university entrance exam	8.38	13	8.43	6	8.78	2
Issue 2. Developing assessment techniques to match with communicative objectives	8.30	12	8.16	11	8.67	3
Issue 8. Improving teachers' English communicative competence	8.50	7	8.40	7	8.28	4
Issue 15. Promoting learner motivation and participation	8.21	16	8.30	7	8.06	7
Issue 16. Lowering students' anxieties about communicative approach	7.42	17	7.74	16	7.92	9

The issues with decreasing importance were Issues 11 (providing opportunities for systematic in-service teacher training), 4 (developing practical and interesting materials including online/digital), 5 (developing supplemental/mobile materials), and 6 (providing digital tools and technology). They were all related to the materials and technologies. They were ranked high in 1996, when there were not enough materials and technologies to support teachers. In 2022 investigation, the issues on materials/technologies ranked low. This means teachers' see the abundant materials and technologies available around them and begin to see that it is the people who can actually make a difference.

TABLE 6
Issues with Decreasing Importance

Issues	1996		2008		2022	
	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank	Mean	Rank
Issue 11. Providing opportunities for systematic in-service teacher training	9.06	2	8.43	6	7.92	9
Issue 4. Developing practical and interesting materials including online/digital	8.77	4	8.63	5	7.36	14
Issue 5. Developing supplemental/mobile materials	9.00	3	8.64	4	6.69	20
Issue 6. Providing digital tools and technology	8.32	10	8.07	14	6.61	21

Conclusion and Implications

The purpose of this study was to revisit key issues related to implementing CLT in Korean EFL context that had been previously identified in Jeon (1997) and Jeon (2009) in order to examine whether or not there have been any changes or new issues we need to address. By using the Delphi technique, a total of 36 teachers from different school levels were first requested to provide key issues they consider as essential in implementing CLT in Korea and those issues were asked to be ranked by the same participants in a later survey. The ranked issues were presented to the participants to have them confirm or revise their initial thoughts on the order of importance. The results showed that there had been some modifications of the issues that had been identified in Jeon (1997) and Jeon (2009), namely, the importance of online/digital/mobile devices and technology in implementing CLT in the classroom. Some new issues that had not come up in the previous studies which seem to have received attention and gained importance over the years have also been identified. These newly identified issues call for the need to search for ways to properly implement of CLT beyond the classroom. In other words, the issues that have been identified in 2022 expanded the key issues to bridging the gap among school levels, improving pre-service teacher training, national teacher employment examination and teacher collaboration as well as considering students' level differences. Also, the issue regarding improving the employment process of companies represent how teachers perceive the role of the society in the English teaching policy and the need for both contexts to collaborate in order to properly implement CLT in the classroom.

While there had been a bit of fluctuations over the 26 years in terms of the ranks, the most significant finding is that the issues that had been identified in the top rank remained consistent. This finding is critical since it exhibits that even after 26 years, constructive changes have not been made. Over the years, CLT had been defined and emphasized in the English teaching field but the results of this study make us reflect whether there had been an equal amount of effort in alleviating the reported obstacles. As such, this calls for a longitudinal examination regarding how these related issues are emerging and evolving. Accordingly, there is an urgent to address the Top 10 issues that have remained consistent over the 26 years of implementation. In particular, there is a dire need to have closer link between assessment and CLT, which means that it is time to change test-based teaching and focus on methods that are more aligned with the needs of the society. Furthermore, we need to pay attention to the rising issues as they demand focus on macro-level links (classroom, school, society) as well as the need to manage micro-level issues such as student-centered teaching to complete the macro-level. An interesting view which the declining issues seem to be presenting is that the decrease in ranking for materials and technology point out that this issue has been satisfied. In fact, it might not be surprising to find a great saturation of materials and technological tools as our society has been advancing rapidly. The focus, then, is not the absence or presence of materials but how to use this vast amount of resources strategically. Most importantly, we need to redefine CLT according to the needs of the students in a particular context (Littlewood, 2013; Wei, Lin, & Litton, 2018). As there are a large number of non-native teachers utilizing CLT to teach English in their classrooms in various parts of the world, we need to consider global and local obstacles. As English teachers, we should continually ask ourselves whether we have appropriately redefined CLT to match the current context as well as whether we are working toward solving the issues that hinder us from implementing CLT properly.

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(Received May 31, 2022; Revised August 20, 2022; Accepted Sep 18, 2022)