

Communicative Language Teaching: The Perceptions of English Teachers in Mempawah Hilir

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***Abstract-** It is undeniable fact that English strengthens its role as international language day by day. In the response to this phenomenon, the Indonesian Ministry of Education has been trying to increase the quality of the education system since years ago; one of them is the changes of curriculum and its teaching approaches. Among many curricula that had been adapted in Indonesia, it is believed that communicative approach or communicative language teaching has mostly adapted in more than two changes of curricula. Therefore, the English teachers of Indonesia are assumed to be familiar with this teaching approach. The research had been done to 18 English teachers of junior high school level in Mempawah Hilir. Thus, the purpose of this paper is to review the results of an investigation about their perceptions in relation to their understanding on CLT principles, and their challenges in implementing CLT. Teachers' perceptions itself is considered important because it reflects teachers classroom practices. By using cross-sectional descriptive survey research design, the data were derived from questionnaire and classroom observation checklist. It showed that, theoretically, the teachers had good understanding on the CLT principles. Unfortunately, in contrast, it did not reflect in their teaching practices. This phenomenon was caused mostly by some challenges identified from the questionnaire, for instance, big class size and student's low English proficiency. In short, based on the results, it is hoped that this result can be one of references in making education/curriculum policy in the future.*

***Keywords** :Communicative Language Teaching, Perceptions, Challenges, Curriculum*

I. INTRODUCTION

A number of researches, such as Musthafa (2001, p. 5-7) and Suryanto (2015, p. 76-77) has been noted the endless difficulties faced by Indonesian students in learning English. They are lack of English proficiency and they have low motivation to learn the language. In response to the phenomenon, several attempts have been made to help solve students' low performance in English; many studies have been conducted on the implementation and the usage of teaching methods, teaching techniques, and media. Unfortunately, up until now, the outcome is still

not satisfactory enough. In relation to the phenomenon, teachers' issues also can be considered as one of contributors of this failure (Suryanto, 2014: 76). As one of the element in teaching learning process, teachers play significant role in promoting a good learning progress for students: teachers' perceptions. Teachers' perception towards a certain teaching methods or approaches is believed to be reflected into their teaching practices; how would they use or apply a certain methods in their classroom.

Perception or behavior of teachers is seen as one of key roles in how students perceive, learn and apply their knowledge (Kierie, 2016, p. 5737). In line with this claim, Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 541) described that teachers' beliefs serve as the source of their classroom practices in which their beliefs about some idea, methods, students or others affect their teaching performances. Perception itself, defined by Lindsay and Norman (1977, cited in Borkowski, 2001, p. 52) as the process of interpreting or perceiving something based on their experiences, knowledge and stimuli. In the field of teaching, Dagneu and Asrat (2016, p. 249) noted, "teachers' perception have an enormous effect on the successful implementation of quality education in schools, quality of teaching, and quality of students' learning". That is why, nowadays, teachers' perceptions getting much attention to be investigated.

There is one research which inspired the writer to conduct a research on a similar topic: Hossen (2008) focused on teachers' perception and attitude toward communicative language teaching (CLT) in Bangladesh. The sample of his study was 19 high school English teachers from different work places and backgrounds: urban areas, rural areas, government teacher, non-government teacher, headmaster, and Madrasa teacher. By interviewed the participants, first, Hossen claimed that most of the teachers do not define clearly about what CLT is. Their definition of the teaching approach is not clear. Therefore, he further noted, "as a result, they cannot understand what their responsibility is and what should they do in the classroom" (p.30). Second, most teachers or urban areas are aware and capable to apply CLT activities in their classroom (role-play, pair-group work), even though they cannot apply such activities daily due to time constraint and big class size. In contrast, teachers from Madrasa and rural areas cannot apply CLT properly in their

classroom. This happened because of urban areas teachers are highly educated and trained in CLT while it is different with teachers from rural areas and Madrasa. In short, teachers should be knowledgeable in CLT that they can promote communication activities to students; they can motivate students in their learning progress. To achieve this, government should provide trainings for the teachers (Hossen, 2008, p. 48).

There is similar research conducted by Scott Menking in 2001. The scope is broader than Hossen; Menking study focused on university instructors in Japan; there were 36 out of 42 university instructors who participated in his study. The main goals of his research were to find out the participants perceptions on CLT elements and the hindrances faced by both instructor and students. In case of the instructors' perception towards the tenet of CLT, the result indicated that most of their class is learner-centered; authentic material are being used and communicative competence is more emphasized thorough pair-group or small group. The class size are too large, and students' embarrassment in using the language actively are most stand out hindrances that indicated by the instructors and students in applying the CLT classroom.

In line with the result of Menking's research; Jafari, Shoukrpour and Guetterman (2015) found that 76 English high school teachers have favorable attitude toward the principle of CLT which pair/group work, one of CLT principles has the highest mean score. The examination system, which is grammar oriented, and large class size are two most indicated difficulties in implementing CLT perceived by the teachers. Thus, they suggested that the government needs to consider providing workshops, training or seminar for teachers so that they are more prepared in implementing CLT approach in their classroom. Although some researches have been carried out on teachers' perceptions, practices, and challenge toward CLT, for instance, those previous researches have been explained above in which the scope and the research method used were broader in years; there is no single research so far dealing with the teachers who teach in junior high school level. Moreover, there is also limited document investigated this topic in Indonesian settings.

Therefore, to fill in the gap, the writer chose the similar topic dealt with English teachers of junior high school, especially in Mempawah Hilir. It is important because the current curriculum in Indonesia called Curriculum 2013 is believed underpinnings the principles of communicative approach or communicative language teaching (Sarosa, 2014, p. 1119). Meanwhile, the changes of curriculum in Indonesia are one of government efforts to prepare our student to face global competition better in the future. Since our independence day in 1945, curriculum in Indonesia has gone through several changes. Unfortunately, the implementation of the latest curriculum, Curriculum 2013, still has not given the expected result. One major reason behind this situation is due to the pressure of preparing students for the national examination that most teachers ignored the main goal of communicative competence as documented in the Government Regulation No. 19/2005 (Yulia, 2014). In line with Yulia, Sahiruddin (2013, p. 573) noted some common problems in Indonesian ELT: students' lack of motivation, big class size, and unqualified teachers. Concerning to this phenomenon, the writer investigated teachers' perception and challenges in implementing CLT that their awareness of the teaching approach will increase and become clearer; their opinion or thoughts could be taken as one of points for the government in making the next policies related to the education in Indonesia.

Communicative Language teaching (CLT) under the theory of Communicative approach is considered as one of dominant teaching approaches used widely around the globe since its emergence in 1970 until this day (Richards, 2001, p. 3). It is recognized that all of teaching approaches that have been documented and implemented until today is for learners to communicate in the target language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 121). Mastering the foreign language is not only about mastering its linguistics competence but also communicative competence. Hymes in 1971 described, "communicative competence is about knowing how to and when to say what to whom". Widdowson (1990) claimed that CLT has shifted teaching-learning center to linguistics structured-centered to communicative approach (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 121).

CLT stresses more on promoting the communicative competence of learners. The competence covers capability of people who capable to: 1) use the language

appropriately in various or different purposes and functions; 2) use the language appropriately in certain settings (spoken or written) and also participants (formal and informal); 3) to conceive and to produce all kinds of text such as interviews, conversations, reports, and narratives; 4) maintain communications because of one's knowledge limitation by using various communication strategies (Richards, 2006, p. 3). Hence, Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 172) concluded some core tenets of CLT that learner / learner's: 1) learn a language through using it in communication; 2) do the classroom activities that are authentic and meaningful; 3) fluency is seen as an important feature in communication; 4) integrate all language skills in their communication; and 5) learning process also involves trial and error in which these things is seen as natural outcome in acquiring the language. Supporting Richards and Rodgers, Brown (2001, p. 42) also described that in term of accuracy in CLT classroom, is a complementary. Fluency is seen more important in order to keep engaging learners in their communication. Promoting communication in its classroom activities, CLT has shifted the role of teachers from source of knowledge by lecturing almost whole time of their teaching to act as facilitator in providing their learners in using the target language, act as monitor in controlling and helping their learners' learning process, and teacher focused more on fluency rather than accuracy within the learners' communication activities. Learners, in their learning, act as negotiator among them. By using the language in their communication whether it is in spoken or written form, they integrate all four language skills: make themselves to understand and to be understood (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 128-129).

In its classroom activity, some scholars also describe many activities of CLT that can promote learners' communicative competence in which, by doing the activities, they are expected to be able to negotiate in meaning, to be able to maintain a communication despite his or her limitation in communicative competence within various situations, purposes, settings of their communication. In contrast to old activities such as translating words and doing only some grammar exercises, mostly done the activities in some of pair-groups or small groups, CLT offers some activities such as dialogues role play by using cue cards, map or situational, information gaps, jigsaw activities, write a report, give a talk, discuss a

discourse (listening or reading), pictures and pictures stories (Richards, 2006, p. 14-19; Nunan, 1989, p. 67-68). CLT that promotes such interesting and meaningful beliefs and activities in its theory is widely adopted by many countries. Thus, this present study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions and challenges toward CLT in Mempawah Hilir.

II. METHODS

Various methods have been utilized by the authors in previous studies to assess the similar topic. For instance, qualitative method by using open-ended interview (Hossen, 2008); survey method by using questionnaire (Menking, 2001); and Mix method by employing questionnaire and interview (Jafari, Shoukrpour and Guetterman, 2015). This study aims to investigate or to describe the phenomenon perceived by the participants at a point of time. Thus, cross-sectional survey method is chosen to conduct this study. It is supported by Spector (2013, in Little, 2013, p. 170-171) claimed that survey method is the most useful to use in order to investigate or to study human attitudes, behavior, cognition, emotion, perception, and many more variables. By employing questionnaire and classroom observation checklists, this study answered these following research questions: 1) how do the teachers' understand about CLT theory? , and 2) what are the challenges they faced in implementing CLT?

This research took place in Mempawah Hilir sub-district involving 18 junior high school English teachers. The teachers in Mempawah Hilir are seen more knowledgeable than teachers in other sub-districts in Mempawah district. The 18 teachers came from different schools. They were consists of four public junior high schools, one public Islamic school, and three private Islamic schools: 1) SMPN 1 Mempawah Hilir (3 teachers); SMPN 2 Mempawah Hilir (3 teachers, 1 headmaster); SMPN 3 Mempawah Hilir (3 teachers); SMPN 4 Mempawah Hilir (1 teacher); MTs N 1 Mempawah Hilir (3 teachers); MTs Al Falah Mempawah Hilir (1 teacher); MTs Al-Fathanah (1 teacher); and MTs Al-Qomar (2 teachers).

This research used questionnaire in the first stage in collecting data. The questionnaire was in the type of Likert-skale which was ranged from 5 to 1 (Strongly agree to strongly disagree) for the first 15 items, and the second 15 items

ranged from 1 to 5 (Strongly disagree to strongly agree). There are 30 items in total that had been modified from questionnaire in previous study (Menking, 2001; Aleixo, 2003; Karavas-Doukas in Chang, 2011). Some modifications were made to achieve the purposes of this study. The questionnaire was aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions (15 items for knowledge / understanding and 15 items for challenges) toward CLT. Second, classroom observation was employed to confirm between their theoretical perceptions and real practices. The items in the checklist was adapted from Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) based on the core tenets of CLT classroom, there are 15 items in total consisted of: CLT instructions, activities in CLT, teacher's role, learner's role, the use of native and target language, the use of authentic materials, and how teacher reactions to learner's error. The validity of those two tools of data collection was done by using content-validity (table of items specification) and piloting the instrument before the main research was held. In piloting, the writer distributed the questionnaire to certain teachers that have similar characteristics with the participants. Piloting the instruments in survey research was done in order to: the respondents could understand the items easily, the instructions written in the questionnaire were clear or any items which confusing, check the time-range for a respondent to complete the questionnaire (Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen, Razavieh, 2010, p. 402). Besides distributed the questionnaire and conducted classroom observation, the writer also video-taped the classroom observation.

The data was analyzed quantitatively. On that account, it was analyzed by using descriptive statistics covered minimum score; maximum score; mean score and standard deviation. It was scored and presented in frequency percentages. Therefore, the scoring for the questionnaire was ranged as follow: 77-50 indicated as favorable perceptions; 31-76 indicated neutral perceptions; and 0-30 meant unfavorable. And for the classroom observation checklist is scored as follow: maximum score was 45, neutral score was 23, and minimum score indicated as the least applicable was below the neutral score. The findings and discussion of the data results will be described in the next sections below.

III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The following paragraphs describe/identify the data to answer the research questions in findings section, and discussion section describes about the results. It will compare the results to the results of previous studies, related topics, and existing literatures.

Findings

It was identified from the demographic results that there were 5 male teachers and 13 female teachers. Their teaching experience ranged from 2 until more than 10 years. The findings presented in percentage of each item covered in two main categories of teachers' perceptions: the teachers' understanding toward CLT principles and the challenges in implementing CLT classroom as follow.

1. Teachers' Understanding toward CLT principles

The items that covered this category were item number 1, 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 13, 16, 18, 23, 26, 30. Among those 15 items, it could be identified that all of the 18 teachers were all agree to these item number 4, 5, 7, 10, 12, 13, 16, 26. The teachers all 100% supported that in CLT is learner-centered who act as facilitator and monitor and students act as negotiator in the teaching learning process. The uses of authentic materials, role-play, and pair-/-small group are stressed in its activities in order to promote students to use the target language actively and appropriately. While for the item number 11 #The target language (English) is used mainly as the communication tool in the classroom; there are 4 teachers (22.2%) who were neutral to this statement while 14 teachers (77.8%) agreed, and 1 teacher (5.55%) strongly agreed to the statement. Moreover, in terms of correcting students' errors, the results illustrated: 9 teachers (50%) were neutral, while 7 teachers (38.8%) disagreed, 1 teacher (5.55%) strongly agreed, and 1 teacher (5.55%) strongly disagreed to the statement.

2. Teachers' Perceived Challenges in Implementing CLT

The items number 3, 6, 8, 9, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 25, 27, 28, and 29 were statements to cover teachers' perceptions regarding to their perceived challenges in applying CLT in their classroom. Based on the results, it showed

that the teachers mostly supported that the challenges comes from the teachers' themselves: CLT forces teachers to have a good English proficiency (item number 8) in which more than half of teachers (77.8%) agreed to the statement; CLT takes much time in its application that there is no enough time to focus on grammar (item number 22) in which 17 teachers agreed to the statement; in CLT activities, it is difficult for teacher to manage time (item number 27) in which 16 teachers (88.95) indicated that they face this challenge. In another side, teacher also indicated challenges related to students: 100% or all 18 teachers agreed that their students' anxiety to speak in the target language and also in their mother tongue is their biggest challenge; it is supported by the results from item number 19 in which 72.2% or 13 teachers agreed that most of their students do not use English in the classroom. It is also can be inferred that grammar-examination based in Indonesia also makes teachers hesitate to conduct CLT in their classroom.

In short, in can be concluded that almost all of teachers have favorable perception toward CLT principles with the scores ranged 79 to 111. The summary can be seen in the form of table below.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics of the Questionnaire (N= 18)

Minimum Score	Maximum Score	Mean Score	Standard Deviation
79	111	97.4	9.8

Based on the table, since the mean score is above the neutral point (76) with the mean score 97.4, it can be concluded that English teachers of junior high school level in Mempawah Hilir sub-district are favorable perceptions toward CLT. The result presented thus far supported the results of previous studies explained in the above paragraphs. In the case of to what extent teachers apply CLT principles into the classroom, the second tool of this research: classroom observation took place after the writer got the result from the questionnaire. Sadly, due to time constraints, the classroom observation only can be conducted to one teacher. Therefore, some considerations were taken into account in choosing one respondent. This teacher has more than 10 years teaching-experience, her questionnaire score was high illustrated that she really did understand what and how CLT classroom is and her

perceived challenges were low illustrated that the challenges did not really prevent her in implementing CLT in her classroom. In addition, she teaches in one of the best schools in the sub-district that uses Curriculum 2013. The observation illustrated that not all of CLT principles applied in her classroom. It can be seen that she emphasized more on pair-group during the activities; authentic resources such as realia, and listening materials were given to the students, and the target language (English) was used quite effective. But, she failed to provide more chance for the students to use the target language since she stressed more on writing activities. Thus, the activities mostly done in listening to the recording and in written form in which she asked the students to answer the worksheet she gave before. In short, there were 3 out of 15 items represented the principles of CLT applied by the teacher. 5 principles rarely applied such as the target language as a medium in the classroom, and the activities maximized communication opportunities. Moreover, 7 principles were not applied, such as error correction, and teacher's role as facilitator.

Discussion

As pointed out in the introduction to this paper, there are three main findings asserted that answer the research questions namely: teachers' understanding toward CLT principles, teachers' perceived challenges in implementing CLT in their classroom, and teachers' teaching practice. Among the 15 items/statements covering the principles of CLT in the questionnaire, the principles were categorized into six categories: instructions of CLT, error correction, CLT's activities (pair/small group and role play), teacher role, student role, and authentic materials. Referring to the findings explained in the previous section, it is found that most of teachers have a good understanding toward CLT principles described in the literatures (Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2000; Savignon, 2002, Richards, 2006; Nunan, 1989), such as item number 5 # *CLT approach is learner-centered*, item number 7 # *pair/small group is a basic activity in CLT approach*, and item number 12 # *authentic materials are used in CLT approach to relate materials to students' daily life* with the percentage is 100%. While for the item number 11 # *English is used to communicate in the classroom*, there were some teachers were neutral to this statement; it can be inferred that those

teachers perceived based on his or her students' background or students' English proficiency that they cannot force them to use English in a whole time during the class. However, it can be concluded that this result implies that the teachers are really aware of what CLT is, theoretically. These results, then, are in line with those of previous researches such as Menking (2001), Chang (2011), and Jafari, Shoukrpour, and Guetterman (2015). Those researches also reported that their participants supported the principles of CLT. In contrast, this research results also do not supported some previous researches such as Aleixo (2003) and Hossen (2008) in which these researches reported that teachers tend to be unclear in defining CLT, and teachers were lack of awareness about CLT.

By dividing the perceived challenges statements in the questionnaires into three main categories: teacher-related challenges; student-related challenges; and educational system-related challenges, it can be inferred that the teachers supported almost all of the perceived challenges written in the questionnaire. Most challenges perceived by teachers are teacher-related challenges and student-related challenges. For instance, item number 8 *#CLT approach forces teacher to use English in the classroom*, there were 14 out of 18 teachers agreed while 4 teachers disagreed to the statement. There are two possibilities that can be implied from the result: first, these 14 teachers do not have good confidence in his/her English proficiency; second, the teachers afraid that his/her students cannot cope up with the instructions if they use English whole time. This prediction is one of limitations of this research that can be taken into account for other researcher to be investigated in the future. In addition, item number 19 *#Most of my students in the classroom use their mother tongue/Bahasa during the class*, in which majority of teachers (72.2% perceived this as their major challenges, while a minority of them (22.2%) perceived it as their mild challenges, and 5.55% participants perceived it as not challenge for him/her in implementing CLT. Furthermore, teachers also perceived the class size in his/her school as major challenge (item number 25). Over half of teachers chose agree to the statement. This implies that big class size is teachers' reason behind his/her anxiety in implementing CLT. In relation to this, it is also over half of teachers perceived group work does not give any advantages because it is difficult for them to assess students' performance (item number 15). The findings broadly

support the work of other researches in this area such as Zhang (1997), Ansarey (2012), and Jafari, Shoukrpour and Guetterman (2015). In short, the perceived challenges of teachers are quite varied from one to another. It is probably because they relate his/her perception to the situation of the school they work at, his/her students' background and proficiency in English, and also his/her experience in teaching.

In terms of teaching practice, an observation revealed that there were only few principles of CLT embraced by teacher in her classroom. It was observed in the classroom observation: teacher started her class by greeting and brainstorming the topic (tourist destinations), she asked students to mention the places, but students were just silent. Teacher asked them few times to motivate students to speak, unfortunately students anxiety or low motivation might be the reason behind their silence. After that, teacher grouped them in four and then gave them worksheet to be completed by listening to recording. Teacher communicated mostly in English with the students, but the students were not confident enough to reply back in English, so that the use of Bahasa / mother tongue was observed in this classroom. The activities focused more on listening and writing in which students did not get opportunities to use English during the classroom. This phenomenon is not in line with CLT principles. Because of little opportunities provided by teacher, over half of CLT principles had not been embraced in this teaching learning process such as CLT embraces all four skills in its applications (Hinkel, 2011; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Moreover, essential activities of CLT such as role plays, and information gap (Moss, 2005) that promote students to use the target language were not observed. Hence, this observed facts reflect those of Aleixo (2003) and Deckert (2004) in which they pointed out the activities is text-book based and the interaction initiated by teacher responded by students in short responses. In other words, teacher applied only few of CLT principles such as they lean strongly to group her students in doing the tasks, authentic material were being used, she tried her best in using English to communicate to students.

IV. CONCLUSION

Returning to the questions posed at the beginning of this paper, it is now possible to state that the participants have a good understanding on CLT principles. It can be implied from the results of questionnaire that they are favorable to CLT principles with the scores ranged is 79-111. In terms of their perceived challenges, they mostly agreed to the statements. Thus, it can be inferred that teacher-related challenges and student-related challenges are their major challenges. With respect to teaching practice, it was observed that there is a contrary fact between their perceptions toward CLT theoretically and practically. But, in this study, there was only teacher observed. Therefore, further researches by interviewing and observing teachers to represent or investigate the trends better are recommended to conduct in the future.

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