

Evaluating Teacher Readiness for the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Malaysian Secondary Schools

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Abstract

This study aims to systematically assess ESL teachers' preparedness to modify their instructional approaches in line with CLT principles, focusing on key influencing factors such as teachers' knowledge and understanding of CLT, their formal training backgrounds, access to classroom resources, and the level of support provided by their institutions. Employing a mixed-methods research design, the study combines both quantitative and qualitative data to gain a comprehensive view of the current landscape. Findings from the study reveal significant gaps in ESL teachers' theoretical understanding and practical training related to CLT, highlighting the disconnect between policy expectations and classroom realities. Moreover, the data show a strong correlation between institutional support and teacher confidence in using CLT techniques, underscoring the need for more robust and directed professional development initiatives. It is recommended that future training programs not only emphasize the theoretical foundations of CLT but also provide hands-on, context-specific strategies for managing challenges such as large class sizes, limited teaching materials, and diverse learner needs. By identifying these critical areas for intervention, the study offers valuable insights to inform policy decisions and teacher education practices.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), ESL Teaching, Communicative Language

Introduction

In recent years, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has gained widespread attention as a learner-centered approach that emphasizes authentic communication, interaction, and meaningful use of language. CLT moves beyond rote memorization and grammar-based instruction, aiming instead to help learners develop communicative competence (Richards, 2006). In Malaysia, where English is a core subject at the secondary school level, the Ministry of Education has incorporated CLT principles into the national curriculum to enhance students' proficiency in English for real-life and academic contexts (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2013).

Despite these efforts, many Malaysian ESL teachers encounter difficulties in translating CLT theory into practice. Research indicates that while CLT is widely promoted, its successful implementation is hindered by various teacher-related and contextual factors (Nunan, 2003; Melor, 2020). For instance, some teachers misinterpret CLT as merely involving group work or casual communication activities, often due to insufficient training or lack of exposure to practical CLT applications (Karim, Mohamed, & Rahman, 2017). As a result, they may continue to rely on traditional teacher-centered methods that prioritize grammar accuracy and examination results over communicative ability.

The concept of teacher readiness plays a crucial role in determining the success of CLT implementation. Readiness encompasses not only theoretical knowledge of CLT, but also pedagogical skills, confidence, resource availability, and institutional support (Afshar & Doosti, 2016). Teachers who feel adequately trained and supported are more likely to engage students in interactive, meaningful language activities, whereas those facing systemic limitations such as large class sizes, rigid curricula, and high-stakes exams often revert to conventional teaching approaches (Azman, 2016).

This study aims to explore the factors influencing ESL teachers' readiness to implement CLT in Malaysian secondary schools. Specifically, it examines their understanding of CLT principles, the quality and frequency of professional development opportunities, and the extent to which school culture and leadership support communicative teaching practices. By identifying these factors, the study hopes to offer practical recommendations for improving teacher preparation and support systems, which are essential for aligning classroom practice with national educational goals.

Ultimately, strengthening teachers' readiness for CLT is expected to lead to more effective classroom practices, thereby enhancing students' communication skills, academic performance, and motivation to learn English. Such improvements contribute not only to individual student outcomes but also to broader educational and societal goals in multilingual Malaysia (Yamat, 2021; Subramaniam, 2022).

Objectives of the Study

The study sets forth several key objectives:

1. To evaluate Malaysian ESL teachers' understanding and knowledge of CLT principles.
2. To examine the key factors influencing secondary school teachers' readiness to implement Communication Language Teaching (CLT).
3. To develop and propose actionable strategies to enhance secondary school teachers' readiness for effective implementation of Communication Language Teaching (CLT).

Research Questions

In alignment with the stated objectives, the study aims to address the following research questions:

1. What is the level of understanding and knowledge of CLT principles among Malaysian ESL teachers?
2. What factors influence the readiness of Malaysian ESL teachers to implement CLT?

3. What strategies can be formulated to effectively enhance ESL teachers' readiness for CLT implementation?

Limitations of the Study

Despite the valuable insights provided, this study is not without its limitations. One significant constraint lies in the resource limitations faced during data collection, such as restricted access to diverse school settings or teaching materials, which may have influenced the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, large class sizes in many secondary schools posed a challenge in gathering in-depth qualitative data, as classroom observations and interactions were limited by time and logistical constraints. Another notable limitation is the insufficient training background of many participating teachers, which may have affected their ability to fully articulate or reflect on their experiences with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The reliance on self-reported data, including surveys and interviews, also introduces the possibility of response bias, where participants may overstate their familiarity or comfort with CLT practices.

Furthermore, the scope of this study was geographically limited, focusing primarily on urban and semi-urban schools, thereby excluding the potentially unique challenges faced by rural educators. These limitations suggest that while the findings offer meaningful contributions to understanding ESL teachers' readiness for CLT, further research with a broader sample and additional methodological approaches is needed to strengthen and expand upon these results.

Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has gained widespread attention as a learner-centered approach emphasizing purposeful interaction, autonomy, and communicative competence. In Malaysia, although the Ministry of Education has endorsed CLT through curriculum reforms, its effective implementation in secondary schools remains inconsistent (Raissi et al., 2013). Many ESL teachers misunderstand the principles of CLT, viewing it as equivalent to group work or as a deviation from traditional teaching rather than an integrated communicative pedagogy (Rahman, 2022). These misconceptions are often rooted in inadequate pre-service and in-service training and a lack of exposure to communicative methodologies (Khalid & Ahmad, 2023; Littlewood, 2023).

Despite favorable policy directions, numerous systemic barriers hinder the full adoption of CLT. Among the most significant are large class sizes, which reduce opportunities for meaningful interaction and restrict teachers' ability to facilitate communicative tasks (Hassan & Zulkifli, 2023). Moreover, a rigid, exam-oriented curriculum forces teachers to prioritize grammar instruction and rote learning over interactive language use (Yusof et al., 2022). These challenges are compounded by insufficient professional development programs that rarely offer practical strategies aligned with the realities of Malaysian classrooms (Shamsudin & Ahmad, 2023).

To overcome these barriers, teacher training must be restructured to include both theoretical underpinnings and practical applications of CLT. Studies suggest that effective training should integrate classroom simulations, collaborative lesson planning, and peer observations to equip teachers with realistic strategies for large, diverse classrooms (Mansor et al., 2022;

Zainal et al., 2023). Furthermore, continuous professional development focused on building CLT competencies fosters confidence and pedagogical flexibility, leading to more effective classroom implementation (Koh et al., 2023).

The Concerns-Based Adoption Model (CBAM) serves as a useful framework to understand teachers' readiness for implementing CLT. CBAM outlines seven stages of concern—ranging from awareness to refocusing that influence how educators adopt new pedagogical practices. In the Malaysian context, ESL teachers often remain in the early stages of this model due to lack of information and support (Rahman, 2022). Professional development tailored to the CBAM stages can effectively address these concerns by targeting specific implementation challenges and facilitating collaborative professional growth (Mansor et al., 2022; Koh et al., 2023; Hassan & Zulkifli, 2023).

In sum, Malaysian ESL teachers' readiness for CLT implementation is shaped by a complex interplay of educational policy, classroom realities, and professional development structures. Addressing this issue requires systemic reforms that align teacher training with the demands of communicative pedagogy and support teachers in moving through the stages of CBAM. By doing so, the Malaysian education system can better meet global expectations for communicative competence in English language education.

Methodology

The development of speech skills using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has brought major innovations to English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction, particularly in the Malaysian secondary school context. Despite these advantages, teachers encounter significant obstacles when integrating CLT into their classroom practices (Omar et al., 2021; Tan & Nasir, 2022). This study aims to assess ESL teachers' readiness to adopt CLT by employing a mixed-methods approach. The methodology outlined here includes research design, setting, sample, sampling techniques, procedures, data collection tools, and analysis methods, all of which are grounded in findings from the literature on CLT.

A mixed-methods design will be adopted to offer a comprehensive view of ESL teachers' readiness for CLT implementation. The quantitative component will involve a structured, closed-ended questionnaire gathering demographic information, prior CLT training, institutional support, and implementation challenges. The qualitative component will involve semi-structured interviews that allow for deeper insights into teachers' understanding of CLT principles and their perceived barriers to implementation (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2021).

The research will take place across a range of secondary schools in Malaysia, incorporating both urban and rural institutions. This diverse setting is crucial for capturing a representative sample and uncovering differences in resources, teacher development, and school environments (Hassan & Zulkifli, 2023). By drawing perspectives from varied contexts, the research can offer more nuanced conclusions on the readiness of ESL teachers for CLT.

The sample will include 200 ESL teachers from at least ten secondary schools across different states. The sample will reflect a balance of teachers from urban and rural schools to ensure representativeness. From this group, 20 teachers will be selected for follow-up interviews

based on variation in experience and exposure to CLT training. This dual sampling structure will enable both breadth and depth in the analysis.

Sampling

A stratified random sampling technique will be used to select survey participants, ensuring proportional representation from different school types and experience levels (Zainal et al., 2023). For the interviews, purposive sampling will be employed to select teachers with significant CLT-related experience or professional development, allowing for detailed, experience-based narratives. Research procedures will commence after receiving ethical clearance from the relevant institutional review boards. School principals will be contacted to obtain permission, and participants will be recruited voluntarily, with assurances of confidentiality. Survey questionnaires will be distributed either physically or digitally, depending on the school's preference, and interview sessions will be arranged at times convenient for the participants.

Two primary tools will be used for data collection. First, a structured questionnaire will assess demographic background, CLT knowledge, training exposure, institutional support, and perceived challenges, with questions developed based on previous research (see literature review). These data will be coded and prepared for statistical analysis. Second, semi-structured interviews will allow teachers to elaborate on their classroom practices, challenges, and interpretations of CLT (Khalid & Ahmad, 2023). These sessions will be recorded, transcribed, and subjected to thematic analysis.

The research instruments include:

A validated questionnaire rooted in prior studies and adapted to the Malaysian ESL context, and a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions to elicit personal experiences and challenges with CLT. Together, these tools will ensure a multi-layered understanding of teacher readiness.

Quantitative data will be analyzed using SPSS software, employing descriptive and inferential statistics such as frequency distributions, means, and correlation analyses to identify trends and relationships among variables (Mansor et al., 2022). Qualitative data will be examined through thematic analysis, categorizing recurring themes and responses from interview transcripts (Koh et al., 2023). The triangulation of both data types will allow for a richer, more comprehensive interpretation of the factors shaping ESL teachers' CLT readiness. In conclusion, this methodology is designed to address key gaps in the understanding of ESL teachers' readiness for CLT in Malaysian secondary schools. By integrating both quantitative and qualitative perspectives, the study aims to inform policy and teacher training practices that enhance communicative competence through effective CLT implementation.

Data Collection

Quantitative data from the questionnaires were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics via software such as SPSS. This analysis included the frequency distributions, means, and correlation tests to identify relationships between variables related to teachers' readiness (Mansor et al., 2022). Qualitative data from semi-structured interviews will undergo thematic analysis, highlighting recurring themes, challenges, and strategies as articulated by

participants (Koh et al., 2023). The integration of these analyses will produce a comprehensive understanding of the factors affecting ESL teachers' readiness for CLT.

This methodology aims to address critical gaps in understanding ESL teachers' readiness for implementing Communicative Language Teaching in Malaysian secondary schools. By triangulating quantitative and qualitative data, the research seeks to yield actionable insights into how teacher training and institutional support can enhance effective CLT practices, offering a pathway toward improved language learning outcomes.

Findings

The study sought to investigate the readiness of ESL teachers in Malaysian secondary schools to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Through the integration of quantitative data from surveys and qualitative data from in-depth interviews, several key findings emerged, illuminating the factors influencing teachers' preparedness and implementation practices.

T1: Teachers' Knowledge of CLT and Its Pedagogical Principles

Survey responses revealed varying levels of familiarity with the core principles of CLT. Only 45% of participants demonstrated a strong grasp of CLT concepts, with notable disparities based on teaching location—urban teachers generally reported greater confidence in their understanding compared to their rural counterparts. During interviews, teachers expressed uncertainty in applying CLT in practice, often citing the abstract nature of the theory and the limited exposure during their formal education. These insights suggest that although awareness of CLT exists, a deeper conceptual and practical understanding remains limited among a significant portion of ESL educators.

T2: The Impact of Professional Training and Development

The data pointed to a clear gap in targeted professional development. Only 40% of respondents indicated they had received formal training specifically related to CLT. Interview narratives echoed this concern, as participants noted that existing training programs were either too general or outdated. Many called for more structured, hands-on workshops and continuous learning opportunities tailored to the realities of Malaysian classrooms. The absence of such training was perceived as a major barrier to translating CLT theory into effective classroom practice.

T3: Institutional Support as a Predictor of Readiness

Findings also emphasized the role of institutional support in shaping teachers' readiness. Approximately 60% of teachers surveyed reported inadequate support in the form of teaching materials, training, and administrative encouragement. A moderate but significant positive correlation ($p = 0.43$, $p < 0.01$) was found between institutional backing and teachers' confidence in implementing CLT strategies. Interview participants described how resource limitations and a lack of recognition for innovative practices created a disconnect between their pedagogical intentions and actual classroom implementation.

T4: Challenges and Constraints in Classroom Contexts

Teachers widely reported that practical classroom realities such as large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and students' varying proficiency levels hindered their ability to use CLT

effectively. One teacher reflected, *“It’s difficult to adopt CLT practices when I have 40 students in a single class; it becomes challenging to foster interaction.”* These challenges often forced teachers to revert to more traditional, teacher-centered methods despite their preference for communicative approaches.

T5: Teacher Motivation and Perceived Student Outcomes

Despite the obstacles, many educators recognized the value of CLT in improving student engagement and communicative competence. Interview responses revealed that activities like group discussions and role plays fostered a more dynamic and interactive learning environment. One participant noted, *“When I use CLT activities, my students are more engaged, and they actually enjoy speaking English.”* This positive feedback loop where motivated teachers observed tangible student progress, was identified as a motivating factor for sustained use of CLT methods, even under less-than-ideal conditions.

T6: Recommendations for Future Implementation

A common theme across interviews was the need for systemic reform to facilitate CLT adoption. Teachers recommended a more CLT-aligned curriculum, better integration of speaking and listening assessments, and collaborative platforms for sharing best practices. The findings underscore the importance of not only preparing teachers but also transforming institutional structures to sustain CLT-based instruction.

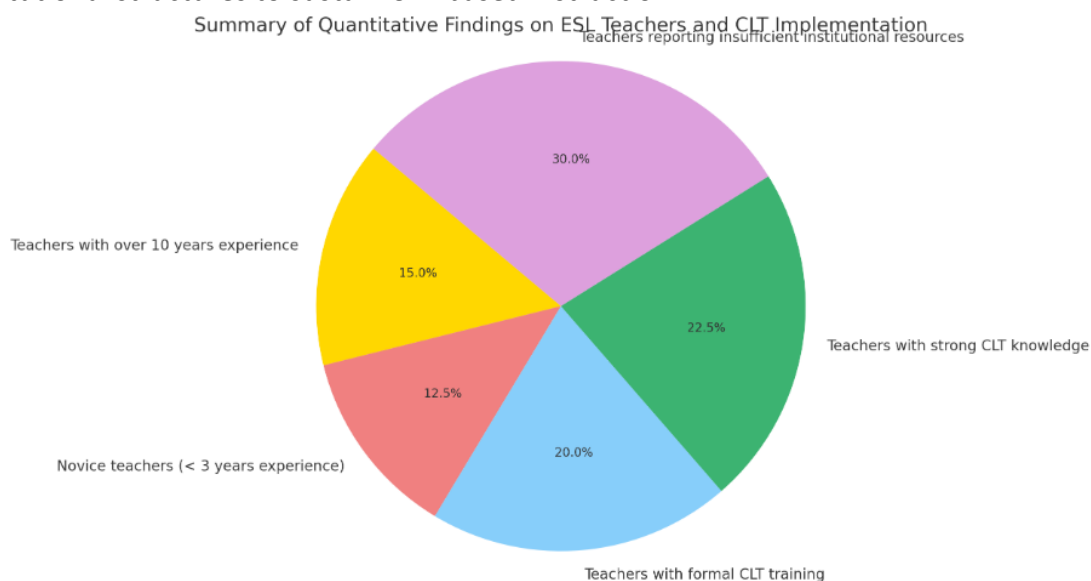


Figure 1.1

These findings indicate that although a subset of teachers possess strong CLT knowledge and experience, a considerable portion still lacks the necessary training and institutional support. This highlights the need for targeted training programs and increased resource allocation to better support CLT implementation in Malaysian secondary schools.

Conclusion

The exploration of ESL teachers' readiness to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Malaysian secondary schools reveals a nuanced landscape shaped by both enthusiasm and institutional limitations. While many educators' express optimism regarding CLT's potential to elevate student engagement and language acquisition, this sentiment is often undermined by significant gaps in formal training and the lack of systemic support. With only 40% of teachers having undergone formal CLT training, the urgent need for structured professional development becomes apparent. This includes not only theoretical instruction, but also practical strategies tailored to local classroom realities, echoing Fadilah and Jana's (2021) findings on the importance of ongoing teacher training.

Furthermore, the lack of institutional resources and administrative support presents a significant obstacle to the implementation of CLT. Schools must proactively allocate materials and support mechanisms to facilitate interactive, student-centered instruction, as emphasized by Rahman et al. (2022). The desire among teachers to embrace communicative methods is strong, reinforcing the need to shift away from traditional didactic models toward more collaborative, dynamic classrooms. Lee and Ng (2023) affirm that such interactive approaches significantly boost student motivation and language proficiency.

For these transformations to be sustainable, broader institutional reforms are essential. As Zainal et al. (2024) argue, systemic changes must include updated curricula, collaborative school cultures, and active policy engagement. Recommendations include establishing enhanced CLT training initiatives, improving resource provision through public-private partnerships (Balakrishnan & Chan, 2023), revising curricula to reflect communicative goals (Bakar et al., 2022), and promoting professional learning communities among teachers (Tan & Wong, 2024). Additionally, engaging students through structured feedback channels allows for greater responsiveness and learner ownership in the educational process (Mohamad & Lim, 2023).

From a reflective standpoint, it is evident that the dedication of ESL teachers is a cornerstone of any educational reform. Despite systemic challenges, many educators continue to find creative ways to make English learning meaningful. This research reinforces the importance of centering teacher voices in policy discourse and supporting them with compassion and collaboration. The motivation behind this study stems from a deep concern for the disconnect between policy expectations and classroom realities, particularly in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). By examining ESL teachers' readiness and the challenges they encounter, this study aims to highlight critical areas that require support and reform.

The contribution of this research lies in providing practical insights that can inform curriculum planners, policymakers, and professional development initiatives to better align with teachers' needs. Ultimately, while the journey toward effective CLT implementation is challenging, it is achievable through collective commitment, resource investment, and an unwavering belief in the transformative power of education. By addressing existing gaps and fostering a more supportive ecosystem, stakeholders can significantly improve English language instruction and better equip students for real-world communication demands in the 21st century.

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