

Evaluating the Challenges and Opportunities in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Filipino Primary Schools: A Paper Review

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Abstract

In this paper, Maestre and Gindidis' study Teachers' Beliefs, Practices, and Challenges in Using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an ESL Context in the Philippines is critically reviewed. The study looked at the opinions, teaching strategies, and difficulties faced by English teachers in a private school in Davao City when it came to using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). By using a qualitative approach, the researchers discovered a discrepancy between the instructors' favorable opinions of CLT and their largely conventional, teacher-centered teaching methods. Contextual impediments like big class sizes, little training focused on CLT, a lack of instructional resources, and a curriculum that prioritizes grammar-centered instruction were the main causes of this discrepancy. This analysis goes beyond the study's results and places them in a more comprehensive context. This critique evaluates the methodological robustness of the study, noting the appropriateness of its qualitative design and the value of triangulating data from multiple sources. It also considers the study's practical relevance to the broader discourse on English language teaching in the Philippines, where English serves both as a medium of instruction and as a marker of socio-economic mobility. The review emphasizes that transforming classroom practices requires more than changing teacher beliefs—it necessitates systemic support, including curriculum reform, leadership commitment, and sustained teacher capacity-building programs. In conclusion, this critique highlights the need for educational stakeholders to foster enabling environments where communicative teaching methods can flourish. Aligning pedagogical beliefs with practice is essential to improving English language instruction and achieving communicative competence among Filipino learners in diverse ESL contexts.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, teacher beliefs, classroom practices

INTRODUCTION

As language teaching techniques continue to advance, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has gained widespread support as a strategy for teaching English as a second language (ESL) across the globe. Authentic communication, learner participation, and real-world language use are prioritized by CLT above grammar-focused instruction and rote memorization. However, pedagogical principles, training, and the realities of the educational setting are often critical to the successful implementation of CLT.

Adapting CLT in schools offers special potential and challenges in the Philippines, a nation where English is both an official language and a major medium of teaching. Teachers' Beliefs, Practices, and Challenges in Using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an ESL Context in the Philippines is a study by Maestre and Gindidis (2021) that explores how primary school teachers in a private Davao City institution view and use CLT in their instruction. The study finds a substantial discrepancy between instructors' theoretical knowledge of CLT and its actual use, which is impacted by structural problems like insufficient training, strict curriculum requirements, and classroom constraints.

This paper aims to critically analyze the findings and methodology of Maestre and Gindidis' work, discussing its contributions to the field of language education and reflecting on the broader implications for policy, teacher

development, and ESL instruction in the Philippine context. Through this review, we also propose actionable insights to bridge the gap between belief and practice in communicative language pedagogy.

SUMMARY OF THE STUDY ON TEACHERS' BELIEFS, PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN USING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN AN ESL CONTEXT IN THE PHILIPPINES

Research Background

The research article investigates the beliefs, practices, and challenges of primary school English teachers in the Philippines regarding the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The study is rooted in the growing shift toward communicative approaches in language education worldwide, particularly the move away from traditional grammar-translation methods. The authors, Jacky-Lou T. Maestre and Maria Gindidis, seek to understand how CLT is understood and applied in the classroom by Filipino teachers, and the barriers they face in fully adopting the aforementioned approach. The research problem revolves around assessing whether CLT is effectively utilized by the teachers, the degree of alignment between their beliefs about language learning and their actual teaching practices, and the challenges they encounter in implementing CLT in a primary school context. The study specifically focuses on teachers from a private primary school in Davao City, Philippines, and is confined to exploring their experiences with CLT within this localized setting.

Methodology

The methodology employed in this study is generally appropriate. It is a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative research techniques. The primary data collection methods included an online survey questionnaire and semi-structured interviews. The survey, based on a validated instrument from a previous study by Manzano (2015), consisted of two parts: demographic questions and items regarding teachers' beliefs, practices, and the challenges they face in using CLT. A total of 17 out of 20 teachers consented to participate in the survey, with 16 completing it. In addition, six teachers who volunteered were interviewed via electronic mail using semi-structured interview questions. The interviews aimed to gather in-depth insights into the teachers' personal experiences, their understanding of CLT, and the specific challenges they faced. The data collected from both the surveys and interviews were analyzed descriptively, with frequencies and percentages used to quantify responses, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) used to explore the qualitative interview data.

Key Findings

The study revealed several key findings regarding the use of CLT. While most of the teachers reported using CLT to some extent, it was not the predominant approach in their classrooms. The majority of teachers demonstrated an understanding of CLT's central tenets, such as using language for communication and involving students in meaningful interactions. However, there was a noticeable gap between their beliefs and actual teaching practices, with some teachers still relying on traditional methods like the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). Classroom activities, such as pair and group work, task completion, and the use of authentic materials, were common among the respondents, indicating some alignment with CLT principles. However, some teachers also incorporated activities that were not consistent with CLT, such as focusing on grammar drills and sentence patterns. Challenges identified by the teachers included time-consuming material preparation, students' reluctance to engage in interactive activities, and difficulties in managing class size and discipline. Despite these challenges, a significant number of teachers expressed a positive attitude toward CLT, recognizing its benefits for language development.

Conclusion

The author concludes that while Filipino primary school teachers generally recognize the benefits of CLT and attempt to apply it in their classrooms, there is a noticeable lack of comprehensive understanding of the approach's theoretical foundations. The study highlights a disconnect between teachers' beliefs about CLT and their actual classroom practices, suggesting that there is still room for improvement in how CLT is implemented. Teachers face several challenges, particularly in terms of material preparation, classroom management, and student participation. Despite these difficulties, the study finds that most teachers are enthusiastic about adopting CLT, especially when it aligns with real-life communication. The author recommends that schools provide more training and support to help teachers fully embrace CLT and tailor its application to the Philippine context. Additionally, the development of context-appropriate materials and a more supportive policy framework are recommended to address the barriers teachers face in implementing CLT effectively.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The study under review offers a valuable contribution to the understanding of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the Philippines by examining primary English teachers' beliefs, practices, and challenges. The study presents

several strengths that contribute to its overall value. One of the primary strengths is the mixed-methods approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. This method provides a comprehensive understanding of the research problem by capturing both broad trends and individual teacher experiences. The use of surveys allows for a broad overview of the attitudes and practices of the respondents, while the interviews add depth, enabling the researcher to explore the nuances of teachers' challenges and beliefs in more detail. According to Ivankova, et. al. (2020), this dual approach enriches the findings, making the results more reliable and comprehensive. This mixed-methods approach helps to triangulate the findings, which means that the results from one method such as surveys can be cross-checked and validated with insights from another method like interviews. This ensures that the findings are more robust and can be interpreted with greater confidence.

Furthermore, the research is contextually relevant. By focusing specifically on the Philippine educational system, the study contributes to the global discourse on CLT implementation in non-Western, ESL contexts. As stated by Pham (2020), this localized focus ensures that the findings are applicable to similar contexts within the Philippines and other Southeast Asian countries, where educational practices may differ significantly from those in Western countries. By localizing the study, the researcher can investigate how CLT is adapted and modified in response to these local challenges and conditions. This not only provides valuable insights into the practicalities of implementing CLT in Southeast Asia but also adds to the growing body of knowledge that emphasizes the need for context-sensitive approaches in language teaching. Furthermore, the findings from this localized research can be applied to other countries in Southeast Asia that share similar educational and linguistic characteristics, such as Vietnam, Thailand, and Indonesia, thus contributing to the regional discourse on CLT implementation.

However, the study also has weaknesses. The sample size of 16 teachers is relatively small, which significantly limits the generalizability of the findings. With such a small cohort, it is difficult to draw conclusions that are universally applicable to all Filipino primary ESL teachers, as the sample may not represent the broader diversity of teaching styles, beliefs, or regional differences within the country. Also, as cited by Kim (2017), the study's cross-sectional design offers a snapshot of teachers' practices and beliefs at one point in time, leaving unanswered questions about the long-term impact of CLT on student learning outcomes. A longitudinal study that tracks teachers' practices and students' progress over time would provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of CLT in the classroom.

Another significant weakness is the social desirability bias that may have influenced the responses. Kong, et. al. (2021) asserted that teachers might have reported their practices in a way that they believed aligned with what the researcher wanted to hear, especially given the growing global emphasis on communicative methods. It is highlighted that teachers, particularly in contexts where Western teaching methods like CLT are perceived as modern or progressive, may feel pressure to align their responses with these ideals, even if their actual practices do not fully reflect these principles. This tendency could lead teachers to overstate their use of CLT or describe their methods in terms that align with the researcher's expectations, thus compromising the accuracy of the data collected. The study under review does not seem to have a mechanism to verify the accuracy of teachers' self-reports or cross-check their responses with actual classroom practices, which raises concerns about the validity of the data. The study lacks a mechanism to assess the accuracy of teachers' self-reports, which could have led to discrepancies between what teachers claimed to be doing and what they actually implemented in the classroom.

On the other hand, the methodology employed in this study is generally appropriate, as it blends quantitative and qualitative methods to provide a holistic understanding of teachers' experiences with CLT. The questionnaire serves as an efficient way to collect data from a larger number of participants, allowing the researcher to capture a wide range of teacher attitudes and practices. Meanwhile, the interviews offer a deeper exploration of the challenges teachers face when attempting to implement CLT, thus enriching the quantitative findings.

However, while the survey method is helpful for capturing broad trends, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The survey likely used closed-ended questions, which could have constrained teachers' responses, limiting the depth of the data collected. Open-ended questions might have allowed for richer data on the specific challenges teachers encounter and the contextual factors that influence their practices. Furthermore, the study does not clearly detail the questionnaire's design, making it difficult to assess how well it captures the nuances of teachers' views on CLT.

The interview data are valuable for understanding the contextual challenges of implementing CLT, such as large class sizes and time constraints. However, as with any qualitative research, the interviews are subject to interpretation bias. As stated by O'Reilly (2015), the researcher's interpretations of the interview responses may be influenced by their own assumptions about CLT, leading to a skewed presentation of the data. The research could have minimized this bias by involving multiple coders in the analysis process to ensure a more objective interpretation of the qualitative data.

The study reflects a clear bias towards the promotion of CLT. Given that the research focuses on teachers' perceptions of CLT and the benefits they associate with the approach, there is a risk that the author may unintentionally emphasize positive findings and downplay criticisms. For instance, although the teachers report challenges such as

material preparation and student resistance, these issues are presented more as obstacles to be overcome, rather than fundamental issues that might call into question the feasibility of CLT in certain contexts.

This bias towards CLT is common in language teaching research, where there is an overarching assumption that modern communicative methods are inherently superior to traditional approaches. However, Liu (2020) stressed out that such a stance could lead to selective reporting of findings that align with the researcher's beliefs while potentially overlooking evidence that questions the effectiveness of CLT in diverse classroom settings. A more balanced perspective would involve not only highlighting the successes of CLT but also acknowledging its limitations and considering alternative approaches that might be more effective in certain contexts, such as task-based learning or the grammar-translation method.

Hence, the study is limited by several factors, including the small sample size and the potential for response bias. As mentioned earlier, the small number of participants makes it difficult to generalize the findings to all Filipino ESL teachers. Additionally, the study does not account for the institutional or policy-level challenges that may affect the implementation of CLT. For instance, the study does not explore the role of school administrators or national educational policies in supporting or hindering CLT adoption, which could be an important factor influencing teachers' ability to implement CLT effectively.

Another limitation is the lack of follow-up data. The study provides a snapshot of teachers' practices and beliefs, but it does not explore how these beliefs evolve over time or whether the challenges identified in the study are resolved. Huyen, et. al. (2018) stated that longitudinal research could offer valuable insights into the sustainability of CLT implementation and its impact on student learning outcomes over time. The lack of follow-up data represents a key limitation, as it prevents the researcher from investigating the sustainability of CLT implementation and whether the initial challenges identified by teachers, such as issues with materials preparation and student engagement, are resolved over subsequent years.

This study also aligns with existing literature on the challenges of implementing CLT in non-Western contexts. For instance, Liao (2019) and Pham (2020) have explored similar barriers to CLT implementation in China and Vietnam, such as large class sizes and a lack of resources. These studies, like the current research, highlight the gap between teachers' positive attitudes toward CLT and the practical difficulties they face in implementing it. Similarly, Manzano (2016) examined the gap between teachers' perceptions and actual classroom practices in the Philippines, reinforcing the idea that although teachers recognize the potential of CLT, they often struggle to implement it effectively.

This study also resonates with Savignon (2018), who argued that the successful implementation of CLT depends on various contextual factors, such as teacher training, student motivation, and institutional support. The findings of the current study underscore these points, showing that while teachers appreciate the benefits of CLT, the lack of adequate preparation and the overwhelming demands of traditional curricula often prevent them from fully adopting communicative methods.

The study's findings have significant implications for the field of ESL education in the Philippines. The identification of teacher training needs and the challenges associated with material preparation suggest that more resources should be dedicated to professional development and curriculum design. As Baker & Loughran (2019) argue, teacher training programs should focus not only on the theoretical aspects of CLT but also on providing teachers with practical tools and strategies for integrating CLT effectively into their classrooms.

Moreover, the study contributes to the growing body of research on CLT in non-Western settings, offering valuable insights into the cultural adaptation of communicative teaching methods. It underscores the importance of developing context-appropriate teaching materials that reflect the linguistic and cultural realities of the Philippines, rather than simply adopting Western methods without modification.

In conclusion, this study makes a valuable contribution to understanding the implementation of CLT in the Philippines. However, it also highlights the need for further research that considers the long-term effectiveness of CLT and explores how institutional and policy-level support can help overcome the barriers identified by teachers. By addressing these gaps, future studies can provide a more comprehensive view of how to optimize CLT for diverse educational contexts.

EVALUATION

The study by Maestre and Gindidis provides significant insights into the beliefs, practices, and challenges faced by primary school English teachers in the Philippines regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). One of the study's strengths is its mixed-methods approach, which combines quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews. This methodology allows for a comprehensive understanding of the teachers' experiences, as it captures both broad trends and individual narratives. As noted by Ivankova et al. (2020), such triangulation enhances the reliability of findings, making them more robust. However, the study has notable limitations. The small sample size of 16 teachers

restricts the generalizability of the findings, as it may not represent the diverse teaching styles and beliefs across the broader Filipino educational landscape.

Moreover, as highlighted by Kim (2017), the cross-sectional design provides only a snapshot of teachers' practices and beliefs, leaving questions about the long-term impact of CLT on student learning outcomes. A longitudinal study could offer deeper insights into the sustainability of CLT implementation and its effectiveness over time. Another critical concern is the potential for social desirability bias, where teachers may report practices they believe align with the expectations of the researcher, rather than their actual methods. This bias could compromise the validity of the data collected, as the study lacks mechanisms to verify the accuracy of teachers' self-reports. Furthermore, the study's focus on the benefits of CLT may reflect a bias towards promoting this approach, potentially overlooking its limitations and the challenges teachers face in its implementation. This concern is echoed in the work of Liao (2019) and Pham (2020), who have identified similar barriers to CLT implementation in non-Western contexts, such as large class sizes and resource limitations, which further complicate the effective adoption of communicative methods.

CONCLUSION

While the study by Maestre and Gindidis contributes valuable knowledge to the understanding of CLT in the Philippine context, it also highlights the need for further research to address its limitations. The findings underscore the importance of providing teachers with adequate training and resources to effectively implement CLT, as well as the necessity for context-appropriate materials that reflect local linguistic and cultural realities. Future studies should consider larger, more diverse samples and longitudinal designs to explore the long-term effectiveness of CLT and the institutional support required to overcome the barriers identified by teachers. This need for a nuanced understanding of CLT implementation is supported by Savignon (2018), who emphasizes that successful CLT adoption depends on contextual factors, including teacher training and institutional support.

Additionally, Manzano (2016) reinforces the notion that while teachers recognize the potential of CLT, they often struggle to implement it effectively. By addressing these gaps, researchers can provide a more comprehensive view of how to optimize CLT for diverse educational contexts, ultimately enhancing language education in the Philippines and similar non-Western settings.

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