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Jean Bosco Ntirenganya  
*Minnesota State University - Mankato*

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Rwandan University EFL Teachers' Perceived Difficulties in Implementing  
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

By Jean Bosco Ntirenganya

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Arts  
in  
English  
Teaching English as a Second Language

Minnesota State University, Mankato

Mankato, Minnesota

July 2015

Date: July 10<sup>th</sup>, 2015

This thesis paper has been examined and approved.

Examining Committee:

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Dr. Glen T. Poupore, Chairperson

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Dr. Sarah A. Henderson Lee, Committee Member

## Abstract

This thesis examines Rwandan University EFL teachers' perceived difficulties in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The data were collected using an online survey questionnaire that was completed by 16 teachers. The results indicated that participants faced several challenges including overly large classes, students' lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom, the students' tendency to always use their L1 in pair and group work, students' passive learning style and dependence on the teacher, students' low proficiency level in English, insufficient time allotted to English, and teachers' little time to develop CLT materials mainly due to a large number of students taught and heavy workloads. In addition to these problematic issues that were generally rated as important problems (each with a mean rating of at least 3.50 out of 5), the study showed that the issues of English not being given the same value as other subjects and a lack of teaching facilities, equipment, and materials were also challenging at some universities. Based on the study findings and the participants' suggestions, the Government of Rwanda, the Ministry of Education, and colleges should 1) train enough teachers of English and provide regular in-service training opportunities to practicing teachers, 2) avail enough language teaching facilities, equipment, and materials, 3) promote the use of CLT from early levels of education, and 4) reduce the number of students in language classes. Teachers can also use various strategies to minimize different problematic issues encountered in the implementation of CLT.

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## **Dedication**

To:

My Beloved Gaudence Uwamahoro, Ora Anna Ihimbazwe, and Amati Ishimo Migisha

My parents, brothers, sisters, and in-laws

Copyright© Jean Bosco Ntirenganya

Minnesota State University, Mankato

July 2015

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## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Language teaching methodology is of paramount importance for successful learning to take place. That is probably one of the reasons why there has been various teaching methodologies as different language teaching and other education experts keep thinking about which teaching procedures and techniques work well in second language teaching and learning. Accordingly, English language teaching has been characterized by different language teaching approaches and methodologies over time. Some of the more recent and well-known methodologies include audiolingualism, grammar-translation, and communicative language teaching (CLT). It can be argued that different changes and innovations having characterized the evolution of English language teaching are always due to advantages, disadvantages, benefits, or challenges of a given approach or combination of approaches.

In more recent years, the continuously growing demand for good communication skills in English has led to different efforts and innovations to help learners become competent users of the language. One such innovation has been the shift from emphasizing discrete-point grammar teaching toward making communication the focus of language teaching. As Richards (2006) points out, that change in language teaching has been characterized by the introduction and a widespread adoption of communicative language teaching, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s. Richards indicates that institutions and teachers all over the world were influenced by the approach and revised their teaching, syllabuses, as well as classroom materials.

However, as CLT originated from contexts where English is a native language

(also known as situations where English is a Second Language – ESL contexts), its characteristics and principles were developed primarily considering such contexts. Therefore, there may be different challenges in the implementation of the approach in several countries where English is not a native language, also known as English as a Foreign Language or EFL situations (this is discussed further under “Difficulties in Implementing CLT in EFL Contexts” in the second chapter of this paper).

Despite some potential challenges of CLT, the following sentence from Hiep (2007, p. 193) suggests that benefits of this teaching approach may outweigh its challenges: “When CLT theory is put into action in a particular context, a range of issues open up, but these issues do not necessarily negate the potential usefulness of CLT.” Therefore, research studies like the present one are necessary to investigate various issues around the evolution and implementation of CLT so that necessary measures may be taken in case there are any problems that need to be dealt with. Before elaborating on this area of inquiry in more detail, the following section gives an overview of important terms and variables that will be used in this study.

### **Definitions and Discussion of Important Concepts**

Some terms will be frequently used in this study. These include communicative competence, fluency, accuracy, focus on meaning, focus on form(s), and communicative language teaching (CLT). Therefore, these concepts are defined and briefly discussed in the next sub-sections.

**Communicative competence.** Over time, some of the driving forces behind different language teaching theories and methodologies have been how scholars and education policy makers conceive and define language and what knowing a language

involves or requires. Directions followed in language teaching also depend on what scholars and policy makers advocate for as goals to attain and appropriate techniques to achieve those goals. In the same vein, perhaps one of the most important stages of the evolution of CLT was the introduction of *communicative competence*, a concept which stresses that being able to communicate in a language requires more than just knowing grammar rules of that language. The notion of communicative competence was introduced by Hymes (1972) in reaction to how language was viewed and explained up to the late 1960s and the early 1970s. He specifically coined the term in reaction to Chomsky's (1965) strict emphasis on linguistic competence. Hymes stressed that knowing a language requires not only knowing its grammar rules, but also knowing the rules and conventions of how language is used appropriately in different contexts. For example, a competent communicator is expected to know "when to speak, when not, what to talk about with whom, when, where and in what manner" (Hymes, 1972, p. 277). In line with Hymes' belief about the appropriateness of language use in a variety of social situations, other scholars proposed their different models of communicative competence (e.g., Bachman & Palmer, 1996; Canale & Swain, 1980; Canale, 1983; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, & Thurell, 1995). All these scholars' different models of communicative competence generally accentuate that knowing a language involves more than just knowing its grammatical rules.

Despite some criticisms and modifications, perhaps the model of communicative competence proposed by Canale and Swain (1980) and further elaborated by Canale (1983) is the most well-known, and, according to Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurell (1993), has been very influential on subsequent studies on major components of

communicative competence. The model maintains that communicative competence is comprised of four areas of knowledge and skill, namely, grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence:

1. *Grammatical competence* - the knowledge of the language code (grammatical rules, vocabulary, pronunciation, spelling, etc.).
2. *Sociolinguistic competence* - the mastery of the sociocultural code of language use (appropriate application of vocabulary, register, politeness and style in a given situation).
3. *Discourse competence* - the ability to combine language structures into different types of cohesive texts (e.g., political speech, poetry).
4. *Strategic competence* - the knowledge of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies which enhance the efficiency of communication and, where necessary, enable the learner to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur. (Celce-Murcia et al., 1995, p. 7)

**Fluency versus accuracy.** As Richards (2006) explains, one of the goals of CLT is to promote learners' development of fluency in language use. He defines fluency as "natural language use occurring when a speaker engages in meaningful interaction and maintains comprehensible and ongoing communication despite limitations in his or her communicative competence" (p. 14). Richards adds that activities that help learners to develop their fluency in language use are those in which they "must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns" (Richards, 2006, p. 14).

In contrast, Richards (2006) points out that learning activities aiming at accuracy



development emphasize on “creating correct examples of language use” (p. 14). In brief, fluency has to do with smoothness or continuous flow of communication while accuracy involves correct usage of language in communication.

Richards also gives a summary of the differences between activities that focus on fluency and those that focus on accuracy as follows:

Activities focusing on fluency

- Reflect natural use of language
- Focus on achieving communication
- Require meaningful use of language
- Require the use of communication strategies
- Produce language that may not be predictable
- Seek to link language use to context

Activities focusing on accuracy

- Reflect classroom use of language
- Focus on the formation of correct examples of language
- Practice language out of context
- Practice small samples of language
- Do not require meaningful communication
- Control choice of language (Richards, 2006, p. 14)

**Focus on meaning versus focus on form(s).** Focusing on meaning and focusing on forms are two other concepts that are closely related to the distinction between fluency development and accuracy development. As Littlewood (2004) indicates, activities that involve focusing on forms are those in which the target is “focusing on the structures of

language, how they are formed and what they mean, e.g. substitution exercises, ‘discovery’ and awareness-raising activities” (p. 322). On the contrary, as Littlewood explains, activities in which there is a focus on meaning primarily require students to communicate messages. In such situations, the forms to be used in the accomplishment of the activities are unpredictable. Examples of meaning-based activities include discussions, problem-solving activities, and creative role-plays. Coming back to the distinction between fluency and accuracy, meaning-based activities mainly help students to develop their fluency, while form-based activities help them to develop their accuracy.

Furthermore, there is a distinction between focusing on forms and focusing on form. On the one hand, Sheen (2003) states that focusing on forms “... is equated to the traditional teaching of discrete points of grammar in separate lessons” (p. 225). In other words, instructional programs or syllabuses with a *focus on forms* are based on a series of language structures to be covered one after another (e.g., nouns, pronouns, verb tenses, direct speech and indirect speech, and so on). On the other hand, a *focus on form* style of teaching involves raising the students’ awareness of particular structures based on their need for those structures in the accomplishment of communicative activities. One of the situations in which it is said that there is a *focus on form* is when the teacher “overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication” (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46 ). Another case of focus on form is when linguistic structures are taught to provide learners with knowledge about how to use the structures correctly before, during or after the accomplishment of a communicative task or activity (Ellis, 2013). The topic of focusing on form in communicative language teaching will be discussed again under the section on

task-based language teaching.

**Communicative language teaching (CLT).** CLT is a language teaching approach generally based on the principle that the main goal of language use and learning is communication. It was introduced in the early 1970s by American and British scholars “to promote the teaching of usable communication skills in L2 instruction” (Dörnyei, 2013, p. 162). CLT was adopted in reaction to grammar-based methodologies such as Audiolingualism (in North America) and Situational Language Teaching (in the United Kingdom) that were popular up to the late 1960s (Richards, 2006). As Richards points out, within those language teaching methodologies, grammatical competence was considered as the foundation of language proficiency. Accordingly, the main objective of language teaching was to equip learners with a strong knowledge of grammatical patterns and sentence structures and how to create these effectively in appropriate situations. Consequently, students were provided with grammar rules and then given opportunities for practice through techniques such as repetition and memorization of sentences, grammatical patterns, and dialogs. Nevertheless, the belief that focusing on individual language forms leads to learning and automatization was no longer widely accepted in linguistics and psychology in the late 1960s. Therefore, this led to a shift from grammar-based language teaching toward communication-based language teaching. It was within this context that English language teaching saw the introduction of CLT. Contrary to grammar-based teaching approaches, CLT emphasizes that language has to be taught through “real-life situations that necessitate communication” (Brandl, 2008, p. 5). According to CLT proponents, when learners take part in pair or group discussions and negotiate meaning, that is, ask for clarification, request confirmation of what they think

they have understood, or rephrase their utterances to make themselves understood, it is assumed that they unconsciously develop their communicative competence or ability (Dörnyei, 2013). In other words, with CLT, communication becomes both the ultimate goal and the means of language teaching and learning.

*Characteristics and principles of CLT.* As it has been mentioned before, the primary goal of learning a second/foreign language is to develop the ability to communicate effectively in that language. In the same perspective, the fundamental principle of CLT is to enable language learners to understand and use the target language for communication. One of the characteristics of CLT is that language is viewed and taught as a means of communication to express meaning. In their discussion of ‘theory of language,’ Richards and Rodgers (2001) give a list of characteristics that explain the communicative view of language as follows:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse. (p. 161)

In brief, these characteristics illustrate how CLT proponents view language as a means of communicating messages and believe that language is above all a tool used to transfer, understand and respond to messages.

In line with emphasizing that language should be viewed as a means of expressing meaning, CLT supporters also believe that the best way to teach a language is to provide

learners with significant opportunities to communicate in that language (Richards, 2006).

Richards lists some principles of CLT methodology as follows:

- Make real communication the focus of language learning.
- Provide opportunities for learners to experiment and try out what they know.
- Be tolerant of learners' errors as they indicate that the learner is building up his or her communicative competence.
- Provide opportunities for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency.
- Link the different skills such as speaking, reading, and listening together, since they usually occur so in the real world.
- Let students induce or discover grammar rules. (p. 13)

Similarly, Brandl (2008) argues that though there have never been any models that can be regarded as universally accepted, scholars have some agreement about the main characteristics of CLT. Such characteristics are given by Wesche and Skehan (2002) as follows:

- Activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems.
- Use of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to "real-world" contexts, often emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels.
- Approaches that are learner centered in that they take into account learners' backgrounds, language needs, and goals and generally allow learners some creativity and role in instructional decisions. (Wesche & Skehan, 2002, p. 208)

From the examples above, it is clear that different scholars have various opinions

on what can be considered as characteristics or guiding principles of second/foreign language teaching within the context of CLT. However, a good number of elements mentioned by different authors having written about principles and characteristics of CLT are common, or at least lead toward the same direction. Among those elements, we can cite the following: emphasizing real life communication and involving learners in communicative activities; using authentic materials in classroom activities; aiming at both fluency and accuracy; accepting errors as a positive sign of language learning and development, and avoiding frequent error correction as this would obstruct development of fluency; focusing on all the components of communicative competence and not on grammatical or linguistic competence only; as well as concentrating on all the four language skills, namely, listening, reading, speaking and writing, usually in an integrative manner.

*Communicative language learning activities.* The change of focus in language teaching from aiming at enabling learners to master language forms toward emphasizing communication goes hand in hand with selecting or designing appropriate learning materials and activities that promote communicative competence. As Richards and Rodgers (2001) point out, there is no limit in what can be regarded as a communicative activity, provided that the activity allows learners to use and understand their target language in communication:

The range of exercise types and activities compatible with a communicative approach is unlimited, provided that such exercises enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage learners in communication, and require the use of such communicative processes as information sharing,

negotiation of meaning, and interaction. (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 165)

Hu (2002) gives examples of activities that are usually used in a CLT classroom: information gap, problem solving, discussion, role-play, simulation, improvisation, debating, survey, project work, and language games. All these activities enable learners to engage in communication and negotiate meaning.

*Learners' and teachers' roles in CLT.* The focus of CLT on communication and communicative competence requires matching learners' and teachers' roles with such an endeavor. Richards (2006) states that learners are expected to participate in their language learning process instead of solely receiving instruction from the teacher. In other words, learners have to be actively involved in their language learning. Hu (2002) states that learners cease to be passive receivers of knowledge and performers of teacher directions and become "negotiators, communicators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information" (p. 95). In the same vein, Hu adds that the preferable learning style is collaborative learning through pair and group work as this enables learners to share information and help each other to perform communicative tasks and achieve their learning goals.

With CLT, the teacher is no longer a model for correct speech and writing, or the master in charge of making sure that students produce error-free sentences; he or she becomes a facilitator and monitor of the language learning process (Richards, 2006). Similarly, Richards and Rodgers (2001) describe the teacher in the CLT context as a needs analyst, counselor, and group process manager. First, the teacher fulfills the responsibility of the needs analyst by assessing and responding to the learners' needs in language learning. It is the teacher's role to know his or her learners' motivation for

learning, learning styles, and preferences. Then after gathering information about his or her students' learning motivations, styles, preferences, and needs, the teacher designs lessons in which he or she addresses both group and individual needs. As a counselor, the teacher gives advice to students and assists them to advance in their learning process. As a group process manager, the teacher first organizes the classroom into an adequate environment for communication and communicative activities. Then, during an activity, as Richards and Rodgers (2001) add, the teacher observes his or her learners' performance, encourages them, and takes notes on gaps in vocabulary, grammar, and communication flow for later feedback and communicative practice. Finally, at the end of the activity, the teacher takes time to assess or reflect on the learning activity process together with students.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Although CLT is a widespread teaching approach all over the world, studies have shown that teachers of English in EFL contexts encounter various challenges in their use of this language teaching approach. As it will be discussed in the literature review, studies on difficulties encountered in the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts have been conducted in different parts of the world, but little is known about what the situation is in African countries. Therefore, it is necessary to find out what problems teachers may be facing in their implementation of CLT in that part of the world as well. Particularly, Rwanda is a special case for study because of various factors including the historical background of English language teaching and use in the country. For example, until 1994, English was only a class subject in some options and majors at high school and university/college level. This was due to the fact that Rwanda was colonized by Belgium,



which is a French-speaking country and thus promoted the use of French in different official sectors including education. French remained a dominant language even after Rwanda became independent in 1962 (Rosendal, 2009; Samuelson & Freedman, 2010).

The language policy in Rwanda had to change after the 1994 repatriation of Rwandan refugees who had been living in both Anglophone and Francophone countries since the late 1950s and early 1960s. The situation at hand made it mandatory to have English as an important language in the Rwandan educational system along with French. Particularly, at the university level there was a parallel teaching and use of both French and English as languages of instruction until the end of the academic year 2008, when the government of Rwanda declared English as the only medium of instruction starting from 2009.

In addition to the fact that English became a considerably valued language in the Rwandan educational system, there are other factors that made it interesting to gather information about the challenges encountered in the implementation of CLT. These include availability of infrastructure and other teaching resources; having a mainly monolingual society (with Kinyarwanda being a common language among almost all Rwandans as it will be discussed below); a lack of opportunities for students to practice English outside the classroom; and teachers' educational backgrounds as students and /or teachers.

To begin with, as Rwanda is a developing country which has also passed through very hard times because of wars and genocide, the country has limited education infrastructure and equipment. Besides, the promotion of the policy of "education for all" to make it possible for all Rwandans or the majority of the population to have access to

education leads to an issue of large classes. The cause of that problem is that this policy mostly does not match the availability of resources, including infrastructure as well as qualified teachers.

Another probable issue that could affect the implementation of CLT in Rwanda is having one common native language, Kinyarwanda, which is shared by the majority of Rwandans. The language is spoken by up to 99.4% of the Rwandan population while English is known by only 1.9% of the population (Rosendal, 2009). In addition to having one common language, opportunities to interact with native speakers of English are very rare or even completely inexistent. As far as teachers' educational backgrounds are concerned, as students and/or teachers, some may have done their studies and professional training in a grammar-based educational system in which the main focus was passing exams of English, which were also mainly grammar-based. For such teachers, CLT may be a new term or would not be a preferred teaching approach.

Briefly, in addition to the commonly known or well researched challenges in implementing CLT in EFL contexts, several factors make Rwanda an interesting setting of research in this topic area. One of those factors is the uniqueness of the Rwandan educational context and language policy, with English having received a special attention as a medium of instruction along with French since 1994, and as a sole medium of instruction starting from 2009 (particularly in middle and high school as well as at university). Given the fact that Rwanda is a developing country with a variety of socio-economic challenges, it becomes captivating to find out more about English language teaching in the country. That is why the present study aimed to investigate the problems encountered by teachers of English at Rwandan universities in their use of CLT.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Though CLT is a teaching approach that may be new to some teachers, and while there is not enough literature about the use of this teaching approach in Rwanda, Uwamahoro (2014) found that teachers are aware of this teaching approach and have positive attitudes toward it. In her study, Uwamahoro collected data from 16 teachers at 10 different universities/colleges all over the country. The data were collected using an online survey questionnaire. In the discussion of the study's findings, she points out that some of her participants may have mainly learned about CLT while studying in English-speaking countries such as the United States of America. As Uwamahoro's (2014) study was one of the first studies on CLT in Rwanda, if not the very first, more studies are necessary in order to know more about this language teaching approach.

Referring to studies that have been conducted in other EFL contexts such as China (Hu, 2002), Iran (Kalanzadeh, Mirchenari, & Bakhtiarvand, 2013), South Korea (Li, 1998), Taiwan (Chang & Goswami, 2011), and Vietnam (Hiep, 2007), the present study aims to find out perceived problems in the implementation of CLT in Rwanda, the seriousness of the problems, and what teachers think can be done to deal with or to solve those problems.

### **Significance of the Study**

The present study sought to gather information about problems that Rwandan teachers of English encounter in the implementation of CLT at the university/college level. Although English is a highly valued language in Rwanda as it has been mentioned before, little is still known about the teaching of the language in the country. Therefore, this study will serve as a source of information about this, particularly the challenges

encountered in the implementation of CLT. In addition to being a source of information, the study also provides some recommendations suggested by both the participants in the study and the researcher to alleviate or totally eliminate the challenges. Those suggestions can be used by different education stakeholders in Rwanda and in similar contexts as well as researchers who may be interested in the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts. In other words, the findings and suggestions in this study will contribute to the advancement of English language teaching in Rwanda and similar situations.

### **Research Questions**

The present study aimed to investigate difficulties encountered by Rwandan teachers of English at university in their implementation of CLT and their suggested solutions to the problems encountered. To achieve the objectives of the study, the following two research questions were used:

For teachers who have used CLT in the Rwandan context:

1. What do they perceive as problems/challenges in implementing CLT?
2. What solutions do they propose to overcome these problems/challenges?

### **Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis is comprised of six chapters. After this chapter, chapter two is a review of some literature related to the topic of the study. The chapter includes an overview of the evolution of CLT, a discussion of how the approach was adopted in both ESL and EFL contexts, and a look at previous studies that have investigated challenges encountered in implementing CLT in EFL contexts. Chapter three, which is the methodology, describes the research study setting, sampling procedures, as well as the

methods that were used in the processes of data collection and analysis. The chapter ends with a section that briefly summarizes my positionality as it relates to this research (i.e., my previous experiences as a language learner and language teacher within the Rwandan context) and how that motivated me to carry out a study on the topic for this thesis paper. Chapter four is the presentation and analysis of the results while the fifth chapter discusses the main findings of the study. Chapter six is the conclusion for this research paper and it also discusses some pedagogical implications of the findings and a number of recommendations that can be addressed to different Rwandan university education stakeholders for minimizing the problems raised by the respondents. The chapter also highlights the limitations of this study and gives some suggestions for further research.

## Chapter II

### Literature Review

This chapter reviews some of the literature on CLT and related topics. Explored topics include the evolution of CLT (with an overview of different theoretical and empirical bases of this language teaching approach as well as its different versions), criticisms and defenses of CLT, the adoption of CLT in both ESL and EFL contexts, and some difficulties encountered in the implementation of CLT in different EFL contexts.

#### Evolution of CLT

Over the years, CLT has been characterized by various undertakings based on different understandings about language and how ‘best’ second/foreign language learners can be facilitated to become communicatively competent. This subsequently led to different studies and findings, as well as theories and models of language teaching that fall under the umbrella of CLT. In the following sections, therefore, I give an overview of the theoretical and empirical bases of CLT and then outline the different versions of language teaching and proficiency development models or programs that have been part of this language teaching approach.

**Theoretical and empirical bases of CLT.** As it has been previously stated, one of the first endeavors having characterized the shift toward CLT was the rejection of the belief that concentrating on teaching grammatical rules and the memorization and recitation of dialogues would lead learners to the internalization of and the ability to use their target language in real communication contexts. Chomsky (1959) was one of the first most influential scholars in this trend. In his scrutiny of how children acquire their first language, Chomsky demonstrated that language acquisition is not simply a result of

imitation and habit formation under the influence of others as behaviorists suggested. He instead theorized that language learning and use are systematic and creative processes and that all languages are governed by a basic rule system that is innate. Accordingly, when exposed to a language, children naturally discover the rules of that language for themselves.

Within the same context of refuting the behaviorist view that language was just acquired through imitation or repetition, memorization, and habit formation, analysis of second language learners' errors constitutes another aspect through which different researchers have demonstrated that language learning is mainly a result of learners' developmental processes and stages, own efforts, discovery, and creativity, as opposed to the influence of external factors. According to behaviorists, language learning is mainly influenced by the environment, specifically the people with whom a language learner leaves, meets, or communicates in general, and errors in second or foreign language learning result from L1 transfer. On the contrary, Corder (1967) found that learners' errors were not arbitrary or merely a result of the influence of the learner's first language, but systematic and showing different stages of language development. Selinker (1972) coined the term 'interlanguage' to refer to such specific stages of language development that learners go through in their language learning, usually characterized by what may simply be seen as errors. In other words, some of the learners' language productions may merely be regarded as errors, while in fact they contain sets of rules formulated by the learners in their language exploration and development. In the same vein, both Corder (1967) and Selinker (1972) found that learners follow what can be regarded as their inner syllabuses in language learning and, therefore, do not necessarily learn what they are

taught.

Additionally, the findings of the Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974) research studies into the sequence of acquisition of morphemes showed that some language structures are generally acquired before others, and this served as one of the bases of the Natural Order Hypothesis (Willis, 2004). The Natural Order Hypothesis implies that learners are unlikely to learn and internalize some new language features if they are not developmentally ready for them. One of the examples that illustrate the validity of the Natural Order Hypothesis is the third person singular -s of the simple present tense in English: this morpheme is so easy to teach that perhaps only very few students will miss it in exercises where it is asked as part of exercises in which the focus is on language forms. However, as it is one of the English language structures that are commonly acquired late, it is often omitted in spontaneous speech. Similarly to what has been mentioned before, the Natural Order Hypothesis then denotes that language acquisition follows what can be considered as students' own syllabuses and, thus, cannot merely be a result of instruction or repetition and error avoidance.

Another influential scholar in the adoption of CLT has been Halliday (1975) who views language not simply as words, but as a system used to express meaning. The title "Learning How to Mean" given by Halliday to the study of his young son's first language acquisition shows the primary purpose of language learning: to express meaning. As Willis (2004) emphasizes, when we look at language as a means of expressing meaning, it becomes subsequent that grammar and/or vocabulary cannot be considered as the target(s) of learning in themselves. Instead, these are then regarded as means toward an end: communicating messages. The argument that language structures should not be the



target of learning by themselves has been significantly persuasive in English language teaching methodology. This is shown by the fact that even though different scholars have advanced diverging opinions on how to proceed in order to help learners to develop their ability to use the language in communication (which is for example illustrated by the existence of different versions of CLT as it will be discussed later), the central idea or objective remains common.

In addition to what has been discussed above, the adoption and evolution of CLT have been influenced by a series of well-known hypotheses. These include Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis, Long's (1983) Interaction Hypothesis, and Swain's (1985) Output Hypothesis. Krashen hypothesized that second language acquisition is subject to receiving 'comprehensible input,' that is, understandable but slightly challenging input (also known as  $i + 1$ ;  $i$  standing for input, and  $1$  representing one step beyond what the learner can already understand). Based on the study findings having shown that acquisition of some morphological and grammatical structures in second language by adults follow a chronological order that is similar to that gone through by children learning their first language, Krashen concluded that second language acquisition was similar to first language acquisition. He argues that a second language is successfully acquired only by receiving understandable messages, just in the same way that children acquire their native languages. Krashen (1982) states, "The child does not acquire grammar first and then use it in understanding. The child understands first, and this helps him acquire language" (p. 23). Using this example of how children acquire their native language, Krashen completely refutes grammar-based language teaching and advocates that second language acquisition is governed only by understanding messages.

While Krashen believes that receiving comprehensible input is enough for language acquisition, Long (1983) maintains that interaction and conversational modifications such as clarification requests and confirmation checks are what lead to both comprehensible input and language acquisition. This shows a divergence between Krashen and Long, but what is common between them, as Spada (2007) explains, is that they “both emphasize the central role of meaningful communication in language acquisition” (p. 274).

Furthermore, after her research with French immersion students, Swain (1985) noticed that receiving comprehensible input or rich input alone is not enough to equip learners with grammatical and syntactic accuracy. She, therefore, suggested that writing and speaking may also be necessary in language learning for a number of reasons. The benefits of spoken or written language output include making learners notice their gaps in language competence and usage, testing their implicit hypotheses about correct language usage, and reflecting on their language learning. Simply put, Swain argues that pushing learners to speak or to write beyond their current language proficiency level gives them opportunities to notice gaps between what they want to say or write and what they are able to say or write. Secondly, the learners’ language productions enable them to explore language in use and test a number of hypotheses. When a student says or writes something, he or she has an implicit hypothesis in his or her interlanguage, and that hypothesis is confirmed or rejected after receiving feedback from his or her interlocutor. Thirdly, Swain argues that learners gain control over their output and internalize language knowledge as a result of reflecting on their language productions.

To sum up, there have been different opinions and empirical research advocating

for the necessity of enabling learners to develop the ability to communicate effectively in their target languages. Different well-known hypotheses were also formulated to explain how learners develop their communicative competence. In general, different researchers agree that it is important for learners to develop their ability to use a language by using it, rather than only learning isolated grammar or vocabulary items, or else simply repeating and role-playing pre-fabricated and decontextualized dialogues. There is also agreement that errors are part of the language development process and, therefore, should be tolerated or dealt with carefully.

Nevertheless, there is divergence in some of the views advanced by different influential scholars on how second or foreign languages are learned or acquired. As we have already seen, for example, people like Krashen (1982) believe that language is successfully acquired by only receiving comprehensible input. However, others like Long (1983) insist that language learning is facilitated by interaction and interactional modifications, an argument that is not far from Swain's (1985) claim that receiving comprehensible input should be accompanied by producing language for learning to be more effective. Consequently, such diverging opinions about the language learning process and how languages should be taught have led to a variety of language teaching and development models and programs that have characterized the evolution of CLT. In the next section, we are going to look at some of the main language teaching versions that have existed as branches of CLT.

**Different versions of CLT.** As Nunan (2004, p. 7) says, CLT is not a single teaching approach, but rather 'a family of approaches'. In fact, CLT is a broad philosophical orientation toward language and language learning, and when it comes to

its implementation at the syllabus design level and in the classroom, it has a variety of applications. As we have seen before in this paper, CLT has received influence from different ideas and empirical studies. Accordingly, there have existed various language teaching models and communicative competence development programs falling under CLT. Perhaps the most commonly known variations of CLT are its weak version, strong version, and task-based language teaching (TBLT), which is also known as task-based instruction (TBI). The main difference among the different versions of CLT is focusing on communication and meaning only, or focusing on both meaning and language form. The next sections will briefly discuss each of these versions of CLT.

***Weak version of CLT.*** One significant development that was part of the advent of CLT was the introduction of the functional-notional syllabuses in Europe. As Willis (2004) indicates in her description of the shift toward CLT, in the early 1970s the Council of Europe initiated the design of a syllabus based on *notions*, that is, the meanings that learners would need to convey and to understand with language, as well as *functions*, which are different purposes for which learners would need to use language in their communication. *Notions* include different language structures that are used in communication to refer to various concepts or ideas (e.g., *time*: two years ago, when . . . ., last week; *movement*: from home to . . .; *quantity*: much, many, few; and so on) while *functions* designate different communicative acts or purposes that learners fulfill with language in their communication (e.g., *apologizing*, *making requests*, *promising*, *inviting*, *greeting*, *complaining*, and so on). Savignon (2007) indicates that one of the objectives behind the introduction of the functional-notional syllabuses in Europe was to address the language needs of a rapidly increasing group of immigrants and guest workers.

Therefore, syllabus descriptions for each European language were produced in terms of what learners should be able to do with language and the meanings that they needed to communicate. As Willis (2004, p. 6) highlights, it was within this context that Van Ek's (1973) functionally based "threshold syllabus" and Wilkins's (1976) notional syllabus for English were produced. After their introduction, notional-functional syllabuses were combined with grammatical syllabuses in foreign language teaching, with a focus on social and transactional purposes. What is noticeable from these different changes is that people had started to be aware of the necessity to teach language for communicative purposes.

In addition to the introduction of the functional-notional syllabuses, other different efforts were also made to achieve the development of learners' ability to use language in communication. For example, as Willis (2004) mentions, in one of the first versions of CLT, teaching involved presentation and practice of grammar patterns and functional dialogues, and then students were given time for free interaction in pairs or small groups to perform a communication task. Based on its main stages, namely *presentation*, *practice*, and *production*, this teaching style ended up being widely known as P-P-P. Richards (2006) highlights the implementation of the P-P-P lesson cycle as follows:

**Presentation:** The new grammar structure is presented, often by means of a conversation or short text. The teacher explains the new structure and checks students' comprehension of it.

**Practice:** Students practice using the new structure in a controlled context, through drills or substitution exercises.

**Production:** Students practice using the new structure in different contexts, often using their own content or information, in order to develop fluency with the new pattern. (Richards, 2006, p. 8)

Although the P-P-P teaching style has been widely used in language teaching and continues to be used even today as Richards (2006) mentions, it has been strongly criticized in recent years. First of all, this teaching procedure has been criticized for focusing on controlled practice of language form (e.g., during the second stage of the P-P-P cycle), rather than allowing students to express their own meaning. Similar to what we have briefly seen above, Willis (2004) highlights that during this second stage, students were given opportunities to practice various structures and realizations of functions and notions through controlled activities such as pair-practice of fixed dialogues, manipulation of functional dialogues, role-plays with cue cards, and similar activities. Willis states that even though such activities are important in stressing and automatizing certain language expressions or structures in some situations, only free production is useful in giving students opportunities to have control over language use and expression of meanings. As Skehan (1996) repeats, the idea that people can learn how to use certain language structures through conscious learning and practice, or “that learners will learn what is taught in the order in which it is taught” (p. 18), is questionable in second language acquisition. Therefore, Skehan mentions that the approaches to CLT that were still characterized by a focus on practice of language form, referred to by Howatt (1984) as the weak version of CLT, were not successful in enabling learners to develop their ability to use language in everyday life communication. Consequently, Skehan argues that students having been taught language through focusing on controlled

practice of language form generally leave school without having acquired a good language proficiency level, the only exception being the gifted learners.

***Strong version of CLT.*** Another category of language teaching approaches under the label of CLT, referred to as the strong version of CLT, is built on the belief that language is successfully acquired naturally simply through exposure and/or communication. An example of the strong version of CLT is the “Natural Approach” proposed by Krashen and Terrell (1983). In the strong version of CLT, language learning is similar to what happens when people go and live or work in a foreign language environment. In such situations, language acquisition happens naturally, just through receiving and producing messages, without formal instruction. According to Willis (2004), other examples of language development programs that are considered as part of the strong version of CLT include French immersion programs for speakers of English in Canada, and content-based instruction in other places. In both immersion programs and content-based instruction, students are believed to develop their language proficiency simply by learning the subject matter (e.g., math, geography, history, biology etc.) in their target language.

***Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).*** In addition to the two other major versions of CLT discussed above, Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), which is also known as Task-Based Instruction (TBI), is possibly the most recent and evolved version of CLT. TBLT is a language teaching method that seeks to enable students to attain both fluency and accuracy. Richards and Rodgers (2014) indicate that TBLT finds its roots in two principles that have been influential in the domain of SLA: the “noticing hypothesis” and “noticing the gap” (p. 181).

Before having an overview of Schmidt's (1990, 2010) Noticing Hypothesis, it is important to indicate that the hypothesis was a reaction against the assumption that only unconscious processing of input is sufficient in the process of language acquisition as it is believed by proponents of the strong version of CLT. Schmidt bases his hypothesis on the findings of his case study of 'Wes', an un instructed Japanese learner of English who had immigrated to the USA at the age of 30, as well as on his experience (i.e., Schmidt's own experience) while learning Portuguese in Brazil. On the one hand, Schmidt points out that Wes was communicatively successful but continued to show deficiencies in linguistic competence, specifically in morphology and syntax, even after a long time of exposure to and use of his target language. Schmidt suspects a lack of attention to and awareness of grammatical items by Wes as most likely possible factors of the deficiencies in his language competence. On the other hand, Schmidt asserts that classroom instruction and his personal efforts involving attention and awareness (e.g., recording newly learned language items in a diary) were helpful to him while learning Portuguese in Brazil. Therefore, he argues that explicit instruction is also important to help learners notice what they are learning as well as gaps in their language proficiency.

Schmidt believes that focusing on and noticing grammatical forms make learning faster and more successful. This is different from the situations whereby learners may simply process comprehensible input with the objective of understanding meaning. In such cases, the learners may not even pay attention to language forms in the input. That is why Schmidt maintains that conscious learning that involves attention and awareness of language form is important for input to become intake, that is, the amount of an input that a learner successfully processes and adds to his or her already existing L2 knowledge.



In task-based instruction, the foundation of language learning and practice is the accomplishment of pedagogical tasks. Nunan (2004) defines the latter as follows:

A pedagogical task is a piece of classroom work that involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is focused on mobilizing their grammatical knowledge in order to express meaning, and in which the intention is to convey meaning rather than to manipulate form. The task should also have a sense of completeness, being able to stand alone as a communicative act in its own right with a beginning, a middle, and an end. (p. 4)

Nunan's definition of a pedagogical task illustrates how the focus is not on grammatical knowledge, but on the accomplishment of tasks through interaction and discussion that involve listening, understanding, speaking and negotiation of meaning. Of course, as it is noticeable from the definition, the interaction that takes place in the accomplishment of a pedagogical task also involves using and negotiating grammatical and lexical knowledge. Moreover, a task should be a complete project with a beginning, a body, and an end or outcome.

Another point worth mentioning about tasks is their characteristics. Drawing on other scholars, Nunan (2004, p. 3) gives the following key characteristics of tasks:

- Meaning is primary.
- There are no restrictions on learners in their use of language forms.
- Tasks should bear a relationship to real-world activities.
- The priority is on achieving the goal of the task.
- Tasks are assessed based on their outcome.

According to Ellis (2013, p. 4), “TBLT aims to create contexts for natural language use and to provide occasions for a ‘focus on form’.” He notes that TBLT combines the best ideas from the communicative approach with an organized focus on form in order to avoid weaknesses of totally or mainly form-based or communication-based approaches. As it has been mentioned before in this paper, Long (1991) suggests that focusing on form refers to briefly drawing students’ attention to grammatical, lexical or any other linguistic items with the intention of catering for the students’ need for the items in their communication or completion of a communicative task. In the context of a communicative classroom, a ‘focus on form’ usually occurs in the form of corrective feedback, the learners’ attention remaining mainly focused on meaning.

Similar to what has been discussed above, Ellis (2013) also explains how TBLT promotes incidental learning rather than intentional learning of language structures. He says that TBLT offers opportunities for strengthening partially acquired language and acquiring new language “not by designating linguistic items as ‘targets’ for learners to study and master but by facilitating the social and cognitive processes of ‘picking up’ language while they are communicating” (p. 3). As Ellis adds, TBLT also caters for language accuracy in the following two ways: 1) the teacher can pre-teach the language that learners will need to perform a task or 2) he/she can explain this language while students are performing the task in response to their efforts to communicate, for example, by negotiating meaning or form. Thus, tasks promote both fluency and accuracy. The primary focus is on meaning, but there is attention to language form as well.

The focus on both meaning and form in TBLT is also illustrated in Willis’s (1996) TBLT framework that particularly includes a focus on language form after the

performance of each pedagogical task by students. As Willis explains, her proposed framework comprises three stages, namely a *pre-task* stage, a *task cycle*, and a *language focus* stage. During the pre-task stage, students receive an introduction to the topic of the task to be completed and what they are supposed to do in the task. After the pre-task stage, the framework continues with the task cycle, which is the time for students to perform the task in pairs or small groups, to plan what members of each pair or small group will share with other classmates, and finally to report what has been discussed during the task. Finally, the task cycle is followed by a language focus stage during which students are guided through the analysis and practice of language structures (e.g., grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation) that have been used while performing the task. The stage that concentrates on focus on language promotes accuracy development by giving students the opportunities to notice the language forms that occurred in the task, to learn the forms explicitly, and to practice them.

Perhaps one may wonder how the accomplishment of pedagogical tasks can lead to language learning and proficiency development. In her discussion of the emergence of TBI, Willis (2004) points out that practitioners like Prabhu (1987) adopted tasks as their language teaching strategies because they believed that “task-based interaction stimulated natural acquisition processes [...]” (Willis, 2004, p. 8). According to Norris (2009), when learners participate in communicative tasks, they develop relevant declarative and procedural knowledge that they will need even outside the classroom. As both Willis (2004) and Norris (2009) explain, when students take part in pedagogical tasks, they listen to their peers or small group members and also use their lexical and grammatical knowledge to discuss and/or explain different things. By doing so, they activate and

develop language skills that they will need to use in communication outside the classroom. Furthermore, Ellis (2003) also finds support for task-based instruction in Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development theory, which asserts that when learners interact with a teacher, a native speaker, or a more advanced peer, they can perform tasks that they would be unable to perform on their own, thus expanding their linguistic competence in the process.

To sum up, CLT has been characterized by different versions based on their focus and procedures in language teaching. The major versions of CLT have been its weak version, strong version, and TBLT. Based on the idea that learners need language to perform communication functions and to express various notions, teaching methods like P-P-P were introduced and learners were given time for free production using language items that they had been taught and practiced in controlled dialogues or other exercises. In other words, learners were taught and allowed to practice language, but in a controlled way. This type of teaching is regarded as the weak version of CLT. Following the belief that the best way to learn a language is by using it, teaching methods like the Natural Approach, CBI, and immersion programs were also adopted. These are in a category considered as the strong version of CLT. Finally, due to weaknesses found in controlling the learners' language learning or simply creating conditions for students to learn a language by communicating in it, TBLT was introduced as a teaching philosophy aiming at development of both fluency and accuracy. However, no matter how CLT has been appreciated or how different implementations have taken place, some scholars have criticized it for various reasons. The next section looks at these criticisms as well as defenses against them.

## **Criticisms and Defenses of CLT**

While some scholars advocate CLT as an effective teaching approach worth promoting and using in any context and at any language proficiency level, others judge it as inappropriate on different grounds. Criticisms leveled against CLT have been about aspects such as its bases, effectiveness, and practicality. In this section, I will present these criticisms and their counter-arguments given by proponents of CLT.

Among the aspects about which CLT has been criticized are its foundations and teaching procedures. Proponents of traditional approaches like Swan (2005) and Sheen (2003, 2005) have argued that CLT is simply based on hypotheses without any evidence to prove that it can lead to developing learners' communicative abilities more effectively than traditional approaches. Swan (2005) also argues that the claims made by CLT advocates that 'traditional' methods have failed are weakened by many people who have learned their target language successfully through those methods. In addition to attacking the theoretical and empirical bases of CLT, Swan disapproves of the principal learning procedure suggested by CLT advocates: learning by doing; that is, learning language through communication. He says that the best way to acquire different skills is through receiving declarative knowledge first, and then developing procedural abilities next. Swan illustrates his arguments using examples of pilot learning and surgery learning. He says that people learning these practical professions first receive theoretical or declarative knowledge and then proceed with practice afterward. Therefore, Swan suggests that good ideas from both traditional methods and task-based instruction can be retained and combined to help learners to effectively achieve the ability to use their target languages.

Furthermore, Seedhouse (1999) has complained about the effectiveness of CLT in

developing learners' linguistic competence. For example, Seedhouse criticizes the quality of language produced during the performance of tasks. He argues that language form or accuracy receives minimal attention, thus resulting in the encouragement of pidgin-like language production. Seedhouse says that the kind of language that learners often produce is impoverished by the fact that when they perform a task, more of their attention is on completing the task rather than on language forms they use.

Similarly, Sheen (2003) argues against the absence of a grammar syllabus in communication-based language teaching as grammar instruction only results from the learners' incidental need of a certain form or certain forms during the performance of communicative tasks. The complaint about the absence of a grammar syllabus is also shared by Swan (2005) who says that task-based instruction 'outlaws' the grammar syllabus (p. 394). Sheen (2003) recommends incorporating a 'focus on formS' in language teaching in order to help learners to develop their linguistic competence more effectively especially because learning the grammar and vocabulary of a foreign language is too difficult to be efficiently achieved only through participation in communicative or problem-solving activities.

Maintaining the idea that the main focus of the classroom should be communicative activities as it is believed by proponents of the focus on form style such as Long (1991), the teaching approach suggested by Sheen (2003) proposes doing whatever it takes to enable learners to achieve both communicative and linguistic competence. Some of the ways he recommends include providing learners with explanations in their L1, showing them differences between the L1 and the L2, giving them written and oral exercises that involve using grammar in both communicative and

non-communicative activities, and providing frequent opportunities for learners to use the grammar in order to attain automatic and accurate use.

Carless (2007) is another scholar who has questioned the effectiveness of CLT. He conducted a study aimed at investigating the suitability of task-based approaches for secondary schools in Hong Kong. Data were collected from 11 secondary school teachers and 10 teacher educators based on purposive sampling. Participants in the study expressed concerns about loss of class control during task-based activities, 'excessive or off-task' use of L1 by students while performing tasks, as well as incompatibility of TBLT with time allotted to English and the requirement to cover the assigned textbook[s]. Therefore, based on the findings of his study, Carless concludes that it is necessary to adapt TBLT to have "flexible" (p.604) and "context-sensitive teaching methods" that he also describes as "situated task-based approaches, in which culture, setting and teachers' existing beliefs, values, and practices interact with the principles of task-based teaching" (p.605). Highlighting the feasibility of such adaptation of TBLT to fit the context of Hong Kong, Carless argues that it is necessary to (a) explore more fully the options for teaching grammar, (b) integrate task-based teaching with the requirements of examinations and (c) find an appropriate balance between oral tasks and other modes such as narrative writing and extensive reading. Carless (2007) then concludes his study with the assertion that "there is clearly more conceptual and empirical work required in the development of versions of task-based approaches suitable for schooling" (p. 605).

In the same way, Bax (2003) has also criticized CLT and its suitability in teaching language in different contexts. He contends that CLT does not give appropriate consideration to the context of language teaching/learning. Among other things, Bax

argues that putting emphasis on methodology as the primary element in language teaching leads to some teachers being discouraged in the exercise of their profession. Therefore, Bax suggests that CLT should be replaced by a 'context approach' that places the context in which language teaching/learning takes place before methodology in general and CLT in particular.

Bax's criticism is closely related to Kumaravadivelu's (2006) insistence that English language teaching/learning has reached a postmethod or critical pedagogy era characterized by "a felt need to transcend the limitations of the concept of method" (p. 69). Kumaravadivelu emphasizes that "language learning and teaching needs, wants, and situations are [so] unpredictably numerous" (p. 68) that it is not possible to prepare teachers to tackle them in a general way. Therefore, he asserts that within such a situation, it is necessary to help teachers to develop the ability to design and implement a context-specific pedagogy based on three operating principles or parameters: particularity, practicality, and possibility. Kumaravadivelu summarizes these parameters as follows:

*Particularity* seeks to facilitate the advancement of a context-sensitive, location-specific pedagogy that is based on a true understanding of local linguistic, social, cultural, and political particularities. *Practicality* seeks to rupture the reified role relationship between theorizers and practitioners by enabling and encouraging teachers to theorize from their practice and to practice what they theorize.

*Possibility* seeks to tap the sociopolitical consciousness that students bring with them to the classroom so that it can also function as a catalyst for identity formation and social transformation. (p. 69)



In other words, Kumaravadivelu firmly opposes the idea of striving to find a generally acceptable or one-size-fits-all method. He instead suggests that teachers should be assisted to have the power, knowledge, and skills that can allow them to make the right decisions and choices when it comes to designing theories and learning activities that match the realities on the ground.

Another area of criticism about the suitability of CLT is that this language teaching approach is not suitable for beginning learners. As Littlewood (2007) indicates, some people's complaint is that it is not easy for lower-proficiency level learners to participate in communicative tasks. Therefore, some students just complete the tasks using minimal language or resort to using their L1 when it is shared with peers or group members.

On the contrary, supporters of CLT have reacted against different criticisms that have been raised against CLT. For example, Ellis (2009) has shown that it is incorrect to say that CLT is simply based on unproven hypotheses or that it is not effective. Ellis cites different scholars having done research on the effectiveness of CLT in comparison with traditional approaches (e.g., Beretta & Davies, 1985; Ellis et al., 1994; Mackey, 1999; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Prabhu, 1987; Sheen, 2004 and others). These scholars conducted studies about different hypotheses underlying CLT as well as the effectiveness of communicative tasks in language learning.

Furthermore, Ellis (2013) disagrees with the claim that task-based instruction ignores language form. He highlights that different proponents of TBLT recognize the necessity for a focus on grammatical accuracy in language teaching even though there is divergence on how best this component of communicative competence can be achieved.

As we have seen, Ellis's argument that TBLT does not ignore language form is shared by different scholars who are advocates of TBLT (e.g., Norris, 2009; Ortega, 2012; Willis, 1996; Willis, 2004). In fact, even though they believe that language teaching should not be solely grammar-based, there is a common agreement among those scholars that grammar learning should receive necessary attention. That is why teachers sometimes pre-teach the language that students will need while performing a communicative task or take time to explain a grammatical or lexical structure when the need arises amid the performance of a task. As it has also been discussed before, the TBLT framework proposed by Willis (1996) incorporates a focus on form, with special attention to language in the last stage of the framework (i.e., the language focus stage). Furthermore, Ellis (2013) explains that some proponents of TBLT recognize the use of both unfocused tasks and focused ones. Unfocused tasks are those in which the focus is on meaning and development of learners' fluency while focused tasks are those that are designed to create contexts for learners to practice certain language features.

In reaction to the criticism that CLT ignores the existence of different teaching contexts, Harmer (2003) reminds us that it is the teachers' responsibility to modify and apply the methodology that they use according to the teaching/learning context and their students' needs. An explanation of that responsibility can also be found in the following statements by Littlewood (2007): "There is now widespread acceptance that no single method or set of procedures will fit all teachers and learners in all contexts. Teachers can draw on others' ideas and experiences but cannot adopt them as ready-made recipes [...]" (p. 248). In other words, teachers need to refer to different ideas and teaching methods or procedures and select or mix them as appropriately as necessary to suit their students'

needs and teaching contexts.

Regarding the complaint about the incompatibility of CLT for teaching beginning students, proponents of CLT have shown that this complaint is rather a misconception of CLT and tasks or communicative activities used within this teaching approach. For example, Ortega (2012) explains that teachers can use TBLT even with students at very beginning proficiency levels by employing input-providing tasks, and not only output-seeking tasks. In line with what Ortega says, Ellis (2013) believes that it is even possible to teach complete beginner-level learners using TBLT; for example through ‘listen-and-do tasks’ (p.12). By performing input-based tasks, which do not necessarily require them to speak, beginner learners get opportunities to build up their L2 resources that they can use later on to start speaking.

In summary, CLT has received different oppositions, mainly from supporters of traditional methods of language teaching, but its proponents have also shown that those oppositions are either unfounded or just misconceptions. As it has been discussed before, there have been controversies over the theoretical and empirical bases of CLT, its teaching procedures, as well as its effectiveness in language teaching. It is worth signaling that the literature which discusses additional issues related to CLT (e.g., concerns about large classes, class management, and unfavorable teaching environments) will be reviewed under problems that have been faced in the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts. Before coming to that section, however, I will first present an overview of the adoption of CLT in both ESL and EFL contexts.

### **Adoption of CLT in both ESL and EFL Contexts**

English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) are two different terms used to designate contextual situations in which the English language is learned and/or taught (Ellis, 1996; Karim, 2004). On the one hand, English is considered to be taught as a second language when nonnative speakers study the language in countries where it is the native language (e.g., England, the United States, Australia, Canada, or any other country where English is the primary language of communication and business). On the other hand, English is a foreign language when nonnative speakers study it where it is not the primary language of communication and business (e.g., Rwanda, China, France, Brazil, or any other country where it is not the first language).

Since its introduction in the early 1970s, CLT has been appreciated by many educators and policy makers all over the world as an appropriate way of enabling language learners to effectively develop their communicative competence. CLT was first recognized in ESL countries as an effective approach to enable learners to develop their language knowledge and skills beyond solely mastering language form, that is, grammar rules, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Afterward, various EFL countries such as China (Hu, 2002), Iran (Kalanzadeh, Mirchenari, & Bakhtiarvand, 2013), South Korea (Li, 1998), Taiwan (Chang & Goswami, 2011), and Vietnam (Hiep, 2007) also undertook reforms aiming to adopt CLT in their language education systems. As a result, CLT is not only practiced in countries like the United States, Canada, England, or any other country where English is the native language, but also in different EFL countries like those mentioned above. Nevertheless, the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts has been

characterized by some challenges that will be discussed in the next section.

### **Difficulties in Implementing CLT in EFL Contexts**

Different studies have shown that the adoption of CLT in EFL countries has encountered difficulties mainly due to the fact that the learning environments in EFL contexts are different from ESL contexts. For example, students in ESL countries need to use the language in everyday life, but learners of English in EFL contexts may only use the language in the classroom. Moreover, students in EFL contexts usually learn English mainly to prepare for examinations, which are also language-form-based in most cases. Most of these differences between ESL and EFL contexts in terms of goals and challenges are also highlighted by Ellis (1996). The author explains that while individuals learn ESL to be able to function in the community, EFL is mainly “a part of the school curriculum, and therefore subject to contextual factors such as support from the principal and the local community, government policy, etc.” (p. 215). Other factors mentioned by Ellis include the teachers’ language proficiency, the availability and suitability of teaching resources, and the possibility of not to test students’ communicative competence as that may not be a priority in national curriculum goals.

Due to the teaching/learning conditions in EFL contexts discussed above, the implementation of CLT may be constrained by numerous challenges. Though there may be particular problems in each context or country, and the severity of problems may differ from country to country, research has revealed that the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts faces challenges that can be grouped into four categories, namely, those that are related to the educational systems and learning environments, teachers, students, and CLT itself (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Hiep, 2007; Kalanzadeh, Mirchenari, &

Bakhtiarvand, 2013; Li, 1998). The next sections review some literature on each of these problems faced in the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts.

**Educational systems and teaching/learning environments.** Studies have shown that there are difficulties in the implementation of CLT in different EFL contexts due to the educational systems and teaching/learning environments in those contexts. Hiep (2007) and Li (1998) are among researchers having investigated difficulties encountered in the implementation of CLT in EFL countries. Hiep (2007) conducted a study in Vietnam, and his objective was to look at teachers' beliefs and implementation of CLT. Participants in Hiep's study were three Vietnamese university teachers, and he collected data through interviews and classroom observation. The findings of the study indicated that all the three participants in Hiep's study believed that CLT is an appropriate approach for providing learners with opportunities to develop communicative competence. However, the participants also reported that there were different challenges in the implementation of this approach. For example, the participants reported that the teaching environment was not favorable for their implementation of CLT because of three main problems: there was no real environment for students to use English, students used their L1 to do assigned tasks, and there was also a tendency of students to listen to and accept views and criticisms from the teacher rather than their peers or group members. Li (1998) also conducted a study on difficulties encountered in the implementation of CLT. Li's study aimed to investigate teachers' perceptions of the introduction of CLT in South Korea and difficulties encountered in the implementation of the approach. The participants were 18 Korean secondary school teachers of English who were attending a teacher education program at a Canadian university, and data were

collected using a questionnaire and interviews. With regard to how the educational system and teaching environment in South Korea impacted the implementation of CLT, participants reported that they encountered difficulties of large classes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding, and a lack of support from colleagues and/or administration.

The seriousness of the issue of large classes in EFL contexts is clearly documented in Jeon's (2009) replication study. The research study was conducted in 2008 (12 years after the same study had been conducted in 1996) in order to aid the development of a successful English education system in Korea by identifying key issues that teachers considered the most important to address. The study involved 305 Korean teachers in elementary, middle, and high schools. The data were collected through a survey questionnaire. The questionnaire was in Korean, and it had a list of 18 issues that teachers thought were the most important and needed to be addressed for CLT to be successfully implemented in Korea. Participants were asked to rate the issues from 1 (unimportant) to 10 (most important), to provide new issues and rationales, and to suggest changes in the exact wording of issues or rationales. Similarly to the 1996 study, teachers ranked large classes as the most important challenge that needed to be addressed for CLT to be successfully implemented. In fact, by considering the results of Jeon's (2009) study, one would logically speculate that large classes constitute the most serious challenge hindering the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts.

Altogether, as far as educational systems and the teaching/learning environments are concerned, researchers have found out that implementing CLT in EFL contexts becomes challenging because of problems such as class size, grammar-based

examinations, insufficient budget, not getting opportunities to use English outside the classroom, use of L1 by learners while performing tasks, and the habit of expecting to learn mainly or even exclusively from the teacher.

**Difficulties related to teachers.** Chang and Goswami (2011) conducted a study in order to investigate factors that promote or hinder the implementation of CLT in Taiwanese Colleges. The participants in the study were eight teachers working at two universities in southern Taiwan. Data were collected through face-to-face semi-structured interviews (lasting for 45-60 minutes). Participants in this qualitative study reported that teacher-related factors such as teachers' professional training as well as their efforts are part of what plays a big role in promoting the implementation of CLT in Taiwanese college English classes. The participants reported that factors hindering the implementation of CLT included teachers' lack of adequate knowledge and skills about CLT and its implementation, and inadequate teacher training.

In another study, Kalanzadeh, Mirchenari, and Bakhtiarvand (2013) investigated perceived problems in using CLT by EFL Iranian teachers and several problems related to teachers were reported: a lack of training in CLT, deficiency in spoken English, few chances for retraining in CLT, and a lack of enough time for materials development for the communicative class. Kalanzadeh et al. aimed to find out whether Iranian teachers were capable of utilizing CLT in their classes to achieve its ultimate goal: communication in real context, and problems in using CLT by EFL Iranian teachers. Participants were 50 Iranian high school teachers of English, and data collection instruments were a questionnaire and oral interviews.

As far as the teachers' ability to implement CLT was concerned, 48 of 50



participants in the study reported that they felt their oral proficiency was not enough for conducting communicative tasks. The problem of inadequate spoken language proficiency was also reported in Li's (1998) study. Out of 18 participants in the study, some were worried about their deficiency in spoken English in general, and all were especially concerned about strategic and sociolinguistic competence.

An explanation of some teachers' discomfort with strategic and sociolinguistic topics and questions compared to grammatical topics and questions could be that most EFL teachers did their studies in form-focused language teaching contexts or were used to this kind of teaching in their classrooms. This is illustrated by a quote in the Li's study in which a participant indicated that students asked a lot of questions in class, which is something very good in terms of students' motivation, participation, and interest to learn, but the teacher's problem was inability to answer questions related to sociolinguistic aspects of English. Here is an excerpt of what the quoted teacher said: "[...] I was happy when they asked me questions related to the English grammar. But those questions that are related to the sociolinguistic aspects of English are really hard for me [...]" (Li, 1998, p. 687). In brief, teachers might be reluctant to conduct communicative classes, or feel embarrassed when they fail to answer some questions from their students, particularly in contexts where teachers are expected to answer all their students' questions (which is the case of South Korea as it is reported in Li's study).

Concerning training and/or retraining in CLT, EFL teachers report that a lack of training or retraining in CLT is another barrier to the implementation of CLT (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Hiep, 2007; Kalanzadeh, Mirchenari, & Bakhtiarvand, 2013; Li, 1998). This is illustrated by the following quotes from participants in Li's (1998) study:

- “I learned the term CLT at a teachers' conference. To be honest, I did not quite understand how it works.”
- “Like many of us, I learned CLT when I was studying at university. But it was taught as a piece of knowledge for us to remember, not to use. I did not practice using it while at university, though I did try it a few times later when I became a teacher.”
- “This is the first time I participate in an in-service teacher education program. It took me 18 years to get such an opportunity.” (p. 688)

Though the adoption of CLT in Korean secondary schools started as early as 1992 with a curriculum revision (Li, 1998), the quotes above show that some of the Korean teachers in Li's study had only heard about CLT once at a teachers' conference or during in-service training. Others had only learned about CLT in their educational studies. This illustrates how sometimes teachers are asked to implement a new policy while they do not have adequate knowledge/skills to enable them to do so. In such situations, there are different negative consequences such as blindly following the imposed policy or not changing the discouraged or abolished practice. That was the case for the implementation of CLT in China and South Korea by some teachers as it is mentioned in Littlewood's (2007) article. As the article reports, when a new educational policy is introduced, there should be adequate sensitization and training of teachers as the principal agents of successful educational practices. Otherwise, as Littlewood notes, for some teachers the implementation of a newly imposed policy may only be in written reports while classroom practices remain unchanged. Others may just follow an imposed policy and return to what they were doing after seeing that their attempts have been unsuccessful.

**Difficulties related to students.** Difficulties related to students in the implementation of CLT include their low English language proficiency, as well as their learning habits. In some countries, one of the habits hindering the implementation of CLT is a culture of expecting to only receive instruction from the teacher (Hiep, 2007). Due to such a passive learning habit, some students do not welcome participation in communicative activities, and others do not accept their partners' feedback. However, as we have seen before with the learners' and teachers' roles in CLT, learners are expected to be active participants in their language learning and development. Their collaborative learning through pair or group work depends on successful interaction, together with negotiation of meaning and language form. Therefore, learning cannot be successful in situations where learners are not willing to participate in communicative activities with their peers or group members, or do not accept their peers' or group members' feedback.

**Difficulties related to CLT itself.** The fact that CLT requires that teaching should mainly be based on communication causes different challenges in EFL contexts. In such contexts, challenges related to the nature of CLT are mostly due to mismatches between what is required by CLT and what is possible or available in local environments and educational systems (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Li, 1998). As a matter of fact, one of those challenges is the lack of an English environment because in most cases English is usually only used in the classroom. For example, five out of eight participants in Chang and Goswami's study reported that the lack of English environment in Taiwan was a limitation to the implementation of CLT. Similarly, all 18 participants in Li's study expressed discomfort with CLT because it "has not given an adequate account of EFL teaching" (p. 694). Li also reports that the participants added that regardless of

differences between ESL and EFL learning contexts, most of the research and documents about CLT and its implementation originate from ESL contexts. However, as it has been mentioned before, Li also explains how ESL and EFL contexts are completely different in terms of learning purposes, needs, resources, opportunities, and challenges. Therefore, it may not be practical to implement CLT in EFL contexts sticking to how it was conceived in ESL contexts or solely using materials such as textbooks that were developed there.

Another difficulty related to CLT is observed in assessing communicative competence. Due to heavy workloads, teachers usually have little time to develop their own assessment instruments, and some may even lack expertise in designing adequate instruments. In general, teachers may say that assessment is not an easy task, and research has revealed that when it comes to assessing communicative competence, the situation seems to be more difficult. For example, 16 out of 18 respondents in Li's (1998) study described unavailability of practical and objective ready-made tools to assess communicative competence as a barrier to the implementation of CLT. Due to their familiarity with traditional discrete-point grammar-based testing, the teachers protested that it was first of all perplexing to create their own assessment instruments to evaluate their students' communicative competence. Besides, the teachers complained that communicative assessment instruments such as oral presentations were not practical in their large classes of around 50 students. Another issue was questionable objectivity and reliability in grading as the following quotes from participants in Li's (1998) study illustrate it:

- There is no way that my colleagues and I would use the same criteria in the

test. Even I myself probably cannot use the same criteria all the time. I would probably use different criteria when I am tired after [a] long time of testing. (p. 695)

- About a year ago, for the final exam, besides the written test, I did an oral exam for the students in one of the classes I taught. Giving them a score was so difficult compared with grading the written tests. My biggest problem was how much I should assign to the content of their talk and how much to the language they used. Even before I finished the test, I knew that I used different criteria. I did not like the results of the test because they were not reliable. (p. 695)

The two quotes above illustrate that the participants were worried about inter-rater and/or intra-rater reliability, or simply put, objectivity and consistency either for one or more teachers, while scoring students' oral tests. Similarly, issues related to the nonexistence of ready-made assessment instruments, teachers' lack of expertise to develop their own instruments, as well as the worry about subjectivity and inconsistency in assessing communicative competence were reported in Chang and Goswami's (2011) study as well.

### **Summary**

Since its introduction in the 1970s, CLT has considerably marked the field of L2 teaching, though some criticisms have been leveled against it and studies have shown that its implementation, especially in EFL contexts, has been characterized by some challenges. CLT was introduced as a reaction to grammar-based language teaching methods such as the Audio-lingual Method and Situational Language Teaching. CLT aims to enable learners to develop communicative competence, or the ability to

communicate in their target language in different contexts. CLT proponents believe that language is learned best by using it for the purpose of communication. Following its recognition as an appropriate approach, CLT has been adopted in both ESL and EFL countries. However, the implementation of CLT has faced different difficulties, namely, those that are related to educational systems and teaching/learning environments, to teachers, to students, and to CLT itself. Despite encountered challenges, proponents of CLT suggest that since no method can fit all contexts, all the time, or in the same way, it is the teachers' responsibility, in collaboration with other educational stakeholders, to draw on others' ideas and make CLT work successfully to meet their students' needs in their contexts.

As the reviewed literature indicates, CLT is well known as an effective language teaching approach that promotes the development of the students' communicative competence. However, studies have also shown that there are some challenges with CLT, especially in EFL countries. Since it is not clear what the situation is in Rwanda, this study aims to investigate challenges that Rwandan university EFL teachers face while implementing CLT. The study seeks to answer the following research questions:

For teachers who have used CLT in the Rwandan context:

1. What do they perceive as problems/challenges in implementing CLT?
2. What solutions do they propose to overcome these problems/challenges?

To answer these questions, Chapter 3 describes how the data were collected and analyzed. After the discussion of these elements of the methodology, Chapter 4 will present the findings of the study.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

Even though numerous studies have been conducted on CLT in different countries, the reviewed literature has shown that there is only one study about Rwanda. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct other studies in order to know more about the use of CLT in Rwanda and to promote its implementation. This chapter explains how the present study was conducted in order to find out problems that hinder the implementation of CLT and necessary solutions for those problems. The chapter includes a description of each of the following: the research setting and the sample selection procedures, the data collection instrument and connected sub-topics, the questionnaire return rate, and methods of the data analysis.

#### **Research Setting and Sampling Procedures**

Participants in the present study were teachers of English selected from 10 public and private universities/colleges in Rwanda. At the time of choosing universities/colleges from which prospective participants would be picked, there were 31 university-level institutions in Rwanda, including 17 that were public and 14 that were private (Ministry of Education, 2013). As it was not possible to conduct the investigation at all the 31 institutions, a sample of 10 universities was drawn for the study. The number of 10 institutions was decided aiming at having a sample of 30 participants. Even though there is no rule specifying what the sample size should be, Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) state that the larger the sample is, the better; however, having at least 30 participants allows reaching statistical significance.

Furthermore, the universities from which the sample population was obtained

were chosen taking into consideration the different geographical locations of Rwanda and whether the universities were public or private in order to collect information that would give a representative image of the problems with CLT at various universities all over the country. Accordingly, the 10 purposefully selected universities included four private institutions and six public institutions from the four provinces of Rwanda, namely the Eastern Province, the Western Province, the Northern Province, and the Southern Province, as well as Kigali City, which is both the capital of Rwanda and considered as a separate province.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that even though there was a goal to have an equal number of institutions by location and legal /ownership status, this was not possible because in the Western Province there were only two campuses affiliated to other institutions. Therefore, while the initial plan was to select two institutions from each province and the City of Kigali, finally one institution was chosen from the Western Province and three were selected from the Northern Province. The names of the institutions from each province and Kigali city plus other necessary details will be given later in this chapter in Table 3.1 (under “Questionnaire Return Rate”).

After identifying the 10 institutions from which prospective participants would be selected, then email addresses of the directors of language centers at those institutions were sought either from the universities’ websites or from colleague teachers. Then, the directors of language centers were sent an email explaining the research to them and asking for a list of teachers of English as well as the teachers’ email addresses (see Appendix A for the sample email template). When the lists of teachers of English from different sampled institutions and their email addresses were received, three teachers were randomly selected from each list to make up a sample of 30 potential participants.



### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The data in this study were collected using an online survey questionnaire (See Appendix D). The questionnaire was comprised of three main parts that included questions about: (1) the participants' knowledge about CLT and their experience with this teaching approach, (2) difficulties/challenges encountered while implementing CLT and teachers' suggestions for its successful implementation, and (3) biographical information and other relevant details about the participants.

The first part of the questionnaire intended to introduce participants to the research topic and to collect information related to their use of CLT in class as well as their opportunities for training in this language teaching approach. The second and core part of the questionnaire included a variety of questions in which participants were asked to: 1) rate 22 listed difficulties that were most likely to be encountered in the implementation of CLT in Rwanda on a Likert scale ranging from *1-Not a problem* to *5-Major problem* and give reasons for their ratings, 2) add any unlisted issues and comment on them as well, 3) make a list of the issues that are the most serious and particularly need to be dealt with to promote the implementation of CLT, and 4) suggest possible solutions for problems with CLT.

Coming back to the list of 22 issues that respondents were asked to rate, the list was created referring to previous studies, particularly Jeon's (2009) study along with Hiep's (2007) and Li's (1998) studies. First and foremost, Jeon's (2009) survey questionnaire was a useful reference because it had an extensive list of issues that incorporated general problems that may be encountered in different EFL contexts. However, the questionnaire that was used in the present study differed from Jeon's as follows: Jeon's survey questionnaire included 18 issues that respondents were asked to

rate on a 10-response scale from 1 (unimportant) to 10 (most important), but the questionnaire used in this study included 22 issues to be rated on a 5-point rating scale: 1 = *Not a problem*, 2 = *Minor problem*, 3 = *Manageable problem*, 4 = *Quite a problem*, and 5 = *Major problem*. The number of problematic issues listed in the questionnaire came to 22 as a result of selections, revisions, additions, or omissions depending on what I thought would help me to collect the data that were needed to answer my research questions. The 5-response Likert scale was used because according to Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010), the most common scale numbers are five or six mainly because too many scale points may lead to unreliable data in case some respondents fail to give the right value to some of the points.

Additionally, while adapting the research questionnaire from Jeon's (2009) study, Hiep's (2007) and Li's (1998) studies were also referred to. Hiep and Li were consulted for the categorization of problems encountered in the implementation of CLT as difficulties/challenges related to the educational system and the teaching/learning environment, teachers, students, and CLT itself, which are the main areas of problems with CLT as it has been discussed in the literature review. Though these categories were not used in the questionnaire because it was necessary to mix up questionnaire items, they were helpful while determining possible issues to include in the questionnaire as well as during the data analysis and interpretation.

Even though the analysis of the ranking of different issues by the participants would give the information about what problems they thought were serious, there was another question that asked for a list of the issues that respondents particularly found as the real or most serious problems with CLT. The reason behind adding this question was to encourage the respondents to reflect more on their ranking and comments. This would

most likely increase the validity and reliability of the collected information. The last question in the second part of the questionnaire asked participants to give suggestions of what they thought could be done in order to achieve successful implementation of CLT.

Finally, the third and last part of the questionnaire was intended to collect biographical information about the participants. This section included questions about the following participants' personal and professional details: age, gender, highest academic degree, years of teaching experience, experience as student/teacher in English-speaking countries, courses taught at the moment of the survey or in the previous two years, the number of classes/groups taught in a week, the average number of students per class, the number of hours of class taught per week, and the participants' majors/fields of study. Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) recommend asking for such personal information toward the end of survey questionnaires mainly for two reasons. The first reason is to let respondents answer questions pertaining to the research study itself first when they are still enthusiastic about the topic of the study and the second reason is to avoid beginning the questionnaire by creating some resistance among the respondents who may feel uncomfortable to share their personal information such as age, level of education, or marital status as a result of their cultural tendencies.

Before the final administration of the survey questionnaire, it was piloted on a sample of four teachers who were teaching English at different universities in Rwanda. As Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010) point out, it is important to do piloting, or "field testing" (p. 53) of a survey questionnaire, which involves administering the questionnaire "on a sample of people who are similar to the target sample the instrument has been designed for" (p. 53) in order to know whether the questionnaire will effectively do the job or needs some changes. Thus, a pilot online survey was created on Minnesota State

University, Mankato's Qualtrics website (<https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com>) and the survey link was sent to the four teachers who had accepted to participate in the survey field testing. Moreover, the participants in the pilot administration of the questionnaire were also requested to provide their comments, make suggestions, and/or ask questions regarding the clarity of instructions, the wording and clarity of different questionnaire items, the readability of the questionnaire, or anything else.

After receiving the completed pilot survey questionnaires in my Qualtrics.com account and emails that contained respondents' feedback on the questionnaire, necessary changes including rewording some instructions and questions were made. For example, the question that asked respondents about their experiences with training programs that involved CLT was changed from just asking about when, where, and how long the programs had taken place and asked to provide a list with descriptions of programs attended. This would lead to obtaining more meaningful information instead of just a list of somehow decontextualized elements. The question that asked about the names of respondents' institutions was changed from only asking for the name to include the campus or college name if the institution had more than one (e.g., University of Rwanda - College of Business and Economics, University of Rwanda - College of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Rwanda - Nyagatare Campus).

Once the survey questionnaire had been revised on Minnesota State University, Mankato's Qualtrics website (<https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com>), two links to the survey were included in the participation request email that was sent out to the 30 prospective participants (see the email template in Appendix B). The first link directed to the survey itself (with a consent letter at the beginning - See Appendix C) and the second link led to a webpage where participants would indicate the name of their institution. Although the

respondents' answers were not to be linked to the names of their institutions as the survey was anonymous, it was necessary to collect that information in order to know the questionnaire return rate and representation of the different institutions sampled for the study. Completing the survey took the respondents approximately 45 minutes. The completed questionnaires were to be submitted into my account on the qualtrics.com website where I would retrieve them for the data analysis.

### **Questionnaire Return Rate**

Even though 30 questionnaires were sent out to teachers at 10 institutions, only 16 respondents (i.e., 53.33%) from eight institutions completed and submitted their questionnaires. This constituted one of the limitations of the study as it will be discussed further in the sixth chapter. Table 3.1 presents the names of sampled institutions, their legal statuses, locations, as well as statistics on the questionnaires that were sent out and those that were returned from each institution. It is important to note that the names of participating institutions have only been given in this section as that was where they were needed to make it possible to have a clear understanding about the participants' institutions as well as their statuses and locations. However, as this is an anonymous research study, the collected data will not be associated with the participants or their institutions.

Table 3.1 *Questionnaire Returns*

Institution	Location	Legal Standing	Administered Questionnaires ( <i>n</i> = 30)	Returns ( <i>n</i> = 16)
1. Independent Institute of Lay Adventists of Kigali (INILAK)	City of Kigali	Private	3	2
2. University of Rwanda – College of Business and Economics (UR-CBE)	City of Kigali	Public	3	2
3. Institute of Agriculture, Technology, and Education of Kibungo (INATEK)	Eastern Province	Private	3	3
4. University of Rwanda – Nyagatare Campus	Eastern Province	Public	3	2
5. Institut d'Enseignement Supérieur de Ruhengeri (INES – Ruhengeri)	Northern Province	Private	3	1
6. Integrated Polytechnic Regional Centre-North Campus (IPRC – North) / Tumba College of Technology	Northern Province	Public	3	1
7. University of Rwanda – College of Agriculture, Animal Sciences, and Veterinary Medicine (UR – CAVM)	Northern Province	Public	3	0
8. Institut Catholique de Kabgayi (ICK)	Southern Province	Private	3	0
9. University of Rwanda – College of Arts and Social Sciences (UR – CASS)	Southern Province	Public	3	2
10. University of Rwanda – College of Medicine and Health Sciences (UR – CMHS), Nyamishaba Campus	Western Province	Public	3	3

As indicated in Table 3.1, 10 of the 16 participants who returned their completed questionnaires (i.e. 62.50%) were teachers at public universities and six (constituting 37.50%) taught at private institutions. Among the 16 participants who returned their questionnaires, four were from the city of Kigali, five were from the Eastern Province, two were from the Northern Province, two were from the Southern Province, and three were from the Western Province.

## **Methods of Data Analysis**

The data in the survey report retrieved from qualtrics.com were already organized according to the three main questionnaire sections described under “Instrument for Data Collection” above. The first section was about respondents’ knowledge and experiences with CLT, the second one focused on problems with CLT and suggestions for solving those problems, and the third section was about respondents’ demographic information. During the data analysis, the questionnaire items in the first and third sections were combined because they all were about details regarding the participants’ background information. Then, the items in the second and main part of the questionnaire were analyzed taking into consideration the research questions.

To begin with, respondents’ demographics were analyzed using various elements of descriptive statistics according to the nature of each piece of information. On the one hand, the data involving a limited number of options (e.g., two or three options to choose from such as the participants’ gender: male/female; highest educational level: Bachelor’s degree/Master’s degree/PhD; and experiences as students or teachers in English-speaking countries: Yes/No) were analyzed using percentages. On the other hand, responses that included a wide range of data such as the respondents’ age, years of teaching experience, classes/groups taught per week, and the average numbers of students per class were explored using calculations of ranges, means, and standard deviations.

Next, the 22 problematic issues that respondents were asked to rate were grouped into four main areas of focus for easy analysis and presentation of the results. The four categories are: 1) difficulties/challenges related to the educational system and the teaching/learning environment, 2) difficulties/ challenges related to teachers, 3)

difficulties/challenges related to students, and 4) difficulties/challenges related to CLT itself. This grouping model was also used in previous research studies such as Chang and Goswami (2011); Hiep (2007); Kalanzadeh, Mirchenari, and Bakhtiarvand (2013); and Li (1998). Thereafter, respondents' ratings of the issues in each of these categories were divided into problematic issues (with a mean of 3.00 or above) and minor problems (with mean ratings below 3.00). The mean of 3.00 was taken as a reference point because 3 represented a manageable problem.

The participants' comments for their ratings of different problems with CLT were analyzed through grouping and selection. First, all the comments on the participants' ratings of different issues as 1-not a problem, 2-minor problem, 3-manageable problem, 4-quite a problem, or 5-major problem were grouped for each of these scale points. Next, based on what the mean rating for each issue was, either below or above 3.00, some corresponding comments were selected to be used as examples of potential reasons for the issue being rated as a problematic or minor issue. In other words, some comments from 1 to 3 were selected to be used with minor problems while some of those that were given for 4 and 5 were chosen to be used with problematic issues.

For the questions that asked respondents to mention any additional problems that they thought were missing on the list given in the survey questionnaire, to create a list of some issues that they particularly thought were the most serious, and to propose what they thought were solutions for problems with CLT, all the given answers were scrutinized and those that were similar or the same were tallied up.

Finally, the findings on the participants' ratings of different problematic issues, their listing of serious issues, and suggested solutions were compared in order to



determine if there were any correlations among the answers that were given.

### **Researcher Positionality**

I have been interested in and curious about the topic of this thesis paper because I believe that CLT is an effective approach to help learners of a second/foreign language gain communicative competence. Consequently, as a graduate student from Rwanda where English is a foreign language, I intended to know more about issues related to the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts. In other words, I wanted to understand the topic better in order to be able to effectively contribute to the improvement of English language teaching in Rwanda when I go back to teach there.

Having been a student and a teacher in the Rwandan EFL context, I already had some knowledge about most of the challenges encountered in English language teaching. For example, during my studies and teaching experience, I studied in or taught classes of more than 60 students. I also faced the challenge of scarcity of teaching facilities and aids (e.g., classrooms, computer labs and computers, books, television, radios, and so on). In addition, CLT came as an innovation after other approaches like audio-lingual method and grammar translation that people had been using for a long time, so some features of those methods may remain in place. Such a situation was not different for Rwanda when I was a student and later on a teacher: classes were dominated by grammar teaching and testing, teacher-centered instruction, and memorization, which are typical characteristics of the above-mentioned teaching methods.

Nevertheless, I believed that if given careful consideration, solutions can be found to overcome the challenges that I had faced or might even still be there at the time of the present research. I also believed overcoming possible challenges cannot be the teacher's

responsibility only, nor can it be the government officials', but a common obligation for policy makers, teachers, school/university authorities, students, parents, and any other people or bodies that are involved in education. These were the reasons that motivated me to conduct my thesis research on problems with CLT in order to find possible solutions for the problems.

Before moving to the next chapter, which presents the results of the study, it may be necessary to remember the aim of the study and the research questions that guided the research. The study aimed to investigate problems encountered by Rwandan university EFL teachers in their implementation of CLT. The study mainly had the following two objectives: to find out the problems that are encountered by teachers and the extent to which those problems hinder the implementation of CLT and to collect teachers' suggestions of what they think can be done to alleviate or completely solve the problems encountered in the implementation of CLT. Accordingly, two research questions were used in the questionnaire design and data analysis: For teachers who have used CLT in the Rwandan context: 1) What do they perceive as problems/challenges in implementing CLT? 2) What solutions do they propose to overcome these problems/challenges? The next chapter presents the results of the study.

## **Chapter IV**

### **Findings of the Study**

This chapter presents the results of the study collected from 16 respondents. Based on the two research questions that guided the study, the results are also presented focusing on the following two components: 1) problems encountered in the implementation of CLT and 2) teachers' suggested solutions for those problems. Before exploring the results related to these focal areas, the next section first discusses the demographic data about the participants.

#### **Participants' Demographic Information**

This section on demographic details and other relevant data presents an overview of 12 features about the participants: 1) age, 2) gender, 3) highest academic degree, 4) years of teaching experience, 5) experience as student/teacher in English-speaking countries, 6) classes/groups taught in a week, 7) average number of students per class, 8) number of hours of class taught per week, 9) use of CLT in class, 10) opportunities for training/workshop in CLT, 11) the participants' majors/fields of study, and 12) courses taught (at the moment of the study or in the previous two years). Table 4.1 presents a summary of the information for biographical elements 1-10.

Table 4.1 *Participants' Demographic Information*

Variable	n	%	Range	Mean	Standard Deviation
Age	<b>15</b>	<b>(100)</b>	30-42	36.07	3.33
Gender	<b>16</b>	<b>(100)</b>			
Male	14	(87.50)			
Female	2	(12.50)			
Highest academic degree	<b>16</b>	<b>(100)</b>			
Master's	11	(69)			
Bachelor's	5	(31)			
Years of teaching experience	<b>16</b>	<b>(100)</b>	3-13	8.13	2.99
Studied/Taught in English-speaking country	<b>16</b>	<b>(100)</b>			
Yes	6	(37.50)			
No	10	(62.50)			
Classes/Groups taught per week	<b>15</b>	<b>(100)</b>	1-3	2.38	0.87
Average number of students in class	<b>15</b>	<b>(100)</b>	40-170	66.33	33.35
Number of hours taught per week	<b>12</b>	<b>(100)</b>	12-40	19.50	8.80
Used CLT in class	<b>16</b>	<b>(100)</b>			
Yes	16	(100)			
No	0	(0)			
Attended workshop/Training on CLT	<b>16</b>	<b>(100)</b>			
Yes	11	(69)			
No	5	(31)			

As Table 4.1 indicates, there are some questions for which not all the participants gave responses, namely age, classes taught per week, the average number of students in class, and the number of hours taught per week. In such cases, the number of responses received was considered as 100%.

To have a more advanced understanding of the participants' demographics, it may be necessary to explore some breakdowns of the data in Table 4.1 as well as other important details. Starting with the respondents' years of teaching experience, four respondents (25%) had a teaching experience between three and five years, eight respondents (50%) had been teaching for six to ten years, and four (25%) had a teaching experience between 11 and 13 years.

In relation to the six participants who reported having been students in English-speaking countries, all of them had done their master's degree studies in the USA (two academic years) at different periods between 2009 and 2013. In addition to having done his or her studies in the USA, one of the six participants indicated that he/she was also a doctoral program candidate in the UK.

As shown by the statistics in Table 4.1, respondents reported that the number of groups or classes that they taught per week ranged from one to three. However, the majority of the participants taught three groups (this number was reported by eight of the fifteen respondents who indicated their number of groups/classes taught per week; i.e., 53.33%). Furthermore, although the most likely common system in Rwanda was having permanent groups or classes taught on a weekly basis, some respondents' comments indicated divergences from this system. For example, one respondent noted that there was a rotating system at his or her institution whereby teachers switched classes every other week; another respondent indicated that he or she taught twice a month; and there was a respondent who reported that the number of groups taught might depend on the university timetable or the teaching program (e.g., during intensive English programs, teachers had one or two groups to teach, but they taught every day).

Regarding the average numbers of students in classes, seven respondents (46.67%) taught classes with an average of 40-55 students, six respondents (40%) had classes averaging between 60 and 80 students, and two respondents (13.33%) had classes with an average of 100-170 students.

As far as the number of hours taught per week was concerned, seven respondents (58.33%) reported that they taught between 12 and 16 hours a week, three (25%) indicated that they taught between 20 and 25 hours, and two respondents (16.67%)

pointed out that they taught between 32 and 40 hours. Nevertheless, it is important to note that some respondents indicated that there were deviances from the most common system of having a fixed number of hours taught on a weekly basis. The following quotes from respondents show that at some universities the number of hours might be high during a certain period or program and later on change:

- “In intensive program we used to teach 45, but nowadays we teach 4 hours.”
- “In IELP [Intensive English Language Program] - 25 to 40 hours a week (i.e. 5 to 8 hours a day); in other courses, between 15 and 20 hours a week.”
- “Day & Evening: 40 hours; Weekend: 17 hours (depending on the course programming by departments).”

In order to know about the participants’ experience with CLT, the questionnaire included two questions that were designed to collect data on this. The first question asked the participants if they had ever used CLT in their classrooms or not, and the second one was about opportunities of having participated in workshops and/or training programs on CLT. As Table 4.1 shows, all of the 16 participants (100%) reported that they had used CLT in their classes. The table also indicates that 11 respondents (constituting 69% of all the participants) reported that they had received training or attended workshops on CLT. Some mentioned that they had been trained on how to use CLT as part of their English Language Teaching (ELT) methods classes at university while others named different education stakeholders and partners who had organized different workshops and training programs comprising or focusing on CLT. The workshop and training organizers and partners mentioned in the participants’ responses included the Ministry of Education, the Association of Teachers of English in Rwanda (ATER), the US Embassy in Kigali, the British Council, the American Corner in Butare-Huye, and the University of Oregon.

As far as the participants' majors or fields of study were concerned, their responses showed that they had studied in various domains mostly related to the English language or English language teaching. Table 4.2 presents the participants' different majors or fields of study.

Table 4.2 *Participants' Majors/Fields of Study*

Majors/Fields of Study	<i>n</i>	%
Business	1	(6.25)
Communication	1	(6.25)
Curriculum and Instruction	1	(6.25)
English-French with Education	3	(18.75)
English Language/Linguistics and Literature Education	2	(12.50)
Languages with education	1	(6.25)
Linguistics	2	(12.50)
TESOL	5	(31.25)

(N = 16)

The courses that the respondents were teaching at the time of this research study or had taught within the previous two years varied from one participant to another. The courses taught included those that are related to the four English language skills (i.e., reading, writing, listening, and speaking), Grammar, English for Academic Purposes, English for Specific Purposes (e.g., English for Health/Medical Professionals and Technical English), Communication Skills, Linguistics (General Linguistics, Applied Linguistics, and Sociolinguistics), English Language Teaching Methodology, and Literature in English.

### **Problems Encountered in the Implementation of CLT**

This section examines the data that were collected from different questions that aimed to find out the problems encountered in the implementation of CLT at Rwandan universities. The data are presented as follows: 1) an overview of the respondents' ratings of 22 problematic issues that were listed on the questionnaire, 2) an overall picture of

issues that were viewed as particularly challenging 3) issues that respondents added to the list of difficulties/challenges on the questionnaire, 4) the participants' listing of the most serious problems hindering the implementation of CLT, and 5) the participants' suggested solutions for problems with CLT. As it has been discussed before, the 22 problematic issues on the questionnaire have been divided into four main areas, namely difficulties and challenges related to the educational system and environment, teacher-related difficulties and challenges, student-related difficulties and challenges, and difficulties and challenges related to CLT itself.

**Difficulties and challenges related to the educational system and environment.** Under the category of difficulties related to the educational system and environment, there were eight issues. The eight issues were numbers 1, 2, 4, 5, 13, 16, 18, and 20 on the survey questionnaire.

The results of the participants' ratings indicated that the following six issues were problematic (in the descending chronological order of their mean ratings): numbers 20, 4, 2, 5, 13, and 18. Table 4.3 presents statistical information on the ratings of these six issues along with some of the participants' comments explaining the reasons for their ratings.



Table 4.3 *Problematic Issues Related to the Educational System and Environment*

Difficulty/Challenge	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Comments
20. Classes are too large for the effective use of CLT.	4.00	1.32	-“I think too large is not enough to describe our class sizes and the problem becomes worse with some classes with fixed chairs!!!!!!” - “Overpopulated classes within limited time render the CLT too difficult. Imagine a class of 60, 50 students.” -“This is a serious problem for my case. I may have more than 250 students in a classroom!!!”
4. Students lack opportunities and/or real environments to use English outside the classroom.	3.94	1.12	-“Very true. In Rwanda, people use one language either in offices, buses, bars and restaurants. There is no real need for using English outside the classroom.”
2. The time allotted to English classes is not enough for me and my students to use CLT and achieve the objectives of the course satisfyingly.	3.50	1.51	-“This is true. In fact much time and consideration is given to science teaching and language comes in at the second level. This reduces the teacher's motivation to use CLT as well as students' motivation.”
5. Grammar-based examinations have a negative impact on the use of CLT.	3.44	1.31	-“Very much true. Though innovation in teaching has included CLT method in the classroom, but the same group of people who prepare exams focus more on grammar. In addition, most learners learn English to advance to further levels of Education and teachers will focus their teaching on what their students will be evaluated on.” - “I agree, even when you try to use this CLT, you also have to emphasize grammar as you will be evaluated on your students' performance.” - “As all almost all exams in secondary schools are grammar-based, students at university understand grammar more than other features. So, it is a problem but if it is solved from secondary school level, it cannot be great at university level.”
13. University administrators, parents, and/or students themselves mainly care about scores in exams rather than communicative competence.	3.38	1.26	-“This is true because many are looking for success in terms of scores and forget about success in outside environment i.e. success at labour market as far as effective communication is concerned.”
18. There is a lack of enough teaching facilities and equipment such as language labs, computers, TV, tape recorders, CD/DVD players, printers, and overhead projectors at my institution.	3.31	1.58	- “I don't know about other universities and higher institutions of learning, but for ... [name of institution], this is a big problem: we do not have these equipments [sic].” -“This is a serious problem. Do not say that they are not enough because they are not there at all.”

Unlike the six problematic issues presented above, two issues were rated as minor problems (with mean ratings of around 2). Those were Issue # 16 (inappropriateness of textbooks) and Issue # 1 (lack of authentic materials). Table 4.4 gives statistics on the ratings of these two issues as well as some comments explaining why the issues were generally viewed as minor problems.

Table 4.4 *Minor Problems Related to the Educational System and Environment*

Difficulty/Challenge	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Comments
16. The textbooks at my university are not appropriate for CLT.	2.50	1.37	-“This is not a major problem because nowadays it is easier to have access to online materials.”
1. Lack of authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, movies etc.	2.13	1.26	- “This is a challenge, but teachers can handle it on their own.” -“There are many materials such as newspapers, articles or magazines available to teachers especially online.”

**Teacher-related difficulties and challenges.** Under the category of teacher-related issues, there were seven items, namely, issues number 3, 7, 10, 12, 15, 19, and 22. The findings of the study indicated that respondents judged four of these issues as problematic: 22, 7, 15, and 12. Table 4.5 presents statistical information about these problematic issues as well as some of the participants’ comments about each of them.

Table 4.5 *Teacher-Related Problematic Issues*

Difficulty/Challenge	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Comments
22. Teachers have little time to develop materials for communicative classes.	3.50	1.21	- "Huge workload may hinder the time allocated to the development of teaching materials."
7. There are few or no opportunities for practicing teachers to get in-service training in CLT.	3.13	1.50	- "This is a big problem. Teachers at universities do not have many opportunities to get training in CLT in English." - "Trainings have been organized, and the suggestion should be to increase their frequency."
15. Teachers do not receive or acquire enough knowledge/skills about CLT during their university studies.	3.13	1.41	- "Qualified teachers are not enough. Many did not do receive this kind of instruction at school, so they teach as they were taught or the way they think suits their students."
12. Teachers lack knowledge about the target language (English) culture.	3.00	1.15	- "This cannot be over generalized because it depends on the teacher's training background. Again, this can be overshadowed by the material available. Another thing is, we are not teaching students to lose their culture on the profit of the English culture."

On the other hand, the results of the study showed that respondents generally viewed three teacher-related issues as minor problems. Those were issues number 19, 3, and 10. Table 4.6 provides the statistics on the ratings for these issues as well as some of the respondents' reasons for their ratings.

Table 4.6 *Minor Issues Related to Teachers*

Difficulty/Challenge	Mean	Standard Deviation	Sample Comments
19. Some teachers are not willing to adopt CLT because they prefer other teaching methods.	2.69	1.35	- "Not a problem because there is no best method." - "They do not resist it because they prefer other methods instead because contexts they teach in do not allow that."
3. Teachers' proficiency in spoken English is not sufficient.	2.56	1.41	- "Teachers' proficiency is not a problem at university level." - "The proficiency should not be a problem instead this helps as teachers talk less and students do their activities whether in pairs, small groups or class discussions."
10. Teachers have misunderstandings of CLT.	2.50	1.32	- "Maybe those who are not trained in the matter." - "Some may have but this notion is broadly known in academia today."

**Student-related difficulties and challenges.** In the category of student-related difficulties and challenges, there were five issues: numbers 8, 11, 14, 17, and 21. It is important to note that some issues related to students are also connected with the teaching system or environment (e.g., Issue # 11: students' tendency to always use Kinyarwanda in pair or group work and Issue # 14: students' resistance to participating in communicative activities). In other words, the classification of issues was not restrictive; issues were classified considering the category in which they would fit the most.

The findings of the study indicated that three of the five issues in the category of student-related difficulties were generally rated as problems (with mean ratings ranging from 3.56 to 3.88). Those problems were issues number 11, 17, and 21. Table 4.7 gives further statistical information on the participants' ratings of these issues together with some comments that describe the participants' reasons for their ratings.

Table 4.7 *Student-Related Problematic Issues*

Difficulty/Challenge	Standard		Sample Comments
	Mean	Deviation	
11. Students tend to always use Kinyarwanda while doing pair or group activities.	3.88	1.15	- "Kinyarwanda as a mother tongue dominates all communication activities. This is an obstacle to acquiring English language." - "Most students use Kinyarwanda while doing group activities due to low background in English."
17. Students have a passive style of learning and mainly expect to receive instruction from the teacher.	3.63	1.31	- "This is another serious problem. Students do not want to work and find information by themselves. They instead wait for what their teacher will provide. Even during coursework, most of them want to copy what their strong classmates have done."
21. Students have low-level English proficiency.	3.56	1.41	- "This is another serious problem because students come to higher learning institutions with insufficient background in English." - "This is also a big problem as most of them evolved in a francophone system. They have a poor background in English."

In contrast, the remaining two issues related to students obtained means that are below 3.00 and can accordingly be considered as minor problems. Those were Issue # 8 (students' lack of motivation to develop communicative competence) and Issue # 14 (students' tendency to resist participating in communicative class activities). Table 4.8 presents the means and standard deviations for these two issues as well as some of the participants' sample comments for their ratings.

Table 4.8 *Minor Problems Related to Students*

Difficulty/Challenge	Standard		Sample Comments
	Mean	Deviation	
8. Students lack motivation for developing communicative competence.	2.81	1.33	- "This should not be a problem as it is our job as teachers to motivate these students and give them reason to develop this competence."
14. Students resist participating in communicative class activities.	2.75	1.29	- "It depends on the activity and the skills of the lecturer." - "They resist if teachers seem not to help them. To get students get to work requires teachers to play different roles."

**CLT-related difficulties and challenges.** Under the category of CLT-related difficulties, there were the following two issues: Issue # 6: CLT not taking into account differences between ESL and EFL contexts and Issue # 9: lack of adequate assessment materials or instruments to assess communication skills (especially speaking and writing).

As the study findings and the participants' comments indicate, Issue # 9 (lack of adequate assessment materials or instruments to assess communication skills) was generally seen as problematic. Table 4.9 presents statistical information as well as some of the respondents' comments about this issue.

Table 4.9 *CLT-Related Problematic Issue*

Difficulty/Challenge	Standard		Sample Comments
	Mean	Deviation	
9. There is a lack of effective and efficient instruments to assess communication skills, especially speaking and/or writing.	3.44	1.26	- “This is a big problem for university level (even in secondary schools) due to a big number of students in one classroom.” - “Only written skills are assessed and most often emphasis is put on grammar.”

Conversely, respondents largely viewed Issue # 6 (CLT not taking into account differences between ESL and EFL contexts) as a minor problem. Table 4.10 gives the statistics on the participants’ ratings of this issue and some participants’ sample comments.

Table 4.10 *Minor Issue Related to CLT*

Difficulty/Challenge	Standard		Sample Comments
	Mean	Deviation	
6. CLT doesn’t take into account the differences between teaching contexts where English is a native language and where it is not.	2.56	1.36	- “We are not slaves of any theory. We are the ones to blame if we do not take into account diversity and the learning setting, not the theory per se.” - “It does not really take into account the context because the aim is to assist students develop their communication skills, and this is needed in whatsoever context.”

**Overall picture of difficulties with CLT.** In general, the respondents’ ratings of different issues indicated that there were 14 problematic issues with CLT at Rwandan universities. Based on the descending order of their mean ratings, the 14 issues can also be classified into the following two categories:

– *Seven issues with a mean rating of 3.50 and above, which can thus be regarded as particularly problematic:*

- 1) Issue # 20: very large classes (mean = 4.00);
- 2) Issue # 4: students’ lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom (mean = 3.94);

- 3) Issue # 11: students' tendency to always use of Kinyarwanda while doing pair or group work (mean = 3.88);
- 4) Issue # 17: students' passive style of learning and expecting to receive instruction from the teacher (mean = 3.63);
- 5) Issue # 21: students' low proficiency in English (mean = 3.56);
- 6) Issue # 2: insufficient time allotted to English classes (mean = 3.50); and
- 7) Issue # 22: little time for teachers to develop teaching materials and activities for communicative classes (mean = 3.50).

*– Seven issues with a mean rating below 3.50 but above 3.00 which can be regarded as manageable problems:*

- 1) Issue # 5: negative impact of grammar-based examinations on the use of CLT (mean = 3.44);
- 2) Issue # 9: lack of appropriate instruments to assess productive communication skills (especially speaking and writing) (mean = 3.44);
- 3) Issue # 13: main interest in grades rather than communicative competence (mean = 3.38);
- 4) Issue # 18: lack of enough teaching facilities, equipment, and materials (mean = 3.31);
- 5) Issue #7: few or no opportunities for in-service training in CLT (mean = 3.13);
- 6) Issue # 15: insufficiency of knowledge and skills gained about CLT during university studies (mean = 3.13);

7) Issue #12: teachers' lack of knowledge about the target language culture (mean = 3.00).

Figure 4.1 portrays an overall picture of all the 14 problematic issues above.

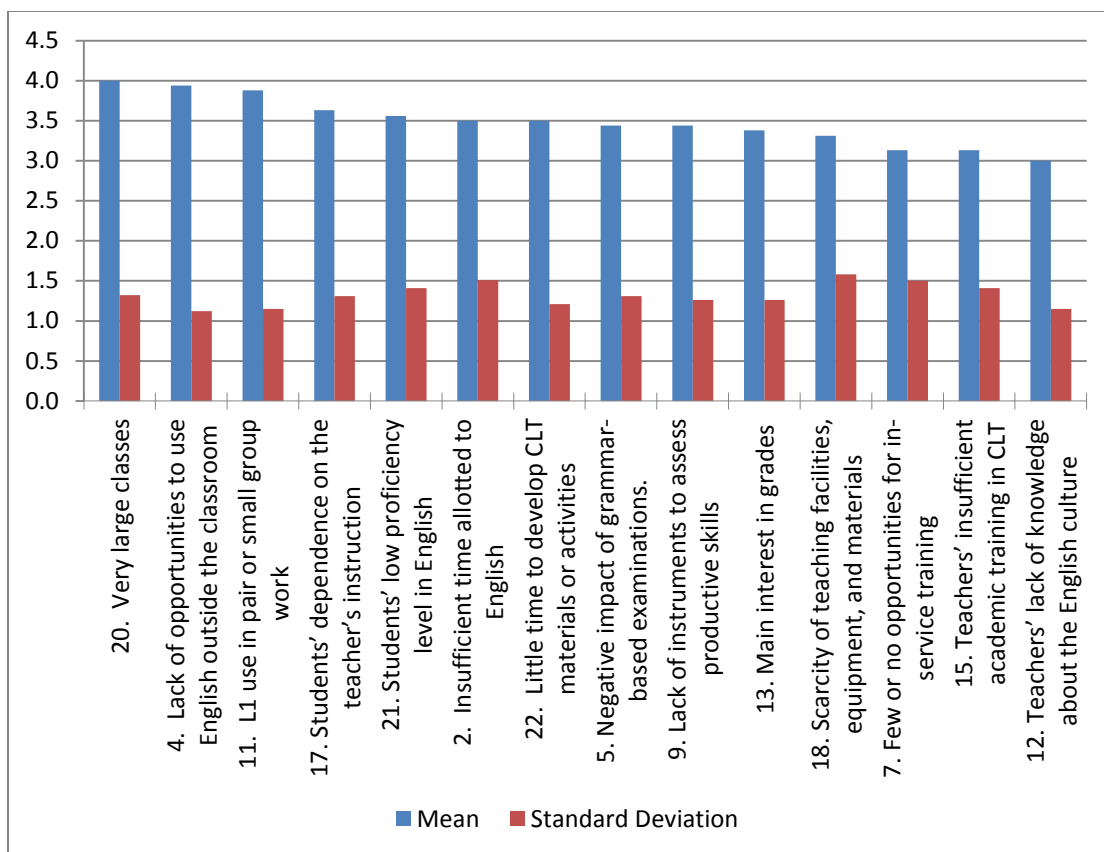


Figure 4.1 Problematic issues in implementing CLT

Unlike the 14 problematic issues highlighted above, the remaining eight issues had mean ratings below 3.00 and can thus be regarded as minor issues. As the purpose of the study was to identify the problems with CLT, it may not be necessary to come back to the minor issues again, especially that they have been highlighted in the overview of the respondents' ratings.

**Additional difficulties.** In response to the question that asked for additional difficulties that might not be on the list provided on the questionnaire, respondents



mentioned several issues. Among others, the following four problems were cited by at least two respondents: 1) not giving English the same importance as other subjects (stated by four respondents); 2) teachers' lack of motivation (mentioned by two respondents); 3) CLT not starting from primary and secondary schools (cited two times); and 4) some teachers' lack of knowledge of or exposure to modern trends of language teaching (mentioned by two respondents).

Even though respondents mostly stated the issues above without elaborating on why they were problematic, the following were some of the respondents' comments on the problem of English not being given the same weight or value as other courses:

- "Lack of University support. There is a focus on science today than on English, so the little money that people get is spent on building science laboratories."
- "Students focus on other courses and take English as facultative, trivial. They are busy concentrating on assignments and works from other courses for fear that they should fail."

As these comments show, an emphasis on other subjects while neglecting English may be an obstacle to the implementation of CLT. As mentioned above, the participants did not comment on the other three additional issues. Perhaps that was due to the fact that the two respondents who mentioned the issues thought that their descriptions of the issues already included enough information.

**Respondents' listing of serious problems.** After the questions that asked respondents to rank different problematic issues listed on the questionnaire and to add and rank any others they thought had not been listed, it was also necessary to know which issues Rwandan university EFL teachers were concerned about the most. Therefore, the participants were asked to create a list of issues that they personally thought were most

seriously hindering the implementation of CLT at Rwandan universities. In response to this question, the following three issues were more frequently listed than others: 1) lack of teaching facilities, equipment, and materials; 2) large classes; and 3) students' lack of commitment, motivation, and/or involvement in English language learning. Table 4.11 gives an overview of these and other difficulties that respondents enumerated plus the number of times that each was mentioned.

Table 4.11 *Most Serious Issues with CLT as per Respondents' Listing*

Issue	<i>n</i>
Lack of teaching facilities, equipment, and materials (e.g., labs, computers, and books)	6
Large classes	5
Students' lack of motivation, commitment, and/or individual involvement in learning English	4
Negative impact of grammar-based tests	2
Teachers' competence	2
Students' low proficiency level in English	2
Some teachers' reluctance to use CLT	2

In general, the results in the previous sections have indicated that Rwandan university EFL teachers face several challenges with CLT. The main challenges include overly large classes; students' lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom; students' tendency to always use Kinyarwanda while doing pair or group work; and a lack of teaching facilities, equipment and materials. Another challenging issue that was pointed out by respondents was negligence of English in some universities where the language is not a main subject. Some of these problematic issues, particularly large classes and students' lack of commitment and involvement in learning English, were both rated and listed as serious problems. However, there were some issues that respondents rated as problematic and finally did not include on the list of those that they thought were very serious or important. This was the case for the issues of the students' lack of the

environment to use English outside the classroom and the tendency to always use Kinyarwanda in pair or group. Possible reasons for these results will be examined in the discussion of the findings.

### **Teachers' Suggested Solutions for Problems with CLT**

Respondents provided a variety of suggestions on how problems with CLT at Rwandan universities can be solved. Among others, the respondents' suggested solutions were mostly about the following four areas of focus: 1) Enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills in using CLT through both pre-service and in-service training; 2) Availing enough teaching and learning facilities, equipment, and materials; 3) Promoting the use of CLT ; 4) Focusing on the learners' development of communicative competence from early levels of education (i.e., primary and secondary schools); and 5) Reducing the number of students per class. Table 4.12 presents the statistics on each of these five categories of suggestions:

Table 4.12 *Teachers' Suggestions for Solving Problems with CLT*

Suggestion	<i>n</i>	%
Enhancing teachers' knowledge and skills in using CLT	12	(75)
Availing enough teaching and learning facilities, equipment, and materials	6	(37.5)
Promoting the use of CLT	6	(37.5)
Focusing on the learners' development of communicative competence from early levels of education	5	(31)
Reducing the number of students per class	3	(18.75)

The present chapter has highlighted the results of the study pertaining to the problems encountered in the implementation of CLT at Rwandan universities. Moreover, the respondents' suggestions about how the problems can be solved have also been explored. The next chapter discusses the key findings of the study.

## Chapter V

### Discussion of the Results

This chapter focuses on the findings related to the research questions and previous research studies on problems with CLT at university in an EFL context and possible solutions for those problems.

#### **What do university teachers of English in the Rwandan context perceive as problems/challenges in implementing CLT?**

The results of the study indicated that there were seven problematic issues that respondents generally viewed as serious problems. This was shown by the mean ratings of 3.50 and above for those issues as well as respondents' comments.

*Large classes.* The survey findings have shown that many respondents viewed the issue of very large classes as a serious problem. Along with a mean rating of 4.00, the participants' comments continuously highlighted the situation in the classrooms and the consequences of the problem of overly large classes. Additionally, it may be important to remember that the average number of students in the participants' classes ranged from 40 to 170, with a mean of 66 students (see the demographic information section at the beginning of Chapter IV). One teacher pointed out that he or she might even have "more than 250 students in a classroom!!!" Indeed, it can be very challenging to effectively apply CLT in a class of 40, 50, 60, or 250 students.

According to the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL)'s position statement on "Maximum Class Size" (n.d.), the maximum class size for language teaching should be no more than 15 students, a number which is also

recommended by the National Education Association (NEA) and the Association of Departments of Foreign Languages (ADFL). Furthermore, despite the fact that educational institutions may be facing some constraints such as problems related to financial means or human resources, the ADFL stipulates that “in foreign language courses that stress all four skills, the maximum class enrollment not exceed twenty students” (“ADFL Guidelines and Policy Statements,” Revised 2012). The ACTFL and the ADFL give clear explanations of the reasons why class sizes should be reasonable, including permitting teacher-student and student-student interaction as well as the teacher’s ability to closely follow up his or her students’ learning and progress and give feedback on the students’ language practice and production. The following is what the ACTFL’s position statement on “Maximum Class Size” says:

Since the goal of a standards-based language program is to develop students’ ability to communicate, there must be opportunities for frequent and meaningful student-to-teacher and student-to-student interaction, monitored practice, and individual feedback during instructional time. (“Maximum Class Size,” n.d.)

In other words, even though a number of respondents’ ratings and comments indicated that some people may think that group work or other strategies such as peer-feedback and self-assessment can help in dealing with or solving the problem of large classes, such attempts may not be adequate solutions in classes of 40 or more students. It is obvious that more appropriate measures need to be taken for the implementation of CLT and language teaching/learning to be effective.

*Students’ lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom.* The problem of students’ lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom was also

identified as a serious issue with CLT. In addition to the mean of 3.94, the respondents' comments illustrated that there were several disadvantages in the implementation of CLT due to the fact that students learn and use English almost solely in the classroom. For example, there is no doubt that students' motivation to learn and use English communicatively cannot be the same as in environments where students need to use the language outside the classroom.

Nevertheless, as Kumaravadivelu's (2006) parameters of particularity and possibility suggest, not having the environment or opportunities to use English outside the classroom does not mean that practicing English outside the classroom is impossible. This was even illustrated by the fact that the respondents in this study did not list the issue of students' lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom as an important problem (this will be discussed further under the section on "What do teachers think are the most serious problems with CLT?"). To cope with the teaching and learning context in which students do not have opportunities or the environment to use English outside the classroom, teachers should encourage their students to adequately exploit the opportunities and resources that they have or that they can have access to (e.g., time – i.e., both class time and free time; learning materials; teachers; schoolmates/classmates; and so on) for them to achieve their English language learning goals.

***L1 use in pair or group work.*** Students' tendency to always use Kinyarwanda in pair or group work was another challenge with CLT, hence the mean rating of 3.88. From the participants' comments, it was obvious that in many classes students frequently used Kinyarwanda while doing English language learning activities or had that tendency. However, one of the objectives of CLT is to promote language learning through

communication in the language (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Richards, 2006). By performing assigned tasks in pairs or groups using English, students get opportunities to produce the language, to interact and negotiate meaning, and accordingly develop their communicative competence. That is supported by Swain's (1985) output hypothesis and Long's (1983) interaction hypothesis discussed earlier. Therefore, frequently using L1 limits students' opportunities for practice and learning.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that what may not be good is overusing L1; not just L1 use. Brown (2007) indicates that L1 has its place in second language learning and acquisition, especially in contexts where L2 learners share the same L1. For example, using L1 may make it easier and faster for learners to understand instructions to follow while performing an activity, to focus on grammatical and vocabulary use, and to discuss some cultural comments than when all their interaction is restricted to using English only.

*Students' passive learning style and dependence on the teacher.* As respondents indicated through both the mean rating of 3.63 and their comments, many students at Rwandan universities tended to be dependent in their English language learning. They either relied on their teachers or their classmates who might be stronger than they were. Such behaviors were reported to occur both in class activities requiring students' participation and in pair or group work (whether done in class or as homework assignments). Nevertheless, with CLT, students are supposed to be actively involved in the learning process (Hu, 2002; Richards, 2006) for them to successfully develop their language knowledge and skills.

As it has been discussed before, CLT does not support the teaching and learning style in which learners are receivers of knowledge or performers of instructions from the

teacher. Teachers then have the responsibility to increase their students' motivation and willingness to participate in learning activities. Since the students' level of involvement in learning activities depends on various factors such as their language proficiency levels, personalities, learning styles, preferences, learning motivations and goals, and the nature and level of difficulty of the activity being performed, teachers also need to utilize relevant and various strategies to engage all their students in learning activities. It is also important to encourage students to develop their communicative competence both autonomously and collaboratively, be it in or outside the classroom.

***Students' low proficiency in English.*** Students' low proficiency in English, which was rated with a mean of 3.56, was another obstacle to the successful implementation of CLT. As the sample comments in Table 4.7 show, the issue of students' low proficiency in English may considerably be connected with the Francophone system, which used to be the educational system in Rwanda, since it promoted the teaching and use of French over any other language. Some of the consequences of the students' low proficiency level in English include unwillingness to participate in classroom activities or recourse to frequent use of their L1. Willingness to participate in classroom activities may depend on various factors such as each student's personality, the activity being performed, the teacher's contribution in encouraging students to participate and his or her competence in administering the activities, or the students' feeling of comfort to speak in the classroom. However, the language proficiency level is another important element because it goes with self-confidence and ease of expression of one's ideas. For example, some students may frequently use their L1 in pair or group work because they feel that their proficiency level is too low to permit



them to speak confidently.

***Insufficiency of time allotted to English classes.*** On the list of respondents' ratings of the 22 listed problems, the issue of insufficient time allotted to English was rated with a mean of 3.50. Some respondents pointed out that at universities where English is not a main subject on the curriculum, the language classes are given little time and importance, which hinders teaching and learning in general and using CLT in particular. For example, where the language is only taught for four hours a week, which seems to be the common class time at many universities based on the statistics in the demographic information, the time may not allow effective application of CLT. Since learning mainly takes place in class, four hours may be very little time for enough communicative activities while the teacher is also striving to complete what is on the curriculum.

***Teachers' little time to develop CLT materials and activities.*** The problem of little time available for teachers to develop materials for CLT classes was another difficulty (rated with a mean of 3.50). Some teachers indicated that their workload and having a large number of students did not allow them to find enough time to prepare materials and activities for CLT. Certainly, preparing activities such as role plays, information gaps, discussions, and problem solving tasks plus related worksheets require more time than preparing closed-ended or discrete-point exercises. Therefore, it may not be easy for a teacher who has three or four classes of 40 or more students to teach to find time to prepare such activities and related materials and to do his or her other teaching duties. However, in case there is more than one teacher teaching the same subject, teachers can work together while designing their classroom materials and activities or

share those that they already have. Collaborative and supportive relationships among teachers can also help them to discuss any other challenges they may be facing and brainstorm solutions.

*Are there any additional issues?* The results of the study indicated that there were other issues that were not on the list of the 22 problematic issues on the questionnaire. Generally, the issue which proved to deserve more attention was the fact that English was not given the same value as other subjects at some institutions. This problem was reported by four respondents (i.e., 25%). The issue of neglecting English over other subjects in some institutions was also raised in the respondents' comments on the related issue of insufficient time allotted to English language teaching. As respondents pointed out, when English is treated as an optional course, negative consequences such as students' and teachers' lack of motivation may follow.

*What do teachers think are the most serious problems with CLT?* By comparing the participants' ratings of listed issues and their own listings of what they viewed as the most serious issues with CLT, the results revealed both regularities and variations. On the one hand, two important problems were among those about which the results of the study were consistent. Those were the issues of very large classes and students' lack of motivation, commitment, and involvement in learning. First, the issue of large classes appeared in almost the same positions for both the respondents' ratings of different issues from *1-Not a problem* to *5-Major problem* and their listings of the most serious problems. The issue was rated in the first position with a mean of 4.00 among the 22 problematic issues listed on the survey questionnaire and it was listed as the second most serious problem. Next, the issue of students' lack of motivation, commitment, and/or individual

involvement in learning English was also rated and listed consistently: its mean rating placed it in the fourth position among the 22 listed issues and it was cited as the third most serious problem. In brief, one can deduce that the issues of large classes and students' lack of motivation, commitment, and/or individual involvement in learning English were consistently judged as very important problems.

Conversely, as stated before, the issue of a lack of teaching facilities, equipment, and materials presents a particularity. While this problem had appeared in the eleventh position in the respondents' ratings on the *1-Not a problem to 5-Major problem* scale (with a mean of 3.31), the number of times it was mentioned as a serious problem put it in the position of the first most serious problem on the respondents' listing. This then implies that the issue might be a very serious issue at some universities as it was also mentioned in the participants' comments.

Another surprise in the respondents' listing regards the issues of students' lack of opportunities to use English outside the classroom and their tendency to always use Kinyarwanda in pair and group work. These two problems had obtained mean ratings that put them in the second and third positions respectively among the 22 problematic issues listed on the survey questionnaire, but they did not appear on the respondents' list of the most serious problems. On the one hand, one can guess that respondents may have considered not having opportunities to use English outside the classroom as a problem just because it was cited and depicted the reality, but they saw other issues as more important especially since the teaching environment is something that cannot easily be changed. On the other hand, respondents may have rated the students' tendency to always use their L1 in pair or group activities as a serious problem, but did not list it as very

important because it is incumbent on teachers to motivate their students to use English and to engage them in activities that promote using the language.

### **What solutions do teachers suggest for problems with CLT?**

The teachers' suggested solutions addressed various focal areas. There were even some issues that were considered as minor or manageable problems that were highlighted when it came to suggesting solutions for problems with CLT. The case that stood out was teacher training: while teachers' competence and opportunities to get in-service training were rated as manageable problems, the necessity for teacher training was recommended as being the first priority for the effective implementation of CLT. I personally think that this makes sense given the role of the teachers in the implementation of CLT. After all, teachers are the main agents of the implementation of CLT, so they need to be well informed about this teaching approach, how they can effectively use it, and how they can deal with challenges that they may encounter.

Another surprising issue was very large classes: although the issue had been both rated and listed as an important problem, only three respondents thought that solving this problem would promote the use of CLT. One can logically infer that respondents thought that there were other requirements coming before reducing the number of students per class such as availing teaching and learning facilities, equipment, and materials, plus training enough teachers.

## Chapter VI

### Conclusion

After analyzing and discussing the results of the study, it can be concluded that Rwandan university teachers of EFL encounter several challenges that need to be solved to allow successful implementation of CLT. In their rating of different problems with CLT, large classes were rated and reported to be the first challenging issue. This finding is in line with Jeon's (2009) study in which participants ranked overly large classes as the most serious problem with CLT in Korea. Furthermore, the participants' suggested solutions for problems with CLT also show that there are some issues such as teachers' competence that may be seen as manageable or minor, but solving them or giving them necessary attention can help to solve other more serious problems. For example, though rated as not very problematic, the availability of enough teachers who are adequately trained is of paramount importance: the teachers' knowledge and skills can allow them to deal with challenges that they may encounter.

Based on the findings of the present study, there are numerous pedagogical implications as well as some recommendations that can be addressed to different Rwandan university education stakeholders for minimizing the problems raised by the respondents. To begin with, as respondents have indicated, it is necessary to train enough teachers of English and to provide regular in-service training opportunities to teachers who are already employed. Another necessity is that the government and colleges together with their partners should collaborate to avail enough teaching and learning facilities, equipment, and materials. Next, CLT should be promoted from early levels of

education, and this should be in terms of both teaching and assessment. Finally, it is necessary to make efforts to reduce the number of students in classes. Certainly, effective language teaching and learning require a reasonable number of students in class in order to allow effective teacher-student and student-student interaction as well as the ability for teachers to monitor their students' learning and progress and to provide adequate guidance, facilitation, and feedback to all the students in class.

Furthermore, some problems such as large classes can obtain direct solutions while others such as a lack of the environment for students to use English outside the classroom can be dealt with through some alternative measures and efforts. For example, means can be found to build more classrooms and other teaching and learning facilities, but the lack of the environment to use English outside the classroom can be alleviated through measures such as encouraging English clubs as these can give students more opportunities to practice English language skills. In brief, different problems that have been reported in this study can be solved or alleviated depending on their nature, the context, and the possibilities that are available.

In addition to the implications and recommendations above, there are various suggestions for minimizing different problematic issues that have been mentioned in the study such as large classes, L1 use in pair/group work, a lack of the environment and opportunities to use English outside the classroom, and students' lack of motivation to develop communicative competence. Starting with large classes, though not ideal for the use of CLT and indeed challenging, Hess (2001) points out that teaching a large class offers a number of benefits. For example, a large class gives an opportunity of the availability of enough students for interaction, and the students can benefit from their

diverse personalities and potentials. In addition, as Hess reminds, in such a class, the teacher is not the only source of information or manager of the learning process because students can be assigned different roles in various learning tasks and accordingly act as the teacher's assistants.

As the ideas above indicate, teachers need to be able to counter the challenges caused by large classes. Hess (2001) discusses some principles, strategies and activities that can be used in this regard. For example, the teacher in a large class needs to vary activities and techniques that he or she uses in order to create an enjoyable environment for his or her students with their different learning styles and preferences. Among examples of helpful activities and topics that Hess suggests, students can have debates, discuss their likes and dislikes, talk about their experiences, or share their knowledge about famous people. Such activities can be done in pairs or small groups and then some pairs or groups will be invited to share their discussions with the whole class.

Context-specific topics that Rwandan teachers can use with their students may include debates and discussions on issues related to the Rwandan and global economy, politics, global warming and other climate conditions, relationships, and so on. Activities through which students can have opportunities to discuss or share their likes/dislikes and experiences in terms of sports, foods, travel, relationships, future plans, and so on can be very engaging too. Students can also discuss what they know and/or like/dislike about local and international famous people in sports, music, politics, history, or any other area of interest.

Other strategies to use in order to reduce challenges of large classes include utilizing collaborative learning, maximizing activities that provide students with

opportunities to work and enjoy activities in a personalized manner, allowing students to choose the topics to work on and give their own ideas, setting up routines to be followed throughout the semester, involving as many students as possible in each activity, and asking questions that allow students to express their opinions and ideas.

More specifically, teachers can allow students to choose their own topics to work on among those mentioned before about debates, likes/dislikes, and experience sharing. It is also possible to prepare activities that can allow students to think about what they will be using English for after their studies. In that way, each student will feel that his or her plans as well as reasons for learning are taken care of. The classroom policies and practices regarding attendance checking, tardiness, test dates and deadlines, pair and group formation and change, and so on also need to be communicated and discussed with students from the beginning of the semester. Nevertheless, Hess recommends that teachers should be flexible and ready to change any policy, convention, practice, or routine that does not work well or as expected.

Another suggestion made by Hess (2001) is to make sure that the teaching pace is not fast or slow. A balanced teaching pace allows all the students in class to effectively follow what is being taught and makes students feel comfortable without much pressure or boredom. In the Rwandan context, attention to the teaching pace is particularly necessary because classes may include students whose language proficiency level is low and those who are significantly advanced. This may be a result of the fact that some students did their high school studies in a Francophone educational system with little or no focus on English while others go to university already having had an Anglophone educational background putting emphasis on English. Another factor that makes it



mandatory to balance the teaching pace in an EFL country such as Rwanda is that the classroom may be the only place for some students to learn and understand something that they may be struggling with.

Brown (2007) and Özdemir (2015) discuss several strategies that can be used to minimize L1 use in pair or group work. In her action research at Hacettepe University, Turkey, Özdemir tested the effectiveness of some strategies used to prevent code-switching. The participants in her study were 34 elementary EFL learners who were studying English for 25 hours a week to improve their language proficiency in order to be able to do their undergraduate studies in the language. Özdemir identified and applied seven strategies during a four-week study after which she gathered students' feedback by asking them to grade the strategies out of 10. The seven strategies were 1) explaining the aim of the activity, 2) providing the language the students need, 3) making students work with a different partner, 4) punishment, 5) rewarding, 6) letting students pre-plan, and 7) monitoring closely.

To begin with, it is compulsory to let students know the purpose of the activity that they are going to perform and the benefits of using their L2. Even though using L1 may be a shortcut to accomplish an assigned task, students need to understand that maximizing their use of L2 helps them to develop their communicative competence in the target language. As it has been mentioned before, occasional uses of the students' L1 may be beneficial for specific reasons. Therefore, as Brown (2007) states, it is necessary for the teacher to discuss with his or her students the circumstances in which it is a problem to use their native language and when it is not so that they understand that it is for their own benefit to make the most use of their L2. Undoubtedly, intrinsic motivation among

students leads them to see the value of their L2 and why they should do their best to use the language as much as possible, which will automatically reduce or eliminate the overuse of L1 in pair or group work.

Next, providing the learners with some language that they will need while performing a learning activity is helpful too. The teacher can pre-teach or guide students in the brainstorming of some useful words, phrases, or sentences that are expected to be used. Changing partners is another strategy for minimizing L1 use because that offers opportunities for students to get a new person to work with and to talk to. Among other benefits of changing students' partners is the fact that the topics or examples that were used with another partner can be used again with a new partner. Furthermore, while punishments can discourage students from using their L1, rewards can be a way of motivating students to maximize L2 use.

Another useful strategy to help students have enough ideas and language to use while performing tasks is to allow them to pre-plan. If students are given time to prepare what to share with peers or group members, they start pair or group work being self-confident as they have both ideas and the language to use while working with others.

As Özdemir (2015) states, monitoring students closely while they are performing an activity is another effective strategy for minimizing L1 use. As the teacher cannot monitor the whole class alone all the time, some students can have this responsibility as part of their role in group work. That will not only help in minimizing L1 use, but it will also be a way of promoting students' ownership and independence in their L2 learning.

Regarding the issue of a lack of the environment to use English outside the classroom, some alternative measures can be taken to compensate the situation. In

addition to extra-curricular activities such as English language clubs mentioned before, Chang and Goswami (2011) highlight that adequate teaching aids can be helpful in creating the environment for students to receive input and to produce and practice output. The teaching equipment such as audio, video, computers, and the internet can be used by students in their communicative language learning activities both inside and outside the classroom. If the university has these equipment and materials or students have their own, students can have numerous opportunities to use English outside the classroom through fun homework assignments that the instructor provides.

Finally, as far as the students' motivation to learn English and to develop their communicative competence is concerned, the teacher can have a huge influence to solve this problem in different ways. First of all, the teacher himself or herself should be a role model and show enthusiasm for English language learning and use. The teacher can also motivate his or her students by creating interesting activities and assignments. Another strategy is to personalize instruction and make sure that each student can see his or her learning goals, needs, styles, and preferences being taken into consideration and catered for. It is also important to help students create their own learning goals and vision of the ideal English language learner self. Undoubtedly, having clear goals and vision makes students strive to achieve those goals and vision.

Additionally, U.S. based and other teacher-training programs, particularly in places where people from different countries meet as students or teachers, can play a significant role in solving different problems with CLT in EFL contexts or toward improvements. Students in these programs as well as their instructors have various backgrounds and experiences, so they can share ideas on how encountered problems can

be solved or alleviated. Research studies such as the present one as well as those that involve action research on solutions addressing specific problems, which may be singled out for the sake of practicality, should also be encouraged.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study has encountered a number of limitations. The main ones include a small sample size and the use of a questionnaire as the data collection instrument. To begin with, the fact that the data was collected only from 16 participants makes it impossible to generalize the findings to all teachers of English at Rwandan universities. The findings just give an image that can be applicable to the sample and serve as a starting point for further research on larger samples. Next, as the data were collected using a questionnaire, the reliability of the findings was also affected. Even though measures such as asking respondents to provide comments on their reasons for some of their answers were taken, other data collection methods such as interviews and classroom observation may have provided further and more reliable information. One of the shortcomings of the use of questionnaires is what Dörnyei and Taguchi (2010, p. 8) call “social desirability bias”: guided by the description of the purpose of the study or other clues, some respondents may try to provide responses that they think the researcher wants or expects from them.

### **Suggestions for Further Studies**

This study investigated difficulties that Rwandan university EFL teachers encounter in their implementation of CLT. As there are questions connected with the topic that were not covered in the study, further research studies could be conducted to find answers for the following:

- 1) How do Rwandan university teachers cope with difficulties with CLT?
- 2) What language teaching methods do teachers use at primary and secondary schools?
- 3) What problems do teachers encounter at primary and secondary schools?
- 4) Do teachers of English at public and private universities face the same or different problems with CLT?
- 5) What problems do university administrative authorities perceive with CLT?

Studies on these and related areas can make it possible to explore the topic of this study more deeply and to reach more transferable findings that can lead to the effective implementation of CLT and language teaching in general.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Sample Email Template (Directors/Deans of Language Centers)

**Re: Request of names and contact information of teachers of English as potential participants in research**

Dear Dean,

I am sending this email to request names and contacts of the teachers of English in your institution. I am a graduate student in MA English: Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at Minnesota State University, Mankato (in Minnesota, USA). I am conducting a study to investigate Rwandan University EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Teachers' Perceived Difficulties in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Therefore, I need the requested information because I would like to ask teachers of English in your institution to participate in the study by filling out an online questionnaire.

Should you have a question about the research, do not hesitate to contact Dr. Glen Poupore – the Faculty Principal Investigator – at [glen.poupore@mnsu.edu](mailto:glen.poupore@mnsu.edu) or Jean Bosco Ntirenganya – the Student Principal Investigator – at [jean-bosco.ntirenganya@mnsu.edu](mailto:jean-bosco.ntirenganya@mnsu.edu).

Sincerely,

Jean Bosco Ntirenganya

## Appendix B: Sample Email Template (Prospective Participants)

### Re: Request to participate in research

Dear teacher of English,

Thank you for taking the time to review this email. My name is Jean Bosco Ntirenganya, and I am a graduate student in MA English: Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) at Minnesota State University, Mankato (in Minnesota, USA). You have been selected to participate in a research study that investigates Rwandan University EFL (English as a Foreign Language) Teachers' Perceived Difficulties in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Note that your participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in the research, rest assured that your responses will be anonymous. The survey will take approximately 45 minutes to complete. Here are two URL/web **links to the survey** and some explanations about each of them:

- (1) [https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_5sR8I5LzTJskZz7](https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_5sR8I5LzTJskZz7) (this opens **the whole survey**) and
- (2) [https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV\\_eQyfw8xSjMNVSHr](https://mnsu.co1.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_eQyfw8xSjMNVSHr) (this additional link contains only one question that asks you **the name of your institution**. The name will just be used to check the questionnaire return rate and representation of different institutions. For that reason, if you decide to participate, please open the second link and give the name of your institution **after submitting your responses**). Rest assured that the two links are not associated at all to ensure that your responses will be completely kept anonymous.

#### **Note: Possibility of completing the questionnaire in more than one sitting**

If you don't finish the survey in one sitting for one reason or another (e.g. problems with the internet connection or having limited time), when you re-open the link to the questionnaire **on the same computer and using the same web browser** - e.g. Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, - you will be taken back to where you previously stopped and continue completing the questionnaire without any problem.

I would like to thank you for your consideration to participate and time you devote to completing the survey, and I look forward to learning more about your teaching experiences.

Sincerely,

Jean Bosco Ntirenganya

## **Appendix C: Online/Anonymous Survey Consent**

You are kindly requested to participate in a **research** study that investigates Rwandan University EFL Teachers' Perceived Difficulties in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The purpose of the study is to explore difficulties/challenges encountered by the aforementioned teachers and the extent to which each difficulty/challenge might be hindering the implementation of this language teaching approach.

This study is supervised by Dr. Glen Poupore and conducted by Jean Bosco Ntirenganya, an MA TESL graduate student in the Department of English at Minnesota State University, Mankato, USA. You were selected as a potential participant in the study because you are a Rwandan EFL teacher working in Rwanda. You will be asked to answer questions about your experiences with and beliefs about CLT, with a focus on difficulties/challenges faced while implementing this language teaching approach in the Rwandan university teaching context. The survey questionnaire is expected to take approximately 45 minutes to complete. If you have any questions about the research, please contact Dr. Glen Poupore at [glen.poupore@mnsu.edu](mailto:glen.poupore@mnsu.edu) or Jean Bosco Ntirenganya at [jean-bosco.ntirenganya@mnsu.edu](mailto:jean-bosco.ntirenganya@mnsu.edu).

Participation is voluntary. You can choose not to participate in this research, and you may stop taking the survey at any time by closing your web browser. Participation or non-participation will involve no penalty or loss of benefits and will not impact your relationship with Minnesota State University, Mankato, or with the investigators. If you have questions about the treatment of human participants' rights and Minnesota State University, Mankato, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Administrator, Dr. Barry Ries, at 507-389-2321 or [barry.ries@mnsu.edu](mailto:barry.ries@mnsu.edu).

Your responses to the survey will be anonymous, and the records of this research study will be kept confidential. The information regarding your institution will only be used for demographic purposes and will not be associated with the other answers that you provide. The results of the survey will be kept on a secured laptop. It is also assured that any publications and presentations of the results will not include demographic descriptions of individual participants that are detailed enough to make identification possible. However, as the data collection will use online technology, there might always be the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. For more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks caused by online surveys, contact the Minnesota State University, Mankato Information and Technology Services Help Desk (507-389-6654) and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager or email [servicedesk@mnsu.edu](mailto:servicedesk@mnsu.edu).

The risks you will encounter as a participant in this research are not more than experienced in your everyday life.

There is no direct cost or benefit to you for participation in this research. Participation will cost you only time and you will not receive money to participate. However, results gathered from the study might provide a better understanding of difficulties/challenges encountered while implementing CLT at Rwandan universities, the importance/seriousness of such difficulties/challenges, and how they can be overcome.

### **PARTICIPANT CONSENT**

Submitting the completed survey will indicate your informed consent to participate and your assurance that you are at least 18 years of age.

Please do not hesitate to print a copy of this page for your future reference.

**MSU IRBNet ID # for this research:** 623694

**Date of MSU IRB approval:** June 23, 2014

## **Appendix D: Online Survey Questionnaire**

### **About the questionnaire**

This survey is designed for Rwandan teachers of English teaching in public and private universities in Rwanda. It aims to explore difficulties/challenges encountered in English language teaching, particularly while implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

The survey comprises three parts: (1) your knowledge and/or beliefs about CLT as well as experience with this teaching approach, (2) difficulties/challenges encountered in implementing CLT and your suggestions for successful implementation of this teaching approach at Rwandan universities, and finally (3) information about you, the participant, and other relevant details. Please read each instruction and answer honestly based on your experience, beliefs, and understanding at this time as only this will guarantee success of the investigation. This is not a test; so, there are no “right” or “wrong” answers. We are only interested in your personal opinion. Thank you very much for your assistance!

#### **Note:**

As we think that you may be interested to know the findings of the investigation, a copy of the research report or a link to the report will be sent to you in our “Thank You” email upon completion of the study.

### **Part I: Questions pertaining to teachers’ knowledge and/or beliefs about, as well as experience with CLT**

Please read the following brief description of CLT as well as some of its characteristics and principles and answer the questions that follow.

#### **Brief description of CLT and its characteristics and principles**

CLT is an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the primary goal of language learning is communicative competence, i.e., the ability to produce and understand messages in real life communication. CLT is a learner- centered approach that generally, but not always, involves students’ interaction/discussion to perform an assigned communicative activity in pairs/small groups.

Other characteristics and principles of CLT include:

- Tolerating learners’ errors as they indicate that the learners are building up their communicative competence;
- Integration of different language skills such as speaking, reading, listening, and writing together since they usually occur so in the real world;
- Use of authentic texts (such as an advertisement or a newspaper article) and communication activities linked to “real-world” contexts (e.g. role-playing a doctor and a patient at hospital, debating, information-gap activities based on picture/map description).



### Questions

1. Based on your own knowledge and/or the description provided, do you use or have you ever tried CLT in your classes?

- Yes  
 No

(If your answer to the previous question is “no” and it is your first time to hear about CLT, please **continue to Part III.**)

2. Have you ever participated in any kinds of programs such as workshops, and/or special training programs devoted to CLT?

- Yes  
 No

If “yes,” **list and briefly describe** the workshop(s) and/or training program(s) that you attended. (If your answer is “No,” skip this one.)

### **Part II: Questions regarding perceived difficulties / challenges in implementing CLT and your suggestions for successful implementation of CLT at Rwandan universities.**

1. In this section, we would like you to tell us how much you think the following challenges/difficulties might be hindering the implementation of CLT at Rwandan universities by choosing a rating from “**Not a problem**” to “**Major problem.**” As we would like to know your opinion about each of the listed difficulties/challenges (as well as others that you may add to the list), it is desirable that you do not leave any item unrated.

If you have a particular reason for your rating choice, please also give that reason in the space provided after each statement.

**For example:**

If you think the challenge/difficulty in the following statement is a small/minor problem, you can choose the corresponding rating and give the reason for your choice as follows:

Teachers lack enough ability to use technology equipment such as overhead projectors.

This is a minor problem because most teachers receive instruction on how to use such technology equipment at university. Even those who received little or no training on how to use the equipment can be assisted by colleagues or IT personnel.

Not a problem   **Minor problem**   Manageable problem   Quite a problem   Major problem

↓

○   ●   ○   ○   ○

Reason

↑

**Choose a rating for the difficulty/challenge in each statement, and write the reason for your choice in the space provided.**

	Not a problem	Minor problem	Manageable problem	Quite a problem	Major problem
<p>1. Teachers lack authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, movies etc.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	○	○	○	○	○
<p>2. The time allotted to English classes is not enough for me and my students to use CLT and achieve the objectives of the course satisfyingly.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	○	○	○	○	○
<p>3. Teachers' proficiency in spoken English is not sufficient.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%; margin-top: 10px;"></div>	○	○	○	○	○

	Not a problem	Minor problem	Manageable problem	Quite a problem	Major problem
4.Students lack opportunities and/or real environments to use English outside the classroom.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5.Grammar-based examinations have a negative impact on the use of CLT.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6.CLT doesn't take into account the differences between teaching contexts where English is a native language and where it is not.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7.There are few or no opportunities for in-service teachers to get on-the-job training in CLT.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8.Students lack motivation for developing communicative competence.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9.There is a lack of effective and efficient instruments to assess communication skills, especially speaking and/or writing.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not a problem	Minor problem	Manageable problem	Quite a problem	Major problem
10. Teachers have misunderstandings of CLT.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11. Students tend to always use Kinyarwanda while doing pair or group activities.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12. Teachers lack knowledge about the target language (English) culture.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13. University administrators, parents, and/or students themselves mainly care about scores in exams rather than communicative competence.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14. Students resist participating in communicative class activities.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15. Teachers do not receive or acquire enough knowledge/skills about CLT during their university studies.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16. The textbooks at my university are not appropriate for CLT.  <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

	Not a problem	Minor problem	Manageable problem	Quite a problem	Major problem
<p>17. Students have a passive style of learning and mainly expect to receive instruction from the teacher.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>18. There is a lack of enough teaching facilities and equipment such as language labs, computers, TV, tape recorders, CD/DVD players, printers, and overhead projectors at my institution.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>19. Some teachers are not willing to adopt CLT because they prefer other teaching methods.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>20. Classes are too large for the effective use of CLT.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>21. Students have low-level English proficiency.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
<p>22. Teachers have little time to develop materials for communicative classes.</p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; height: 40px; width: 100%;"></div>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Are there any other ideas about difficulties/challenges which have not been mentioned that you find as disfavoring or blocking the adoption of CLT in Rwanda?

(If any, write your additional ideas together with your comments about them, and select their corresponding rating scale in the same way you have done above.)

**Challenges/Difficulties that have not been mentioned, plus your comments about them, and their ratings:**

	Not a problem	Minor problem	Manageable problem	Quite a problem	Major problem
23. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
24. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
25. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
26. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
27. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
28. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
29. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
30. <input type="text"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

2. Based on the difficulties and challenges listed, and/or those that you have added to the list, please mention what you **PERSONALLY THINK** are the biggest problems to the implementation of CLT at Rwandan universities and explain why.

**Note:**

You are free to list **ANY NUMBER OF PROBLEMS** – e.g. two, three, or more, – and we expect you to state them according to what you think is their order of importance or seriousness.

3. What are your suggestions for the successful implementation and practice of CLT in Rwanda?

**Part III: Personal information and other details**

Please provide the following information by writing your response in the space or selecting the appropriate option.

1. How old are you?

2. Gender:

- Male  
 Female

3. Highest academic degree:

- Bachelor's Degree  
 Master's Degree  
 PhD

4. Field of study/ Major (e.g. Communication, English Linguistics, TESOL, etc.):

5. How many years have you been a teacher of English?

6. Have you ever been a student/teacher in a country where English is a native language?

- Yes  
 No

If “yes,” **when, where** – i.e. in which country, **at what educational level** (e.g. secondary school, university – undergraduate, university – graduate, etc.) and **how long** did you study/teach? (If your answer is “No,” skip this one.)

7. What English courses have you taught in the past 2 years or are you currently teaching? (Give the course titles.)

8. How many classes/groups do you usually teach in a week?

9. What is the average number of students do you usually have in class?

10. How many hours of class do you teach a week?

11. Status of your institution:

- Public  
 Private

**End of questionnaire.**

**Note:**

Please don't forget to go to the second link where you are asked to provide the name of your institution to help us know about the questionnaire return rate and the extent of representation of different institutions.

**Thank you very much for your cooperation!**