

Expectation versus Reality: Communicative Approach to EFL Teaching

Abdu Al-Mekhlafi, Sultan Qaboos University, rayan3@gmail.com

P. N. Ramani, Ministry of Manpower, Sultanate of Oman, ramanipn@yahoo.co.in

Abstract

This article explores EFL teachers' attitudes towards using the communicative approach to the teaching of English and how it is being understood and implemented by EFL teachers in the context of Oman, given the likely discrepancy between professed theory and classroom practice. More specifically, the study has investigated the EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of the communicative approach in teaching English. The study has also investigated how their perceptions vary according to their gender, qualification, and the level taught by them in relation to the place and importance of grammar, error correction, the respective roles of the learner and the teacher in the learning process, and classroom interactions in the form of pair or group work. Ninety-three teachers of English – 47 male and 46 female – from basic and general education schools in Oman were randomly selected for the study. Karavas-Doukas's (1996) attitude scale was used in the present study. The respondents were asked to indicate the level of agreement on a five-point scale. The responses were statistically analysed for the mean scores, standard deviation and T-test of significance across the variables. Overall, the study found that there is a moderately favourable attitude among EFL teachers towards using the communicative approach.

Key words: communicative approach to EFL teaching

This article has been peer-reviewed and accepted for publication in *SLEID*, an international journal of scholarship and research that supports emerging scholars and the development of evidence-based practice in education.

© Copyright of articles is retained by authors. As an open access journal, articles are free to use, with proper attribution, in educational and other non-commercial settings.

ISSN 1832-2050

Introduction

Most English language teachers and teacher trainers subscribe to communicative methodology, if not to the communicative approach. The term, however, does not refer to one particular type of methodology, but a spectrum of teaching methods and procedures that have evolved over a few decades since 'communication' came to be generally recognised as the ultimate goal of language teaching.

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is described as a method that promotes language acquisition and encourages expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning (Kumaravadivelu, 1993). According to Brown (1994), the goal of communicative language teaching (CLT) is to develop the communicative rather than grammatical or linguistic competence of learners, with a focus on pragmatic, authentic, functional use of the language for meaning and with an emphasis on

fluency, which keeps learners meaningfully engaged. CLT is defined as a foreign language teaching method that develops communicative competence, not just knowledge of grammatical structures (Matthews, 1997).

Despite the widespread adoption of the communicative approach in ESL/EFL curricula and textbooks around the world, research suggests (e.g., Anderson, 1993; Christ & Makarani, 2009; Sze, 1992; Ye, 2007; that communicative language teaching principles in classrooms are rarely to be found and that only a fairly limited use of communicative principles has been evident in syllabus design, lesson structure, and content. Most teachers now profess a commitment to the communicative approach and claim to use a communicative approach in some way or other – no one wishes to be called a 'non-communicative teacher' – while they may actually follow more structural approaches in their classrooms (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Saricoban & Tilfarlioglu, 1999).

Besides the communicative approach to language teaching, several theories about second language (L2) instruction and language pedagogy have been proposed, for example, Krashen's Monitor Model (Krashen, 1981), Long's Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), VanPatten's input processing theory (VanPatten, 1996, 2002) and Ellis's theory of instructed language learning (Ellis, 2005). All these theories address the relationship between L2 instruction and acquisition.

A communicative approach emphasises the purposes of language – what we use the language for – over detailed knowledge of formal grammar, that is, language is seen as a tool of communication rather than as a subject for academic study. We learn to communicate in a language by actually communicating in that language.

While the practitioners of the communicative approach agree upon the attainment of communicative competence as the ultimate goal of language learning, different methods and procedures have produced a wide variety of syllabus designs and classroom procedures. According to Howatt (1984), there seem to be weak and strong versions of the communicative approach. The weak version includes pre-communicative tasks, such as drills, cloze exercises, and controlled dialogue practice, along with communicative activities (for example, the PPP lesson – presentation, practice and production). Littlewood (1981) considered pre-communicative activities as a necessary stage between controlled and free (or uncontrolled) language usage. In the strong versions, the teacher is required to take a less dominant role and the learners are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning.

For example, notional and functional categories of language were proposed as the basis of creating a communicative syllabus for language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980; Wilkins, 1976). Nevertheless, inventories of functions and notions do not necessarily reflect the reality of language learning any more than inventories of grammatical and lexical items do (Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1988). Nunan (1988) points out that language learning does not occur in a linear-additive fashion and thus the focus of learning should be on language use rather than on the language itself.

Hiep (2007) refers to the interesting debates on communicative language teaching (CLT) in recent articles in the *ELT Journal*, but points out that within the broad theoretical position on which CLT is based, different understandings of CLT exist. The articles draw on a study of teachers' beliefs and implementation of CLT in Vietnam.

Among the salient features of the communicative approach, the most important issues that are discussed often in the literature are: the place and importance of grammar, error correction, the respective roles of the learner and the teacher in the learning process, and classroom interactions in the form of pair or group work.

Thompson (1996, pp. 9-10) considers the exclusion of explicit attention to grammar a misconception about what communicative language teaching involves, although “it is certainly understandable that there was a reaction against the heavy emphasis on structure at the expense of natural communication.” A number of applied linguists have argued strongly and persuasively that explicit grammar teaching should be avoided. Prabhu (1987), for example, argues that grammar teaching is impossible because the knowledge that a language a person needs in order to use the language is simply too complex to be taught. Students’ and teachers’ views on the role of grammar and error correction were surveyed by Schultz (1996).

An error, according to Hendrickson (1980:169), is “an utterance, form, or structure that a particular language teacher deems unacceptable because of its inappropriate use or its absence in real-life discourse.” The term error correction is used to indicate what the teacher does “in response to what is perceived to be an error” (Chun et al. 1982, p. 538). Seedhouse (1997) argues that “it is possible, in certain circumstances, for teachers to create and maintain a dual focus on form and meaning, on accuracy and fluency.” One of the ways in which this can be accomplished, according to him, is by “limiting the teacher’s role to using camouflaged correction techniques to upgrade and scaffold learner utterances.”

One of the useful techniques suggested by the communicative approach is the use of pair/group work activities in the language classroom. This is based on the principle that learners need to be given some degree of control over their learning. Language is a system of choices, so learners must be given the opportunity to learn how to make choices. (Thompson, 1996) According to Larsen-Freeman (2000, p. 129), one of the important characteristics of CLT is that “activities in the communicative approach are often carried out by students in small groups.”

Teacher education research has investigated teachers’ beliefs and their impact on educational practice (Borg, 2003). Bernat (2004) reported the findings of a study that explored the Vietnamese learners’ beliefs on language learning. Cohen and Fass (2001) reported that the beliefs held by students and teachers did not generally reflect a communicative approach to foreign language teaching.

Given the dynamic features of the communicative approach and the likely discrepancy between professed theory and classroom practice, it has become necessary to investigate the current status of the employment of CLT in an EFL context (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Manghubai et al., 2005; Yoon, 2005).

Rationale for the Study

The EFL environments that most of our learners in the Gulf region find themselves in are removed from a lot of “naturalistic”, non-classroom, English speaking settings. An understanding of these realities and the principles that govern realistic classroom learning can be useful to teachers in choosing the appropriate approach(es), methods and classroom practices in a specific context (Nunan, 2005).

One of the main reasons for the disparity between professed theory and actual classroom practice is the crucial role played by teacher attitudes in the implementation of an innovative approach, which usually involves a departure, sometimes a drastic one, from established theories of language teaching and learning, which, in turn, are the product of previous teaching and learning experiences of the teachers, their beliefs and prejudices (Freeman & Richards, 1993). These unconsciously held attitudes and beliefs of teachers influence their classroom behaviour, their teaching styles, and the learning experiences provided to students.

Some studies on how teachers understand and use the communicative approach (Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Lewis & McCook, 2002; Li, 1998; Mangubhai et al., 2005; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; ; Savignon & Wang, 2003;) have concluded that teachers either have incomplete and imprecise notions of communicative language teaching or they believe in it but are not able to implement it fully in their classrooms. The present study has been undertaken in this context to explore how the communicative approach is understood and implemented by EFL teachers in Oman.

Study Questions

More specifically, the study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are EFL teachers' perceptions of the use of the communicative approach in teaching EFL?
2. How do teachers' perceptions vary according to their gender?
3. How do teachers' perceptions vary according to their qualification?
4. How do teachers' perceptions vary according to the level taught by them?

Methods and materials

Subjects

Ninety-three teachers of English – 47 male and 46 female – from both 'basic' and 'general' education schools in Oman were randomly selected for the present study. A note of explanation about the terms, 'general' and 'basic' education is in order.

Prior to 1998–1999, the public or government schools in the Sultanate of Oman were following a three-level General Education (GE) system (primary, preparatory and secondary). The Basis Education (BE) system was introduced in 1998–1999 in a few schools to gradually replace the GE system to create a unified system covering the first ten years of schooling. BE comprises two cycles: Cycle 1 (Grades 1–4; ages 6–9) and Cycle 2 (Grades 5–10; ages 9–15), followed by a Post-BE Cycle (Grades 11–12; ages 16–17). Both the systems of education are being implemented in Oman. In 2004, the three levels of GE were consolidated into one level comprising all grades from 1 to 12 in schools that were not implementing the BE. The English curriculum and the course books require the teachers to use the communicative methodology in the classroom.

Research Instrument

The attitude scale developed by Karavas-Doukas (1996) for a similar study was adopted in the present study as the scale had already been piloted, modified and

revised by him to cover five themes relating to the communicative approach to language teaching.

The thematic groups and the number of statements that fall into these groups are given below:

1. group/pair work (4 statements)
2. quality and quantity of error correction (4 statements)
3. the role and contribution of learners in the learning process (6 statements)
4. the role of the teacher in the classroom (4 statements)
5. place/importance of grammar (6 statements)

Respondents were asked to indicate how far they agreed or disagreed with each statement on a 5-point Likert-type attitude scale, from 5 for 'strongly agree' down to 1 for 'strongly disagree'. A high score on the scale would imply a favourable attitude. For the scoring of items unfavourable to the approach, the scoring was reversed. An open-ended questionnaire consisting of five questions, one for each of the themes mentioned above, was also designed and administered to a smaller sample of the respondents.

Data Analysis

The return rate was a hundred per cent, i.e., all the subjects returned the questionnaire having completed them. The responses were statistically analysed for the mean scores, standard deviation and T-test of significance across variables, such as gender, qualification, teaching experience, and type of school the teacher is teaching in, and also across the five thematic groups mentioned above. Responses to the open-ended questionnaire were analysed qualitatively.

Results and discussion

Table 1 presents the overall mean scores for the five thematic groups of statements in the present study as well as in a study by Christ and Makarani (2009) with Indian school teachers of English. The table shows a moderately favourable attitude of the teachers surveyed in the present study to the use of the communicative approach in the English classroom; the latter study shows a more favourable attitude of teachers. This may be because English is taught as a second language in India and teachers have been exposed and introduced to the communicative methodology for a longer period than in Oman. In both the studies, the mean score was the highest for 'group/pair work', while the lowest mean score was obtained for 'place/importance of grammar' in the present study as against 'error correction' and 'place/importance of grammar' in the other study. These results are consistent with the basic principles of the communicative approach. The findings of the present study are also in conformity with the generally favourable attitudes of the Greek secondary school teachers reported by Karavas-Doukas (1996) and of the Iranian teachers reported by Razmjoo and Riazi (2006).

Table 1 – Mean & Standard Deviation According to Thematic Groups (N=93)

Thematic Group	Present study		Christ & Makarani (2009)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
Group/pair work	3.4335	.63624	3.63	.59
Quality and quantity of error correction	3.0718	.47324	3.35	.56
Role and contribution of learners in the learning process	3.1064	.38010	3.40	.50
Role of the teacher in the classroom	3.0346	.49269	3.53	.31
Place/importance of grammar	3.0035	.42962	3.36	.62

Table 2 summarises the results for all the statements. These results are discussed in detail in comparison with those of Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu (1999) with Turkish EFL teachers. The analysis of results in Tables 1 and 2 shows that the findings of the present study are in conformity with those of the studies conducted with EFL/ESL teachers from different countries

Table 2 – Mean & Standard Deviation for all Statements (N=93)

#	Statement	Mean	SD
1	Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language learners' performance should be judged.	2.7340	1.10886
2	Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for cooperative language learning and in promoting interaction among students.	4.1596	.89567
3	Grammar should be taught only as a means to an end and not as an end in itself.	3.4362	1.17828
4	Since the learner comes to the language classroom with little or no knowledge of the language, he/she is in no position to suggest what the content of the lesson should be or what activities are useful for him/her.	2.9681	.95548
5	Training learners to take responsibility for their own learning is futile since learners are not used to such an approach.	2.6809	.94143
6	For students to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teacher's feedback must be focussed on the appropriateness and not the linguistic form of the students' responses.	3.5745	1.03164
7	The teacher as 'authority' and 'instructor' is no longer adequate to describe the teacher's role in the language classroom.	3.2979	1.03519
8	The learner-centred approach to language teaching encourages responsibility and self-discipline and allows each student to develop his/her potential.	3.7660	1.06181
9	Group work allows students to explore problems for themselves and thus have some measure of control over their own learning. It is therefore an invaluable means of organising classroom experiences.	3.7447	.99392
10	The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make. If errors are ignored, this will result in imperfect learning.	3.0638	1.32639
11	It is impossible in a large class of students to organise your teaching so as to suit the needs of all.	3.4574	1.26716
12	Knowledge of the rules of the language does not guarantee ability to use the	3.4362	1.17828

#	Statement	Mean	SD
	language.		
13	Group work activities take too long to organise and waste a lot of valuable teaching time.	3.3511	1.14260
14	Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time.	2.7340	1.12809
15	The communicative approach to language teaching produces fluent but inaccurate learners.	2.9149	1.26712
16	The teacher as transmitter of knowledge is only one of the many different roles he/she must perform during the course of a lesson.	3.2979	.91381
17	By mastering the rules of grammar, students become fully capable of communicating with a native speaker.	2.3085	.98403
18	For most students language is acquired most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct or explicit way.	2.9043	1.14600
19	The role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing, and example.	2.1809	1.08720
20	Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them.	3.7553	.87604
21	Students do their best when taught as a whole class by the teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but it can never replace sound formal instruction by a competent teacher.	2.0106	1.01064
22	Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue.	2.4787	1.07492
23	Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively.	3.2021	1.11278
24	A textbook alone is not able to cater for all the needs and interests of the students. The teacher must supplement the textbook with other materials and tasks so as to satisfy the widely differing needs of the students.	3.3617	1.10571
	Total	3.1175	.20256

Group/Pair work

The highest mean (4.16) was obtained for Statement 2 (*Group work activities are essential in providing opportunities for cooperative language learning and in promoting interaction among students*), while the lowest mean (2.01) was reported for Statement 21 (*Students do their best when taught as a whole class by the teacher. Small group work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but it can never replace sound formal instruction by a competent teacher*), showing a wide range of mean scores. In the study by Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu (1999), the percentage of teachers who either strongly agreed or agreed with these statements was very high, namely 91.3% for both. This is an interesting similarity in the perceptions of teachers in two different contexts. The findings suggest that, although teachers are convinced in principle of the benefits of group/pair work (Statement 9), they have reservations about using them in the EFL classroom (Statement 13) – a majority of the subjects in Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu's (1999) study find it difficult to monitor students' performance and their use of the mother tongue in group work activities.

All those who responded to the open-ended questionnaire agreed that it is necessary to use group/pair work in the foreign language classroom for students "to

practise the language”; they are “very important and beneficial”, and also “necessary to promote students’ speaking skills.” When asked specifically how they would help learners in their communicative use of English, the respondents mentioned the following, among other things:

- Sharing knowledge and experience, and looking at things from different points of view;
- Raising student-student interaction and triggering more negotiation;
- Conversing and interacting with each other in the target language, thus gaining communication skills;
- Helping to break down barriers and fear, reducing their hesitations;
- Using language in meaningful ways; and
- Helping each other, sharing, discussing, cooperating and collaborating to do the tasks.

Quality and quantity of error correction

With regard to the quality and quantity of error correction, Statement 10 (*The teacher should correct all the grammatical errors students make. If errors are ignored, this will result in imperfect learning*) obtained a mean score of **3.06** in the present study, while Statement 14 (*Since errors are a normal part of learning, much correction is wasteful of time*) obtained a mean score of **2.73**; however, in the 1999 study with Turkish EFL instructors cited above, the percentages of respondents who agreed with these statements were 21.74 and 69.56 respectively. It may be noted that there is greater consistency in responses to these two statements among the Turkish instructors than with the Omani teachers in the present study.

Surprisingly, however, the Omani teachers’ response to the open-ended question whether learners’ errors should be corrected and how showed greater consistency, i.e., most of the respondents agreed that “major, common or frequently repeated” errors should be corrected, but only indirectly and collectively rather than individually, as communication is the goal and error correction should be subordinate to this goal. The respondents added that error correction should be limited because students might be discouraged and even frustrated by too much correction; this “will hold back their participation.” Besides, one respondent pointed out that correction should “not disturb the flow of the lesson” and another said, “the less, the better”; many suggested minimum/not much/not too much correction “to avoid discouraging students/learners.” Many of them suggested that error correction should be done “in a supportive way.” It was also suggested that “self-correction must be encouraged – however, teachers can provide the correct answers when students can’t get it.” Some of the respondents, however, said that correction “depends on the type of errors, the classroom situation as well as the lesson objectives (or learning outcomes)”, as “some errors are serious and need to be corrected in the classroom directly.”

The role and contribution of learners in the learning process

Among the statements that deal with this theme, statements 8 (3.77) and 20 (3.76) obtained the highest mean scores, followed by 4 (2.97), 15 (2.92) and 18 (2.90); the least mean score was obtained by statement 5 (2.68). These results more or less tie in with those of Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu’s (1999). In their study, the highest percentage of agreement was obtained for Statement 20 (86.96%), emphasising the

need for negotiation of tasks and activities to suit students' needs; about 78% of the EFL instructors agreed that the learner-centred approach (i.e., the communicative approach) encourages responsibility and self-discipline among students (Statement 8) and that training learners to take such responsibility for their own learning is not futile (Statement 5). About 72% of them do not think that learners come to the classroom with little or no previous knowledge of the target language (Statement 4) and believe that the target language is acquired most effectively when the focus is not on the language (Statement 18); however, only about 42% disagree that the communicative approach produces fluent but inaccurate learners.

Responses to the open-ended question about the role of the learners in the learning process in the present study were varied, as follows:

- The teacher should facilitate the process and provide a stimulating climate for learning.
- The teacher should not; learners should have a role – education should be learning-centred.
- Learners should be involved in the process of learning. It depends on the learning outcomes, the nature of the tasks, and the level of the students.
- Both teacher and learners should take part in the learning process and decide keeping in mind individuals' learning styles.
- The teacher should decide what and how the learners should learn, because students may not be able to decide what and how they learn, and the teacher knows their real level.
- Learners should be involved after the teacher analyses the needs of the students.

It is clear that, while the teachers surveyed would like greater involvement of the learners in the learning process, they still want a prominent role for themselves in analysing students' needs and in guiding them in their learning process. When asked how learners could contribute to the learning process, however, the teacher respondents mentioned the following ways:

- By being aware of the metacognitive strategies to prepare them as self-regulated learners
- By identifying their needs and their own style of learning and deciding upon strategies for better learning
- By discussing and negotiating with the teachers, and being open and expressing their worries to the teachers
- Through self-reflection and peer support

The role of the teacher in the classroom

In the present study, statements 7 and 16 that emphasise the role of the teacher going beyond that of 'authority', 'instructor, and 'transmitter of knowledge' obtained higher mean scores of 3.3, showing consistency with the lowest mean scores for statement 19 (imparting knowledge through explanation – 2.18) and 21 (whole class formal instruction by the teacher – 2.01). In the 1999 study cited above, however, while 86.86% of the Turkish EFL instructors agreed that the role of 'transmitter of knowledge' is only one of the many roles of the EFL teacher, surprisingly only 30.44 % agreed that the teacher is no longer to be described as

‘authority’ and ‘instructor’ and 36.36% believed in formal whole class instruction, while 52% agreed that the teacher’s role is to impart knowledge. These results are not as consistent as those of the present study.

In response to the open-ended question about the role of the EFL teacher in the classroom, almost all the respondents referred to the EFL teacher as a facilitator, helping learners be able to choose appropriate strategies for their learning. The other roles mentioned were: guide and model; guide, monitor and manager of the learning process; guide setting up situations and options for students to choose from; solver of problems; guide to enhance learner independence and independent learning; democratic, not dominating the teaching/learning process; explain, guide, monitor and assist learning; and good advisor, supporter, and guide.

The place/importance of grammar

In the present study, the teachers’ responses showed an inconsistency between statements 1 (2.73) and 6 (3.57) (relating to grammatical correctness being regarded as the most important criterion for judging language performance and teacher’s feedback to be focused on appropriateness rather than the linguistic form) as well as between statements 3 (3.44) and 23 (3.20) (relating to the methodology of grammar teaching). Statements 12 and 17, which relate to knowledge of grammar and the ability to communicate in the target language, however, obtained mean scores of 3.44 and 2.31 respectively, showing consistency of perceptions.

In the 1999 study also, there was a similar consistency – 95.45% of the Turkish EFL instructors strongly agreed that knowledge of rules of a language does not guarantee the ability to use it (Statement 12) and 78.26% think that mastering grammatical rules does not enable students to communicate with native speakers (Statement 17). An inconsistency was reported between statement 3 (grammar should be taught only as a means to an end, not as an end in itself – 91.3% agreeing) and statement 23 (direct instruction in grammatical rules and terminology is essential for learning to communicate effectively – only 39.13% disagreeing).

The last of the open-ended questions in the present study was whether grammar should be taught in the EFL classroom and the response was unanimously in the affirmative. To the sub-question of *why* grammar should be taught, the following justifications were given:

- Students need to pay attention to difficult grammatical structures that contradict with their native language, because grammar is linked t strongly o, and is an essential component/part of, language.
- Learners should attend to form in a communicative situation, because we can not guarantee subliminal learning.
- To enhance accuracy in communication because students need to know how to use correct formal language
- It’s an important aspect of English and necessary for good communication.

To the other sub-question of *how* grammar should be taught and why, many respondents advocated an “implicit” or “inductive” approach because the EFL “classroom should focus on the communicative use of the language” and the “development of students’ critical thinking skills”; students should “first focus on meaning, then the form.” Those few who favoured an explicit approach said that it would make it easy for students to understand grammar. One of the respondents who favoured the implicit approach, however, said that students should not be left

without telling them the rule at the end. Interestingly, more than half of the respondents said that both the approaches should be integrated and used because “students are different in their best way of learning”, implying that the approach should cater for different learning styles and preferences; one of them recommended the implicit approach with young learners and the explicit with adult learners.

Table 3 – T-test Results: Gender

Thematic Group	Gender	N	Mean	SD	t.	Sig.
Group/pair work	Male	47	3.3404	.66231	.210	1.591
	Female	46	3.5326	.60692		
Quality and quantity of error correction	Male	47	3.0904	.47613	.703	.147
	Female	46	3.0707	.46447		
Role and contribution of learners in the learning process	Male	47	3.0816	.34028	.402	.710
	Female	46	3.1449	.41217		
Role of the teacher in the classroom	Male	47	3.1170	.43567	.163	1.981
	Female	46	2.9457	.53984		
Place/importance of grammar	Male	47	2.9752	.51073	.116	2.514
	Female	46	3.0362	.33502		
Total	Male	47	3.1055	.22436	.749	.016
	Female	46	3.1368	.17451		

With regard to differences in *gender*, we find a significant difference between male and female teachers in their attitude towards the communicative approach at the level of 0.05 (Table 3). “Quality and quantity of error correction” and “role of the teacher in the classroom” produced higher mean scores for male teachers than for female teachers.

Table 4 – T-test Results: Qualifications

Thematic Group	Degree	N	Mean	SD
Group/pair work	BA	87	3.4339	.63045
Quality and quantity of error correction	BA	87	3.0603	.47460
Role and contribution of learners in the learning process	BA	87	3.1073	.37782
Role of the teacher in the classroom	BA	87	3.0316	.49972
Place/importance of grammar	BA	87	2.9770	.40441
Total	BA	87	3.1087	.19793

With regard to *qualifications*, the analysis was made only for teachers with a bachelor's degree, as there were only 3 respondents in each of the other two categories, viz., teachers with a post-graduate degree and with a diploma, and t-test could not be done with such a small number in two out of the three categories. While the overall mean score for this group was 3.11, ‘group/pair work’ produced the highest mean score (3.43) and the ‘place/importance of grammar’ produced the lowest mean (2.98) (Table 4).

Table 5 – T-test Results: Type of School

Thematic Group	Type of School	N	Mean	SD	t	Sig.
Group/pair work	General	54	3.4583	.66721	.522	.414
	Basic	39	3.3974	.60621		
Quality and quantity of error correction	General	54	3.1111	.47001	.773	.084
	Basic	39	3.0256	.48257		
Role and contribution of learners in the learning process	General	54	3.0833	.38818	.511	.435
	Basic	39	3.1410	.37568		
Role of the teacher in the classroom	General	54	2.9583	.53144	.095	2.850
	Basic	39	3.1346	.42475		
Place/importance of grammar	General	54	3.0586	.40588	.876	.025
	Basic	39	2.9231	.45859		
Total	General	54	3.1235	.20267	.844	.039
	Basic	39	3.1090	.20737		

Finally, with regard to the type of school the subjects teach in, there is a significant difference at the level .05 between teachers in the general education schools and those working in the basic education schools in their attitude towards the communicative approach (Sig. = .039) (Table 5). Lower mean scores were, however, obtained with teachers from general education schools than those from basic education with regard to the 'role and contribution of learners in the learning process' and the 'role of the teacher in the classroom'.

Conclusion

Overall, there is a moderately favourable attitude among EFL teachers towards using the communicative approach, with the highest mean for group/pair work and the lowest for the place/importance of grammar. This finding is consistent with that of Saricoban and Tilfarlioglu (1999) and the relative emphasis on these expected of teachers in the communicative approach (Prabhu, 1987). The results also reveal that all teachers, regardless of their gender, qualification, or the level they teach, have favourable attitudes towards using the communicative approach. Although with regard to a few statements some inconsistency in response was observed between favourable and unfavourable statements about the communicative approach, this may be due partly to an incomplete understanding of CLT and partly to the gap between what the teachers really believe as ideal CLT practices and what they are actually able to implement in their own classrooms in reality, i.e. a gap between theory (or expectation) and practice (or reality), as pointed out by Karavas-Doukas (1996).

Though both male and female teachers do not differ in their attitudes towards using the communicative approach, male teachers have a stronger attitude towards the use of the communicative approach than the female with regard to some areas, such as quality and quantity of error correction and the role of the teacher in the classroom (Seedhouse, 1997). The perceptions of teachers with a bachelor's degree are the strongest with regard to group/pair work. There is a significant difference between teachers in the general education schools and those working in the basic

education schools in their overall attitude towards the communicative approach and with regard to the 'place/importance of grammar'.

Attitude scales, such as the one employed in the present study, help in revealing teachers' beliefs and attitudes, which have to be analysed for identifying and resolving potential contradictions, and for providing the necessary clarification and support to the teachers. Awareness of one's attitudes and beliefs is the first and essential step towards improving teaching effectiveness. An investigation of teachers' attitudes can help identify the difficulties or problems they may face in implementing the communicative approach in their classrooms (Wagner, 1991). It can also help in planning the changes in pre-service curricula and in-service teacher support (Breen, 1991). Studies using a larger sample of EFL teachers will contribute further to the research in this area.

Teachers' attitudes and beliefs are very often largely ignored before a new approach and course materials based on the new approach are introduced. Programmes designed to train teachers to use the new approach and materials often end up transmitting information about the new approach and trying to persuade teachers to accept its effectiveness. When teachers, however, return to their classrooms, they follow their routines based on their pre-existing beliefs and attitudes, while trying to believe and maintain that they are following the new approach (Wagner, 1991). This goes to show that language curriculum development and implementation should be carried out from a wider perspective; otherwise, even the 'best' approach would be distorted and would not be as effective as it is expected to be. There would always be a gap between expectation and reality. The question is: How wide is this gap? The present study, it is hoped, has advanced researchers' and practitioners' knowledge about this gap in a particular context.

Acknowledgements

The authors of this paper are grateful to the EFL teachers who willingly cooperated and filled in the questionnaire, thus providing valuable data for the research.

References

- Anderson, J. (1993). Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in China? Pros and cons. *System*, 21(4), 471-480.
- Bernat, E. (2004). Investigating Vietnamese ESL learners' beliefs about language learning. *Education Australia Journal*, 21(2), 40-54.
- Borg, S. (2003). Teacher cognition in language teaching: A review of research on what language teachers think, know, believe and do. *Language Teaching*, 36(2), 81-109.
- Breen, M. P. (1991). Understanding the language teacher. In R. Phillipson, et al. (Eds.). *Foreign/Second language pedagogy research*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Brown, H. (1994). *Teaching by principles: An interactive approach to language pedagogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall Regents.

- Canale, M., & Swain, M. (1980). Theoretical bases of communicative approaches to second language teaching and testing. *Applied Linguistics*, 1(1), 1-47.
- Christ, T. W., & Makarani, S. A. (2009). Teachers' attitudes about teaching English in India: An embedded mixed methods study. *International Journal of Multiple Research Approaches*, 3, 73-87.
- Chun, et al. (1982). Errors, interaction, and correction: A study of native-nonnative conversations. *TESOL Quarterly*, 16, 537-46.
- Cohen, A. D., & Fass, L. (2001). *Oral language instruction: Teacher and learner beliefs and the reality in EFL classes at a Columbian University*. Research Report, Department of English and Second Language, University of Minnesota, Feb. 2001.
- Ellis, R. (2005). Principles of instructed language learning. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(3).
- Freeman, D., & Richards, J. C. (1993). Conceptions of teaching and the education of second language teachers. *TESOL Quarterly*, 25(2), 193-216.
- Hendrickson, J. M. (1980). Error correction in foreign language teaching: Recent theory, research, and practice. In K. Croft (Ed.), *Readings on English as a second language* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, Mass: Winthrop Publishers.
- Hiep, Pham Hoa (2007). Communicative language teaching: unity within diversity. *ELT Journal*, 61(3), 193-201.
- Howatt, A. P. R. (1984). *A history of English language teaching*. Oxford, UK: OUP.
- Karavas-Doukas, E. (1996). Using attitude scales to investigate teachers' attitudes to the communicative approach. *ELT Journal*, 50(3), 187-198.
- Krashen, S. (1981). *Second language acquisition and second language learning*. Oxford, UK: Pergamon.
- Kumaravadivelu, B. (1993). Maximising learning potential in the communicative classroom. *ELT Journal*, 47(1), 12-21.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. (2000). *Techniques and principles in language teaching*. Oxford, UK: OUP.
- Lewis, M., & McCook, F. (2002). Cultures of teaching: Voices from Vietnam. *ELT Journal*, 56(2), 146-53.
- Li, D. (1998). It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine: Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 67-703.
- Littlewood, W. (1981). *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: CUP.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). San Diego: Academic Press.

- Long, M. H., & Crookes, G. (1992). Three approaches to task-based syllabus design. *TESOL Quarterly*, 26(1), 27-56.
- Manghubai, F., Marland, P., Dashwood, A., & Son, J. B. (2005). Similarities and differences in teachers' and researchers' conceptions of communicative language teaching: Does the use of an educational model cast a better light? *Language Teaching Research*, 9(1), 31-66.
- Matthews, P. H. (1997). *The concise Oxford dictionary of linguistics*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Nunan, D. (1988). *The learner-centred curriculum: A study in second language teaching*. Cambridge, UK: CUP.
- Nunan, D. (2005). "Important Tasks of English Education: Asia-wide and Beyond". In P. Robertson, P. D. Jung, & J. Jung (Eds.), *English language learning in the Asian context* (pp. 5-8). Pusan, Korea: The Asian EFL Journal Press.
- Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second language pedagogy*. Oxford, UK: OUP.
- Razmjoo, S. A., & Riazi, A. M. (2006). Do high schools or private institutes practise communicative language teaching? A case study of Shiraz teachers in high schools and institutes. *The Reading Matrix*, 6(3), 340-63.
- Saricoban, A., & Tilfarlioglu, F. Y. (1999). Attitudes of foreign language teachers to the communicative learner-centred approach. *Hacettepe University Journal of Education*, 15, 61-65.
- Savignon, S. J., & Wang, C. (2003). Communicative language teaching in EFL contexts: Learner attitudes and perceptions. *IRAL*, 44(3), 223-50.
- Schultz, R. A. (1996). Focus on form in foreign language classrooms: Students' and teachers' views on error correction and the role of grammar. *Foreign Language Annals*, 29(3), 343-364.
- Seedhouse, P. (1997). Combining form and meaning. *ELT Journal*, 51(4), 336-44.
- Sze, P. (1992). A decade of communicative language teaching in Hong Kong: Where from here. *Journal of Primary Education*, 2(2), 23-30. Retrieved from <http://sunzi.lib.hku.hk/hkjo/view/36/3600030.pdf>
- Thompson, Geoff (1996). Some misconceptions about communicative language teaching. *ELT Journal*, 50(1), 9-15.
- VanPatten, B. (1996). *Input processing and grammar instruction in second language acquisition*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.
- VanPatten, B. (2002). Processing instruction: An update. *Language Learning*, 52, 755-803.
- Wagner, J. (1991). Innovation in foreign language teaching. In Phillipson et al., (Eds.), *Second language pedagogy research*, Clevedon, Avon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Wilkins, D. (1976). *Notional syllabuse: A taxonomy and its relevance to foreign language curriculum development*. Oxford, UK: OUP.

Ye, Jin. (2007). Adapting communicative language teaching approach in China's context. *Sino-US English Teaching*, 4(10), 29-33. Retrieved from <http://www.linguist.org.cn/doc/su200710/su20071007.pdf>

Yoon, Kyung-eun (2005). CLT theories and practices in EFL curricula: A case study of Korea. *Asian EFL Journal*, 7(3).