Tunisian Secondary EFL School Teachers’ perceptions regarding
Communicative Language Teaching: An exploratory survey

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Abstract

The communicative approach represents a change of focus in language teaching from linguistic structures to learners’ need for developing communication skills. As such, teachers in many English foreign language contexts are expected to use the CLT approach in their classes due to the high demand for developing learners’ communicative competence. The present study investigates secondary school EFL teachers’ perceptions of CLT principles and practices in the Tunisian context. It seeks to explore EFL teachers’ attitudes toward CLT as well as the difficulties they may encounter in implementing the approach in their classrooms. In order to address the purpose of this study, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data using a semi-structured questionnaire with 30 Tunisian English language teachers was carried out. The results of this study reveal that EFL teachers have a positive attitude toward the CLT approach. However, the findings also show that EFL teachers perceive many difficulties in implementing CLT in their classrooms. The identified factors that prevent the implementation of CLT are consistently associated with the class size, number of class hours and lack of teaching materials for communicative activities in the education system and so forth.

Keywords: Communicative language teaching (CLT), English as a foreign language (EFL), EFL school teachers, perceptions.
1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction of the study

Many scholars have emphasized the potential role of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an effective approach in promoting and developing learners’ ability to communicate using the FL/SL (Burns, 2010; Brown, 2014; Harmer, 2007; Littlewood, 2011, 2014; Nunan, 2003; Wang, 2007) and several EFL countries have shown an increasing concern in CLT due to its capacity for engaging learners in communication as a pre-requisite for the development of communicative competence (Savignon, 2007). Since the focal point of CLT is fostering the development of learner’s ability to use language appropriately in context, CLT contrasts sharply with the established traditions that emphasize learners’ knowledge of formal features. It is important to mention that teachers’ instructional decisions are assumed to be shaped by their beliefs about teaching (Phipps & Borg, 2009). In a broader sense, beliefs constitute an important part of teacher cognition which is defined by Borg (2003, p. 81) as “what teachers know, believe, and think”. In other words, the knowledge, beliefs and theories of teachers make up teacher cognition. What teachers know, how they come to know this and how they use their knowledge in the classroom setting constitute “the processes of teacher cognition” (Borg, 2007). According to Richardson et al (2012), examining teachers' attitudes and exploring their perceptions then are important in the implementation of teaching programs and effective education.

Given the importance of understanding teachers’ perceptions in English language teaching (Nishino, 2008; Taguchi, 2005), this study is set up to explore the Tunisian teachers’ beliefs of the appropriateness of implementing the communicative approach in the classroom setting.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Since the 1970s, the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach has gained acceptance as the theoretical model of English language learning and is considered an effective approach by many applied linguists and EFL teachers around the world (Brandl, 2008; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Nunan, 2004; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Tarone & Yule, 1989). CLT is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching and learning (interactive rather than didactic and individual) (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). It is based on the assumption that the key function of language use is communication and its main purpose therefore is for learners to develop and foster communicative competence or proficiency (Hymes, 1972, Richards and Rodgers, 2001). In other words, its aim is to make use of real-life situations that require communication and interaction relying on the use of the target language.

CLT has attracted the attention of a number of scholars who have provided a substantial body of literature defining CLT and its features and principles (Cook, 1991; Flowerdew & Miller, 2005; Howatt, 1984; Hymes, 1972; Lee & VanPatten, 1995; Littlewood, 1981; Littlewood, 2007; O’Malley & Chamot, 1990; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Savignon, 1997; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992). The subsequent sections focus on CLT in greater depth, beginning with an overview of how different applied linguists have defined CLT.

1.2.3 CLT and Communicative Competence defined

The Communicative Approach also known as “Communicative language teaching” (CLT) has been the core of language teaching research since the late 1960s originally in Britain. It
has been discussed from different points of view, such as what the CLT approach is and how it works in EFL contexts.

- Richards, Platt and Platt (1992) argue that CLT is “an approach to foreign or second language teaching which emphasizes that the goal of language learning is communicative competence” (p. 65).
- Richards and Rodgers (1986) consider that “the CLT approach starts from a theory of language as communication, to develop learners’ communicative competence” (p. 69).
- Widdowson (1990) describes CLT as follows “…The content of a language course is now defined not in terms of forms, words and sentence patterns, but in terms of concepts, or notions, which such forms are used to express, and the communicative functions which they are used to perform.” (p. 159).

Overall, it is for granted that the central focus of CLT is to develop the ability of the language learner to interact appropriately using the knowledge of grammar they have learned in various social contexts. Although other experts have defined and categorized CLT differently (Howatt, 1984; Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Scarcella & Oxford, 1992), it can be understood that the fundamental purpose of CLT is to develop learners’ “communicative competence” in the four language skills.

The term “communicative competence” was coined in the 1970s and concerns the development of the capacity for expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning. It relates to both the psycholinguistic and sociocultural aspects of second language learning (Hedge, 2000; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Savignon, 2002).

Hymes (1972) refers to communicative competence as “the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses” (p. 13) and the “ability to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts.” (p.246). Hymes’ understanding of communicative competence encompassed not only social and cultural knowledge but also included the ability to employ that knowledge in effective communication (Hedge, 2000).

Many scholars as Hymes (1972); Canale and Swain (1980); Bachman (1990); Hedge (2000); and Savignon (2002) have discussed the constituents of communicative competence. For example, Dörnyei’s model of the components of communicative competence underscored the development of different aspects of learners’ language capability, such as linguistic competence, actional competence, socio-cultural competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Dörnyei, 1995). Richards (2006) also categorized the key aspects of communicative competence as follows:

a) knowing how to use language for a range of different purposes and functions.

b) knowing how to vary use of language according to the setting and the participants (e.g., knowing when to use formal and informal speech, or when to use language appropriately for written as opposed to spoken communication).

c) knowing how to produce and understand different types of texts (e.g., narratives, reports, interviews, conversations).

d) knowing how to maintain communication despite having limitations in one’s language knowledge (e.g., through using different kinds of communication strategies). (Richards, 2006, p. 3).
1.2.4 CLT Principles

The principles of CLT have been discussed extensively in the literature (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards, 2006). Brown (2007) defines CLT as “an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task based activities, and communication for the real world, meaningful purposes” (p.378). Brown (2007, p.241) also specifies four interrelated principles of CLT:

1. Classroom objectives are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not limited to grammatical or linguistic competence.
2. Language techniques are designed to engage learners in the pragmatic, authentic, functional use of language for meaningful purposes. Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
3. Fluency and accuracy are considered as complimentary principles underlying communicative techniques. At times fluency may have to take on more importance than accuracy in order to keep learners meaningfully engaged in language use.
4. In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language, productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

1.2.5 Teacher and Learner Roles in the CLT Classroom

Within the communicative approach, learners are highly encouraged and motivated to interact using the target language in different situations. Richards and Rodgers (1986) state that “the primary function of language is for interaction and communication” (p. 71). In a CLT classroom, teachers and learners display roles that are completely distinct from those established in the classrooms where traditional methods are endorsed. Richards and Rodgers (1986) maintain that “the emphasis in communicative language teaching on the processes of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles for learners from those found more traditional second language classrooms” (p. 76).

On the one hand, the teacher is expected to adopt different roles: he/she is a “facilitator, a guide and a helper” and at the same time he is a “coordinator, an idea-person and a communicator” (Oxford, 1990, p.10). Learners, on the other hand, take an active role in the learning process, initiating and interacting rather than being passive in class (Maley, 1986). Richards and Rodgers (1986) emphasize that the learner has to be “a negotiator between the self, the learning processes and the object of learning” (p. 77) and this involves negotiation within the group in the classroom procedures and activities.

1.2.6 Classroom Activities of the CLT

The major aim of CLT is to build up the knowledge of linguistic forms and the meanings and functions of the language to employ them in diverse situations. Thus, the foremost concern in CLT is to make EFL learners capable of using the language in different situations communicatively. In this regard, Larsen-Freeman (2000) affirmed that “obvious characteristic of the approach is that almost everything is done with a communicative intent” (p. 129). Moreover, learners are expected to identify and comprehend different aspects of functional and structural settings and be able to select proper and suitable vocabularies by understanding their use in specific situations (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards, 2006).
CLT approach revolves around the idea of endorsing communication in the classroom setting and language learning occurs when learners are involved in a real process of communication, which mainly requires information exchange, negotiation of meaning, integrating authentic materials into pedagogical practices, and working in pairs and small groups (Lantolf, 2000; Littlewood, 1981). There is a wide range of communicative activities in CLT classroom. These activities include pair or group work which requires negotiation and cooperation between learners, fluency-based activities that encourage learners to develop their confidence, role-plays in which students practice and develop language functions, as well as judicious use of grammar and pronunciation focused activities. These types of classroom activities “are suggested to encourage students to use and practice functions and forms that help the students to become more independent and to accept responsibility” (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p.171). The use of authentic materials (realia), for example newspaper articles, photos, maps, symbols or any other material which can be touched and held, makes speaking and learning more concrete and meaningful and allow the learner to link classroom language learning to real-life communication, emphasizing communication through interaction (Lantolf, 2000; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Thereby, learners should be engaged into situations where communication occurs as much as possible to increase their communicative proficiency and they have to participate in classroom activities based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning.

1.2.7 Barriers to the implementation of CLT in different EFL contexts

Several studies have shown the importance of implementing the CLT approach in an EFL context (Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007; Wang, 1990). However, the majority of these studies have highlighted difficulties related to the educational system, the lack of ability on the part of both teachers and learners to employ CLT techniques, and classroom environment (Dailey, 2010; Li, 1998). Common difficulties in implementing CLT in EFL contexts discussed in the literature include the existence of traditional teaching methods, the context of the wider curriculum, lack of authentic materials, class size, work overload and a lack of teachers trained in CLT (Hall & Hewings, 2001). The study by Humphries and Burns (2015) shows that there are some barriers to the implementation of CLT as an ELT curriculum innovation in Japan. They believe that the main barriers to the implementation of CLT as an innovative curriculum are related to (a) minimizing the importance of the expectations and beliefs of the teachers (b) not providing opportunities for teachers to understand CLT principles underlying the textbooks and (c) not developing opportunities for problem-solving meetings between teachers and school managers.

Karavas-Doukas (1995) found that Greek high school teachers had an incomplete understanding of the innovative aspects of the curriculum they implemented. Their attitudes and beliefs toward learning were also not compatible with the innovations in learning principles. Li’s (1998) study in Korea provided similar results showing that the teachers’ misconceptions about CLT undermined their efforts to implement it successfully.

The teachers’ perception of the time needed to complete the mandated curriculum deters them from carrying out process-oriented activities or sparing time for classroom interaction. In Razmjoo and Barabadi’s (2015) study, the participant teachers justified their lavish use of L1, the omission of certain textbook activities and their use of traditional instructional techniques like reading aloud, drilling and translation with the pressure they felt for covering the syllabus. In Li’s (1998) study in Korea, teachers claimed that “time was not enough” for carrying out communicative activities. One of the teachers in the case study conducted by
Carless (2003) in Hong Kong pointed out that “maintaining English medium communication” (as opposed to switching to the mother tongue) could be quite time-consuming for her (p. 495). These views can be justified by the fact that in an EFL context learners’ engagement with communicative activities requires a lot of drilling to consolidate grammar and vocabulary. The concept of time is also related to the great emphasis teachers put on covering the textbook. In Hong Kong, the teachers’ tendency to cover the textbook has been accounted for by “book deference” originating from the traditional Chinese culture (Tong, 1996 cited in Carless 2003, p. 493).

Another challenge that can impede CLT implementation is teacher preparation for classroom instruction. As mentioned by Carless (2003, p. 494), when the time for preparation is scarce, “traditional teaching or following the textbook” can be the teachers’ preferred instructional strategy as making arrangements for the CLT task-oriented classroom activities is more demanding in terms of time and energy needed for preparation.

2. Methodology

In this section, the methodology used to address the research questions relating to the investigation of Tunisian EFL teachers’ perceptions is presented. The section covers the research questions, research design, data collection and analysis procedures, research sample, validity and reliability and ethical issues.

2.1 Participants

The context of this study is the Tunisian EFL setting. The target participants of this study are Tunisian English language teachers of the secondary schools. The sample constitutes 30 EFL teachers who volunteered to take part in the study. Table 1 provides the general profile of the participants.

Table 1: The general profile of the participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants’ General Information</th>
<th>Tunisian EFL teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Gender</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational background</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor degree</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MA degree</td>
<td>07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-30</td>
<td>04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50+</td>
<td>05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teaching experience</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0-1</td>
<td>02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-5</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5-10</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>03</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 Data collection instrument
The data for the present study were elicited using a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire is a modified version of Nishino’s questionnaire (2008). It is made up of two parts: The first part deals with teachers’ background information (age, gender, teaching experience and educational background) and the second part focuses on teachers’ perception of CLT principles and practices.

- Questions 1 to 5 are concerned with teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about CLT.
- Questions 6 to 8 are concerned with the perceived use of communicative activities and their acceptability among teachers and learners in CLT classes.
- Questions 9 to 12 deal with the difficulties and problems that teachers perceive they are facing when they implement CLT in their classes.

It is very useful to conduct the pilot study because it provides opportunities to examine every single aspect of the survey. Therefore, in this study, the questionnaire was piloted with two English language teachers to check its content and written expressions. The reason why this questionnaire was selected for the study was the fact that it contained close-ended questions (question 1, 2 and 11) which are used to elicit a short, quick response, open-ended questions (question 5, 11 and 12) which provided opportunities for the respondent teachers to justify their perceptions and extend the scope of the items, and selective responses and rating questions which are very helpful in identifying the variables that shape teachers’ beliefs. The researchers believed that this diversity in the type of questions included in this survey can be used as a gateway into teachers’ perceptions regarding CLT.

2.3 Data collection procedure
This study relies on a simple random sampling method in the sense that the questionnaire was administered and shared on a Facebook page which exclusively associates and connects EFL teachers teaching at different schools in Tunisia. The researchers requested that the questionnaire should be completed by the secondary school teachers who were assured that all the data collected were for research purposes only, and their confidentiality would be respected during the study. The survey was filled in by 30 teachers who sent it back to the researchers via e-mail. The process of data collection lasted approximately two weeks (in March 2017).

2.4 Research questions
The present study can be considered as an attempt to find out how CLT as introduced in secondary school English curriculum is perceived by teachers and what they think are the hindrances to the practice of CLT in the Tunisian context. In particular, the research tried to provide answers to the following research questions:

1. What are EFL teachers’ perceptions regarding the appropriateness of CLT in their classrooms?
2. What difficulties do Tunisian EFL teachers face when implementing CLT?
3. What do secondary school teachers think should be changed in order to utilize CLT in secondary schools?

2.5 Significance of the Study
The present study is significant because it aims at gaining interesting insights on English language teachers’ perceptions regarding CLT as an approach to be used in the language classrooms in Tunisia. The findings not only contribute to the literature of how well teachers understand and use CLT approach in EFL contexts but also it helps to direct future research regarding the issue and to identify the areas of study which call for further analysis. As such, the results of the study provide guiding and directing factors that can be useful in planning
questionnaire items for future in-depth large-scale study. In addition, it can also provide the researchers with some general outlines on what aspects to look at during classroom observation (for instance, secondary teachers’ actual practice of communicative activities). Moreover, the impeding factors identified in the Tunisian context can provide valuable insight for various stakeholders such as curriculum designers, material developers, teacher trainers, as well as secondary school teachers, in order to make informed pedagogical decisions regarding English language teaching within a communicative approach which is believed fundamental for promoting learners’ level of language performance, especially in oral communication.

2.6 Analysis of questionnaire data

Teachers’ responses to the survey were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitative analysis was done through a statistical analysis of data using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software, which is commonly used in applied linguistics and educational research (Dornyei, 2007). For example, number of participants who selected each item was calculated using frequency, the results were analyzed and tabulated and then they were converted into percentages (e.g., to figure out number of the participants who answered a particular item among the whole participants in the study). Qualitative analysis was carried out through an analysis of the results of the open-ended questions. It is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons and opinions of the teachers and to dive deeper into the problem.

3. Results

This section represents the results of the questionnaire analysis. It is divided into three major parts: Tunisian teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about CLT, Use of Communicative Activities in CLT Classes, Problems and difficulties in implementing CLT in English classes.

- Tunisian teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about CLT:

Questions 1 to 5 deal with Tunisian teachers’ beliefs and knowledge about CLT. In response to Question 1, 17 out of 30 participants indicated that they had heard of or studied CLT. However, responses to Question 2 show that they mainly learned about CLT through workshops. Only 7 teachers reported learning about CLT from teacher’s manual. There were also 3 teachers who reported learning about CLT through books, journals and Internet.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources and places</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workshops</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teachers’ manual</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Books, journals, internet</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following Table 3 displays that the majority of the teachers believed it was most important for students in CLT classrooms “to communicate effectively”, “to enjoy communicating” in FL and “to collaborate with each other”. However, few teachers selected native-like accuracy or native-like fluency and pronunciation as important factors.

Table 3: What the Teacher Thinks is Important for Students in CLT Classroom (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Important Factors for Students</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To communicate effectively in FL</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To enjoy communicating in FL</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To collaborate with each other</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never to use L1 (Arabic)</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To acquire native like accuracy</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To acquire native like fluency</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To acquire native like pronunciation</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To talk to a native speaker</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Teachers’ responses to question 4 reveal that the majority of teachers observe themselves as being “facilitator”, “communicator model”, and “material provider” as the main roles of teachers in CLT classrooms which can indicate their perception of communicative activities in English classes. Only some teachers chose native-like pronunciation, fluency and accuracy as important attributes of CLT teachers. But, none of these teachers considered being a native speaker as a crucial factor in teaching English.

Table 4: What the Teachers Think is required of Teachers in CLT Classrooms (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role of Teachers</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To be a facilitator</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To be a communicator model</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To provide material</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have native like accuracy</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have native-like pronunciation</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To have native-like fluency</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Question 5 asked participants to provide a definition of “communicative competence”. Teachers’ responses to this question showed that only one teacher pointed to Canale and
Swain’s (1980) four aspects of communicative competence which are grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic competences. Three teachers referred to it as the ability of the learners to cooperate with each other and to express their opinions and thoughts. Yet, the majority of teachers (n=26) defined communicative competence as the ability to understand others and to be able to communicate with other people. Overall, the participant teachers do not seem to have developed a conceptual definition of CLT.

Examples of participants’ responses for open-ended questions:
Participant A: “I think that communicative competence denotes pupils’ ability to cooperate with each other and to express their thoughts and opinions”.
Participant B: “communicative competence can be seen as the ability to understand what other people say to you, also the ability to interact and communicate with people.”

Use of Communicative Activities in CLT Classes

Consistent with the CLT approach, textbooks for the secondary school curriculum include activities to be carried out in groups or pairs. Questions 6 to 8 asked the respondents about their use of group/pair work and their appropriateness among teachers and learners in EFL classes in Tunisia.

Table 5: Frequency of group/pair work Activities (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hardly ever</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sometimes</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Often</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usually</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

According to Table 5, 28 out of 30 respondents claimed that they often, usually or always used group or pair activities. The high percentage of perceived use of pair and group work, more than 50%, revealed the respondent teachers’ tendency to use pair and group work in their classes. However, this tendency does not necessarily indicate that they use them for carrying out communicative activities.

Table 6: Range of Communicative Activities Used by Teachers (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Role-play</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Games</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information-gap</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem-solving</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As for question 7, which asked the participants about the use of the different types of activities, the responses provided a variety of activities. The ranking of activity types mentioned by the participants suggest that “role play”, and “games” were more likely to be employed by Tunisian teachers. The higher priority given to these two activities might reflect their high frequency in the textbooks used by the teachers compared with the other ones.
mentioned in the list. This implies also that secondary school teachers have to stick to the textbook activities whether they suit the teaching context or not.

Question 8 asked teachers about their perception of their students’ favorite activity in CLT classes. In response to question 8, 14 teachers out of 30 reported that their students’ favorite activity was “role play”. Eight teachers also chose “games” as the activity which was most desired by their students. The teachers’ views about their students’ favorite activity support the point mentioned earlier about the type of activities included in the textbooks.

**Problems and difficulties in implementing CLT in English classes**

Questions 9 to 12 were concerned with the difficulties and problems that Tunisian teachers believed they faced when they implemented CLT in their classes. Question 9 asked teachers about the effectiveness of CLT in language classes. Their answers revealed that the majority of the participants, more than 76%, claimed CLT was not used effectively in their classes. In spite of their tendency to use pair work and group work in their classes and engage students in communicative activities such as role plays and games, the respondents did not perceive the use of these activities effective in English classes. The teachers’ responses to question 10 (see Table 7) which asked them about the reasons behind the lack of CLT effectiveness displays that the majority of teachers (more than 50%) considered “class size” and “the number of teaching hours” as the major reasons for the ineffectiveness of CLT in language classes. Between 13% to 10% perceived “lack of materials for communicative activities”, “textbooks” and “curriculum” as the major reasons. Less than 6% of the teachers considered “lack of teachers’ language proficiency”, and “exam system” as responsible for the lack of effectiveness.

Table 7: Reasons Why CLT Cannot Be Effective in Classes (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of class hours</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of materials for communicative activities</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam system</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Lack of teacher’s proficiency         | 01              | 3% |}

Question 11 demonstrated that the majority of Tunisian teachers 75% sought to provide their students with more communicative activities in their English classes. Few teachers believed that teaching grammar and vocabulary was more important for the students and that their main focus should be on them and not on communication. Explaining why they want to adopt communicative activities in the classroom, the majority of teachers (80%) believed that focusing on communication and enhancing the four language skills should be the main goal of teaching the English language. Most of the respondents claimed that CLT classroom offer the EFL learners the opportunity to engage in communicative activities.

Table 8 presents responses to question 12 which asked teachers about the circumstances which require modification in order to facilitate an effective implementation of CLT in
classroom settings. The majority of teachers (75%) state that “number of class hours”, “class size”, “lack of materials in the education system” as the main impeding factors which should be changed and improved. The “teacher training courses for teachers” and “textbooks” were mentioned only by 10% of the teachers.

Table 8: Conditions to be changed in order to use CLT in the Classrooms (N=30)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problems</th>
<th>No. of mentions</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of class hours</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class size</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of materials for communicative activities</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher training courses</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Textbooks</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher’s proficiency</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The present study explored Tunisian Secondary School EFL Teachers’ perception of CLT principles and practices. The opinions and attitudes expressed by secondary school teachers in this study seemed to be relatively consistent with the CLT principles particularly with regard to teachers’ roles in CLT classrooms and the goals of teaching and learning English. Moreover, a large proportion of the respondents highlighted the need for employing CLT in their English lessons in order for learners “to communicate effectively” and “enjoy communication” in English classes. Teachers’ responses also illustrated that group/pair work and communicative activities like role plays and games were considered more favorable to both secondary school teachers and learners. However, they acknowledged that the communicative activities were not used effectively in their classes. This result reveals the gap between teachers’ willingness to embrace CLT in their classes and the restrictions of the teaching context.

However, teachers’ responses unveiled the existence of major problems and challenges that were perceived to hamper the implementation of CLT. Foremost, the majority of the teachers perceived factors such as “number of class hours”, “class size” and “lack of materials for communicative activities” to be the major problems hindering the adoption of CLT in classes. In similar studies conducted by Hall & Hewings (2001) highlighted factors as class size, work overload and lack of authentic materials as main obstacles to the implementation of CLT. According to Richards (2015), schools are asked to provide materials and resources that teachers need to carry out communicative activities effectively. Another identified obstacle is the “exam system”, which focused solely on assessing grammar and vocabulary knowledge and disregarded the listening and speaking skills. The problems mentioned by Tunisian teachers are not unique to the Tunisian EFL context as similar problems were mentioned by other researchers (Humphries & Burns, 2015; Kim, 2014; Ghanbari & Ketabi, 2011; Li, 1998).

In fact, when teachers were asked about the conditions which should be changed so that CLT can be used more effectively, most of them hinted to the “number of class hours”, “class
size”, “lack of supplementary teaching materials” and “teacher training courses for teachers” as the main contextual factors which should be reformed in order to create a classroom environment supportive of the CLT. In this respect, most of the respondents in this study called for smaller classes and more class time. With regard to class size, participants reported that in their school it was hard to check and assist pair/group work in a class containing 35 students and that classrooms sometimes become very noisy and that administering communicative activities was difficult. Participants recommended that there should be less than 20 students in one class in order to create a classroom environment conducive to CLT.

It is important to state that if these identified problems are not surmounted and the teaching condition are not improved, teachers will be prone to frustration and as a result they are likely to revert back to the traditional methods of EFL teaching (Fullan, 1991; Pinar, 1999).

We can conclude that the present study seeks to contribute to the current CLT literature through probing the Tunisian teachers’ perceptions of CLT concepts and practice of this approach in the Tunisian teaching context. The best way to understand the most effective ways of implementing CLT is doing more research to understand teachers’ and learners’ concerns toward it (Gorsuch, 2000). The general picture which emerged from this study was that teachers’ views were compatible, to some extent, with CLT principles in the sense that they held a positive and favorable attitude toward its characteristics; however, they seem to be confronting many contextual barriers.

They believed that there were factors limiting their ability to employ CLT effectively in schools.

5. Research implications

The implications of the present study will make more sense if the results are corroborated with further research. Replication and extension of the study are recommended specially because of the limitations of the reported results. The survey results, as frequently mentioned in the literature, need to be complemented with observation of the participants’ practice. There are also certain variables like age, experience and level of education of the participants which were not controlled and as a result might have affected the results. Future studies might benefit from controlling the mentioned variables.
References


Karavas-Doukas, K. (1995). Teacher identified factors affecting the implementation of an EFL innovation in Greek public secondary schools. Language, Culture, and Curriculum, 8 (1), 53-68.


Appendix A
CLT Questionnaire
This survey is intended to elicit your perceptions of communicative language teaching principles and practices (CLT). The information you provide is considered confidential and will be used for research purposes only. You do not need to mention your name. We truly appreciate your volunteering to cooperate and spend time completing the questionnaire.

1. Background Information
Please tick the item that best describes your background.

- **Sex:**
  - Male
  - Female

- **Age:**
  - 25-30
  - 31-40
  - 41-50
  - 50+

- **Educational background:**
  - Bachelor degree
  - MA degree

- **Teaching Experience:**
  - 0-1 year
  - 1-5 years
  - 5-10 years
  - Over 10 years

2. Your views on CLT principles and practices
Please tick the items that apply to you.

1. Have you heard about communicative language teaching (CLT) before?
   - Yes / No

2. Where did you learn about communicative language teaching (CLT)?
   - Books or journals or Internet
   - Teachers’ manual
   - Workshops
   - University

3. What do you think is important for students in CLT classrooms?
   - To talk to a native speaker
   - To acquire native-like pronunciation
   - To acquire native-like fluency
   - To acquire native-like accuracy
   - To communicate effectively in L2
   - Never to use L1
   - To collaborate with each other
   - To enjoy communicating in L2

4. What do you think is required for English teachers in CLT classrooms?
   - To have native-like pronunciation
5. What is your definition of “communicative competence”?  
…………………………………………………………………………………………  
…………………………………………………………………………………………  
…………………………………………………………………………………………  

6. How often do you use group/pair activities in your lessons?  
  o Never  
  o Hardly Ever  
  o Sometimes  
  o Often  
  o Usually  
  o Always  

7. Which of the following activities have you used in your lessons?  
  o Information gap  
  o Problem solving  
  o Discussion  
  o Role-play  
  o Games  

8. Which of the following activities do you think your students prefer?  
  o Information gap  
  o Problem solving  
  o Discussion  
  o Role-play  
  o Games  

9. Do you think CLT is employed effectively in your school?  
  o Yes  
  o No  

10. If no, which of the following factors do you think is the biggest problem?  
  o Lack of materials for communicative activities  
  o Lack of teachers’ English proficiency  
  o Curriculum  
  o Textbook  
  o Class size  
  o Number of class hours  
  o Exam system  

11. Do you want to provide your students with more communicative activities?  
  o Yes  
  o No  

Your reasons:  
…………………………………………………………………………………………  
…………………………………………………………………………………………  
…………………………………………………………………………………………  

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12. What are the conditions that should be changed in order to use CLT in the classroom?