

Teachers' Beliefs and Teaching Practices about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in a Thai EFL Context

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Abstract

This study investigates Thai EFL teachers' beliefs regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their teaching practices in General English (GE) classrooms. Data collection methods consist of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and fieldnotes. Seventeen teachers participated in the interviews and nine teachers' classroom teaching practices were observed in four public Rajabhat universities from four provinces of the lower northeastern area of Thailand. The selection of participants was conducted via purposive sampling technique and data were analyzed via an interpretive approach and thematic analysis. The findings reveal that the teachers had strong beliefs that were mostly consistent with the CLT principles because of the benefits derived in terms of developing students' communicative competence. The teachers applied the CLT approach in their classrooms, but adopted only some CLT principles. The

	teachers' teaching practices were not in line with their beliefs concerning CLT due to various reasons and factors that might be related to the local teaching contexts which have influenced teaching practices.
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1. Introduction

English is used globally in many fields such as media, business, education and tourism, and studying English benefits the job advancement prospects of learners. Those who are competent in English are more advantaged in the fast-changing world, thus English competency is needed to help learners succeed in their future career path and compete in the job market. Even though Thai students have studied English for many years, numerous studies have reported that they have low levels of English proficiency (Darasawang & Watson Todd, 2012; Noom-ura, 2013; Wiriyachitra, 2002), so the success of English Language Teaching (ELT) in Thailand remains limited. One of the main culprits for this deficiency has been the teaching styles of teachers that depend too much on traditional approaches (Noom-ura, 2013). Therefore, the teaching approaches that the teachers use can influence ELT and students' language learning performance. In Thailand, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been incorporated into the educational context to improve ELT and CLT implementation is considered vital as it helps develop students' communicative ability. At the beginning of the 1980s, CLT first became known in Thailand (Boonkongsaen, 2018; Kwangsawad & Yawongsa, 2009; Saengboon, 2002) with its objective to improve Thai EFL students' English competency. CLT is regarded as an official government policy (Kwangsawad & Yawongsa, 2009) and it is probably the favorite teaching approach of Thai EFL teachers (Methitham, 2009). Nevertheless, the CLT approach has not been successfully implemented in Thai EFL classrooms to develop Thai students' communicative ability (Promtara, 2016; Teng & Sinwongsawat, 2015).

There is growing evidence that firmly held beliefs can influence teachers in terms of the teaching approach in their classes, their values, their perceptions of the world, lesson planning, decision making, and classroom practices (Pajares, 1992; Xu, 2012). Xu (2012) mentioned that teachers' beliefs can determine their actual behavior toward students. When the teachers realize students' English proficiency level, they consequently attempt to determine and adapt their teaching behavior and

methods to serve students' better-learning performance. Several studies have been conducted investigating teachers' beliefs regarding CLT and teaching practices in different contexts especially in Asian countries (e.g., Kim, 2014; Maestre & Gindidis, 2016; Nishino, 2009; Rahman et al., 2018; Setyaningrum, 2018). In Thailand, teachers' beliefs regarding ELT and CLT have gradually received more interest from researchers and scholars. Nevertheless, only a limited number of studies have focused on the relationship between teachers' beliefs concerning CLT and teaching practices in the EFL context in Thailand (e.g., Kaweian, 2018; Saengboon, 2002; Tayjasanant & Barnard, 2010). Moreover, to the best of the knowledge of the researchers, little research in this topic has been conducted in the lower northeastern area of Thailand; and studies aimed at developing our understanding of EFL students' communicative skills at the university level in Thailand are also very limited.

2. Review of literature

2.1 Teachers' Beliefs

Teachers hold beliefs about their teaching and these beliefs can guide their behavior. The researchers have been interested in the field of teacher education and teacher recognition in terms of investigating teachers' beliefs regarding teaching and learning (Erkmen, 2012). Even though the study of beliefs has been popular among researchers in educational studies over the last decade, their definition is not clear. According to Borg (2001, p. 186), beliefs refer to "a proposition which may be consciously or unconsciously held, is evaluative in that it is accepted as true by the individual and is therefore imbued with emotive commitment; further, it serves as a guide to thought and behavior." Beliefs are significant in language teaching because they are "the driving force behind decisions that individuals make throughout their lives" (Kumaravadivelu, 2012, p. 60). They can be categorized into various aspects according to the scholars' perspectives, such as beliefs regarding English teaching, beliefs regarding teacher-student interaction in class, beliefs regarding curriculum planning, and beliefs regarding English learning (Chu, 2014).

Beliefs play an important role in language teaching because teachers decide their approach based on their beliefs. Some studies indicate that teachers' beliefs can influence their planning, instructional

decisions, behaviors, and professional development in the classroom (Erkmen, 2012; Farrell & Lim, 2005; Richards et al., 2001). Teachers' beliefs can affect their goals and processes, teaching materials, classroom interaction models, their roles, students, and workplaces (Kuzborska, 2011). Beliefs can affect teachers' teaching practices and language instruction in the classroom (Farrell & Bennis, 2013). They can affect teaching processes, decision making in the classroom, and can direct the implementation of the teaching approach which can influence outcomes in terms of teachers' teaching development and students' learning performance. Pookcharoen (2016) remarked that it is unquestionable that teaching practices are associated with effective teaching in the classroom and students' learning achievement.

2.2 Communicative Language Teaching

At the outset of the 1970s, CLT was first proposed by British and American scholars (Richards & Rodgers, 2014) with the purpose of promoting teaching a second language (L2) through communicative skills. Even though CLT was regarded as a counter to the audiolingual approach that was prevalent in the 1960s, CLT's main objective of developing the functional communicative competence of learners in L2 learning was equivalent to the primary audiolingual goal (Dörnyei, 2009). According to Brown (2007, p. 378), CLT refers to "an approach to language teaching that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task-based activities, and communication for the real world and meaningful purposes." It is considered one of the most effective teaching approaches in ELT (Ansarey, 2012; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Ellis, 2003; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Nguyen, 2010) to help develop learners' ability to use the target language in authentic situations. In addition, it is aimed at developing teaching processes in the four language skills where the interdependence between language and communication exists. It was controversial that the learners learn a language through the process of communicating; however, meaningful communication offers a better opportunity for language learning than a grammar-based approach (Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

The CLT approach has been widely employed in second and foreign language teaching. It can shift the teaching processes from grammar-based teaching to more communicative activities. Unlike traditional approaches such as Grammar-Translation, CLT can support the students to

learn a language and communicate meaningfully. The activities in communicative classrooms require the students to have a negotiation of meaning (a process that has a shared understanding of meaning together) and have meaningful interaction that promotes students' language learning fluency rather than engaging the students in correct repetition and memorization of sentences and grammatical structures (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). CLT is student-centered (Nguyen, 2010; Richards & Rodgers, 2014) and can be integrated to facilitate a wide range of classroom procedures.

Considering that beliefs can affect teaching practices, the discrepancy between teachers' beliefs concerning CLT and teaching practices have been reported in a number of studies. This motivated the researchers to study teachers' beliefs regarding CLT and how the teachers applied the CLT approach in General English (GE) classrooms in a Thai university context to investigate the relationship between teachers' beliefs concerning CLT and teaching practices. Given these considerations, this current study aims to shed light on how teachers' beliefs toward the principles of CLT are reflected in their teaching practices in GE classrooms by observing the teachers' teaching practices in their classrooms.

This study aimed to address the following research questions:

- 1) What are Thai EFL teachers' beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching in a Thai university context?
- 2) How do the teachers apply the CLT approach in their teaching practices to develop students' communicative skills?

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Settings and Participants

The findings reported in this paper are a part of a doctoral study. This study was conducted in four public Rajabhat universities situated in urban settings in the lower northeastern area of Thailand. The participants were full-time Thai EFL teachers, consisting of seventeen teachers (15 females and 2 males) who took part in semi-structured interviews and nine teachers (7 females and 2 males) who took part in classroom observations. The selection of the participants was conducted through the purposive sampling technique. The participants had all graduated with either a master's or doctoral degree, had teaching experience in the English

language for at least three years, had GE teaching experience for two years, and were representative of Thai EFL teachers in the university.

T1, T2, ..., T17 were used to specify the teachers in the interview sessions. Following the interviews, the teachers who were available to participate in the classroom observations and were assigned to teach GE subjects in the first semester of academic year 2019 were selected to monitor their teaching practices and nonverbal behaviors. This resulted in nine teachers being observed. It could be said that approximately two teachers were the representatives of the participants from each university. The researchers aimed to examine teachers' beliefs regarding GE subjects as it is assumed that the teachers had possible opportunities to implement the CLT approach, and these subjects were compulsory for all students in each university. In the GE classrooms where the study was undertaken, the students were from various majors and had different English language proficiency. Each class was conducted once a week and audio-visual equipment, such as projectors, speakers, and microphones, were provided in all classes. The number of students was different in each class; they could accommodate approximately 50 students. Most students were individually seated in rows of eight to ten, except in one class that was arranged for group work. For participants' demographic characteristics, see Table 1.

TABLE 1

Teachers' Demographic Information

Demographics	Details	No. of Participants for Interview	No. of Participants for Observation
1. Gender	Male	2	2
	Female	15	7
2. Age	35-62 years old	17	9
3. Education Background	M.A.	15	8
	Ph.D.	2	1
4. Academic Title	Instructor	16	8
	Assistant Professor	1	1
5. English Teaching Experience	3-42 years	17	9
6. GE Teaching Experience	2-12 years	17	9
7. CLT Teaching Experience	3-42 years	17	9

3.2 Instruments

To collect data, the instruments consisted of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and fieldnotes. Semi-structured interviews were considered an effective method in this study since it could help explore the phenomena that the observation could not directly observe (Baxter & Babbie, 2003; Sommer & Sommer, 2002). Also, this method is used when a researcher aims to explore in-depth information about the teachers' thoughts and feelings regarding some phenomenon (Baxter & Babbie, 2003). The interview sessions aided the researchers' understanding of the teachers' beliefs and teaching experiences related to their CLT approach in GE classrooms. All interview questions were designed under the CLT principles adapted from the framework of Karavas-Doukas (1996), consisting of (i) the importance of grammar, (ii) group/pair work, (iii) quality and quantity of error correction, (iv) the roles of the teachers in the classrooms, and (v) the roles of learners in the learning process. A sixth component, teaching materials, was added. The interview questions were validated by five experts who had experience in English teaching and educational research and evaluation. Mock interviews were conducted with two pilot teachers who shared similar characteristics with the participants in the main study to ensure reliability. Examples of questions are as follows: Do you believe that teaching English grammar in GE classrooms is important? How? How do you teach an English class? What kinds of teaching methods/activities do you believe that help promote the CLT approach? What teachers' roles are important in your English class? Why? What are the learners' roles that you believe would help develop students' English skills?

Subsequently, classroom observations were conducted with nine teachers who taught in GE classrooms to have their actual teaching practices observed. The observation protocols were mainly adapted from Rahman et al. (2018). The observations proceeded to investigate how the teachers implemented the CLT approach. The observations were used to explore complex interactions occurring in natural social contexts (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). All classes involved non-participatory observation that was carried out over two months to explore teachers' teaching practices and behaviors. The teachers were observed as to how they conducted CLT-based teaching and how much they focused on this approach. The purpose

of the observations was to investigate the consistency between teachers' beliefs and teaching practices in CLT-based classrooms.

In addition, the semi-structured interview questions and the classroom observation protocols were adapted from the theoretical concepts of CLT principles based on a review of numerous scholars such as those of Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011); Nunan (1993); Richards and Rodgers (2014); Savignon (2006).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

The data collection and analysis were guided by the research questions. Both the semi-structured interviews and classroom observations were conducted in the first semester of the 2019 academic year (July - October). The teachers were asked to participate in the face-to-face semi-structured interviews depending on their time availability. In the interviews, the teachers were asked questions to explore their beliefs about teaching English using the CLT approach in GE classrooms. They could express their beliefs based on their teaching experiences. Each interview lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. During the interview sessions, audio-recording and fieldnotes were used. Each interview script was transcribed verbatim in Thai and then translated into English. The translated and analyzed transcriptions were verified by the advisor and native speakers and they were also verified by randomly member checking. Nine teachers were observed through non-participant observations in nine GE classrooms. Each class was observed for the entire class teaching period which lasted for between 60-150 minutes and was video-recorded and photographed with a camera. The teachers' teaching practices and nonverbal behaviors were noted in the fieldnotes. The fieldnote data were used for analysis to support the audio-recorded and video-recorded data.

After the interview sessions and classroom observations were completed, to answer research questions, an interpretive approach, including coding categories, interrelating themes and interpreting the meaning of themes based on the pre-determined themes and emerging themes, was used (Creswell, 2014). To discover the emerging themes, data transcriptions of interviews were carefully read many times and the video-recordings of classroom observations were repeatedly watched. Salient themes were noted, the meaning of which were interpreted and included under the appropriate categories. The themes that emerged from the

interview and observation data analysis were compared with the literature review. The recurrence of utterances was combined in themes and the significant words of the teachers were quoted. The research findings were validated through the use of multiple sources of data utilizing the triangulation method (Richards, 2015).

In terms of ethical issues, prior to data collection, the Institutional Review Board (IRB) consent form from NIDA's Ethics Committee in Human Research (ECNIDA) was approved and the forms were sent to the participants. The participants' names and workplaces remain anonymous and confidential. They all were asked for permission to allow audio-recording, video-recording, and photographing in both interviews and classroom observations. The original files from the interview recordings, observations, and fieldnotes are confidential and the researchers strongly affirmed to the participants that all recorded data would be utilized for the purposes of this research only.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Results

This study's qualitative findings were presented below. The findings of teachers' beliefs about CLT were first reported, followed by teachers' teaching practices and how they employed CLT-based teaching in GE classrooms.

4.1.1 Teachers' Beliefs about CLT Principles

According to teachers' beliefs regarding the CLT principles, the findings suggested that the teachers believed in the CLT principles. In terms of the importance of grammar, all teachers (17) believed that grammar was important, but it was not considered as the most important part of CLT-based teaching. Learning grammatical rules could help students understand sentence structures and use sentences accurately for communication. Five of them focused on teaching "tense" knowledge. One of them, T2, believed that grammar competency was needed because the students could form sentences for better communicative performance. As explicated by one of the participants, T8, grammar learning could be the foundation of linguistic forms to communicate correctly. As she elaborated:

If we do not teach the students grammar or provide no grammar rules for them, when they speak, they cannot imagine when to use past tense or present simple tense. Consequently, grammatical instruction should be given together with content knowledge. (T8)

For CLT-based teaching in GE classrooms, the teachers also believed that group/pair work activities offered a great opportunity and were beneficial for students' language learning because, through the activities, the students were encouraged to practice real language use. They could practice how to use English from various conversations resembling real-life situations and participate in meaningful communication. Additionally, the activities they engaged in could help them create self-autonomous learning as well as learning how to share and have more responsibility when being assigned to do activities in group. The students had the opportunity to negotiate meaning among classmates when they were assigned to practice English conversation in role plays. As explained by T12:

Role-plays help students' learning autonomy when they are outside the classrooms. I assign them to practice English out of class because they have only 2-3 hours in classrooms. However, when they realize that they have an assignment, they know how to prepare their roles. (T12)

For quality and quantity of error correction, the teachers believed that it was very important, and they needed to give feedback to students, otherwise, students' language learning would not develop. They corrected students' errors in two ways: giving feedback as a whole-class interaction and rephrasing the same sentences with correct grammatical structures. They believed that giving students feedback on a one-on-one basis resulted in the students feeling embarrassed and thus afraid of English speaking. They agreed that language errors made by students during the communicative activities were natural for language learners. The teachers believed that students would develop their language proficiency by learning from their mistakes. They agreed with correcting students' errors after the students had completed their conversations. They did not want to interrupt students' communication flow because it may lower their confidence in English use. In terms of language accuracy and fluency,

although most teachers emphasized the students' communicative ability by focusing on fluency, accuracy was still important. For example, T13 pointed out that the use of accurate grammar was very significant, especially in business English communication in organizations. Similarly, T5 agreed that she focused on students' use of accurate language as follows:

I prefer them to have accurate pronunciation even though the students' accents are not similar. Having the same accent like the native speakers was very difficult. At least they should pronounce correctly. I'm concerned about misspelling and punctuation such as using small letters and capital letters. (T5)

In terms of teachers' roles, 13 teachers (T1, T2, T3, T4, T5, T7, T8, T9, T10, T14, T15, T16, T17) believed that they should function as facilitators who assist students master English by providing guidance and assistance in learning through activities. T9 explicated that:

If the teachers prepare the lessons or they function as a facilitator who supports what procedures in the activities then the students will learn the content from teaching aids. This will help a lot. (T9)

Moreover, creating a wide variety of activities was seen as one of the teachers' roles to boost students' English learning skills. Three teachers (T2, T13, T15) believed that teachers should create a supportive and friendly learning environment because it could motivate students to be interested in and pay more attention to classroom participation. When students had problems in language learning, teachers should help them.

The teachers believed that the roles of students in the learning process were essential because they could determine students' learning success. In CLT-based teaching in GE classrooms, the students must be active learners who are always enthusiastic to search for information concerning English lessons when out of class. Active learners could contribute to rapid and successful learning in the target language. Moreover, seven teachers (T5, T7, T8, T10, T14, T15, T16) believed that the students should have self-learning autonomy so they could take the initiative in English learning. They recommended that various online websites, for example, YouTube or different mobile phone applications, were available for students to practice autonomously. The students could

learn by practicing English from songs, movies, games, and news from numerous online sources. English could be learned anywhere and anytime. Interestingly, most teachers stated that good language learners have learning motivation because it can drive them to learn and practice English individually. Notably, T2 shared her viewpoint regarding how students' interest contributed to the development of English proficiency as follows:

In my teaching style, I try to instill interest in English in the students and for them to perceive its importance in their daily lives. When they realize the importance of English and know why they need to learn it, they will like the language. Then, they become interested and attempt to learn English.
(T2)

In regards to teaching materials used in the classrooms, all teachers believed that authentic teaching materials such as commercial textbooks and instructional media could help promote students' learning performance. These kinds of materials could enhance students' interest and learning motivation. They could learn real-life situations based on conversations from the materials. Three teachers (T5, T11, T12) mentioned that several websites were available which included material that resembled authentic situations and increased the interest of students to learn English. T11 mentioned that:

I prefer them to experience the communication of actual interactive behavior through visual aids because these are more interesting than textbooks. The visual aids engage students' imagination and increases their enthusiasm. They are eager to study and know what's going on. (T11)

As such, audio-visual aids helped increase students' attention. In addition, they believed that the medium of instruction in CLT-based classrooms should be both English and Thai as well as the Isan dialect when appropriate. Also, the CLT approach should be integrated into all four language skills.

4.1.2 Teaching Practices in GE Classrooms

How the teachers applied the CLT approach in nine GE classrooms is summarized below. The findings are categorized into seven main topics: English teaching approach, classroom activities, teaching materials, teachers' roles, students' roles, error correction, and use of language.

Regarding the English teaching approach, most teachers frequently used lecture-based teaching and a teacher-centered approach where the teachers were often involved in classroom activities. As can be seen, a mixed-teaching approach including the CLT and Grammar-Translation were employed. Grammar teaching was a focus, and direct grammar teaching was pervasively seen in almost all classrooms because the students were expected to have acquired the grammar knowledge required for the passing of examinations. Most teachers highlighted the grammar-based examinations or test-based teaching because they needed to teach based on the objectives of each subject. Out of the nine teachers, five often described grammatical rules from PowerPoint slides and sometimes on whiteboards, whereas the two others taught grammar on whiteboard and the final pair did not highlight grammar teaching. The students of two teachers were to sit for examinations the following week, so they needed to complete the relevant teaching content during the observation week. Most of them employed text-based teaching, so they followed the lesson order from the textbooks. Most classes included vocabulary explanation and translation. The teachers started the lessons by explaining instructions and grammatical structures, asking students questions and translating how to use grammar or vocabulary. The teachers preferred to teach in front of the class. They attempted to engage students to increase class participation and interaction. All four language skills were emphasized, but students could not practice speaking skills often due to limited teaching hours. The teachers focused on classroom attendance.

Concerning classroom activities, the teachers often employed whole-class teaching. Pair/group work activities rarely occurred. The students had little opportunity for communicative practice with classmates, thus classroom activities were rarely assigned during the observed time. Only one teacher assigned the students to do both pair (role play) and group work activities. In one classroom, group work was employed to allow the students to share their opinions about writing accurate sentences. Since the teachers used textbooks as the main teaching materials, the activities were based on the textbooks. Two

teachers designed an activity based on asking-answering questions. For example, each student in one classroom was assigned to compose a question to ask an American native-English speaker who was a visiting lecturer in the class. After composing the question, they asked the visitor one by one. In almost all classes, the teachers had the students watch video clips from PowerPoint slides and instructional media from YouTube. To improve listening and speaking skills, the students had an opportunity to listen to audio files a few times and repeat them. In some classes, the students needed to repeat the teachers' pronunciation because they did not use audio-visual aids. For writing skills, the students practiced the use of correct tense forms from the exercises. Grammatical structures regarding tenses of the simple present tense, past continuous tense, and past simple tense were taught. They learned grammatical structures and how to use them accurately. From these activities, they remembered the correct forms and practiced speaking from the conversations. Most teachers assigned in-class exercise practice and homework for students.

In terms of teaching materials, commercial textbooks from recognized publishers were used as the core materials to teach GE subjects. The exercises from the textbooks engaged the students to practice in all four skills, which consisted of a variety of activities such as filling in the blanks, matching, multiple choices, and answering questions. Six teachers used the PowerPoint slides provided with the packaged software to make their classrooms more interesting. The PowerPoint slides consisted of audio-visual files and videos which resembled real-life situations. Also, authentic teaching materials such as interesting video clips from interactive websites such as YouTube as well as worksheets and flashcards were used to motivate students' interest in language learning and to support the use of CLT-based teaching. Meanwhile, three teachers did not use any teaching materials except the textbooks. In the listening part, they read the conversations and the students repeated after them.

For teachers' roles, almost all teachers functioned as leaders, teachers, and knowledge transmitters who educated the students and were dominant. They were actively involved in all steps of teaching, such as planning teaching methods, designing the lessons or activities, and managing the classes. All classroom activities were created by the teachers, so it is understood that they taught, assigned activities, and supervised the classes. They were the center of students' attention and they continued their teaching until the end of teaching period, but they

sometimes asked students to have classroom interactions. As previously mentioned, the teachers used lectured-based teaching, so they spent most time on lecturing. Occasionally, they were facilitators who helped students when they had difficulties in learning or practicing the tasks or exercises. During class, teachers explained the instructions for each topic clearly and the students were required to repeat sentences. For doing exercises, the teachers described how to do the tasks and gave them clues. Sometimes, they asked the students to answer questions. When they noticed students were reluctant to answer or gave the wrong answer, they repeated and clarified the answers for them. All teachers engaged the students to participate by asking them questions when they finished listening to a conversation or watching videos. They tried to create a supportive learning environment for students.

Generally, for students' roles, the students were required to follow the instruction of teachers. It seemed that students were not very active or self-autonomous. They did not actively participate in the class. Some of them did not prepare for lessons before attending classes. Since GE students were from different majors who had various levels of English proficiency, it was observed that they had little self-confidence. Rather, they were humble, shy, and quiet. They seldom shared their opinion or discussed the topics with the teachers and classmates. Some students volunteered to answer teachers' questions, or the teachers sometimes called on students by name. Students from five classrooms were occasionally active learners in terms of participating in classroom activities. Most students almost never had classroom involvement except when the teachers asked them to do activities. Some students had little motivation to learn and were therefore not attentive.

Regarding error correction, it was observed that teachers sometimes corrected students' errors. They gave feedback directly after the students finished speaking. For example, one teacher asked a pair of students to practice asking-answering questions activities. When she realized that the students made errors, the teacher corrected their errors immediately and suggested how to use accurate language. Most of them often gave feedback to the students as a whole class. Sometimes, when they noticed that the students had problems in pronunciation or pronounced words incorrectly, they repeated the words or sentences with accurate grammar so the students could identify the errors. The teachers corrected students' incorrect pronunciation and misspellings. Sometimes,

when the students pronounced the words from the audio files incorrectly, the teachers corrected them, so the students could learn how to pronounce words correctly or use correct sentences. When the teachers asked students questions and they could not reply, the teachers gave clues or offered appropriate context.

Concerning the use of language, code-switching between Thai and English was frequently employed as the medium of instruction. Native Thai language was prevalently used in most classrooms except one. Five teachers used Thai (60%) and English (40%) in GE classrooms. Regularly, the teachers spoke English when giving instructions, reading conversations and some grammatical sentences. They used Thai when they explained grammatical rules and exercises. Sometimes, they gave instructions, especially how to do the exercises, in Thai. Among the nine teachers, eight translated the meaning of words, sentences or conversations into Thai, while one teacher always conducted class in English using simple English words to explain the lessons and meaning of new vocabulary. Some teachers sometimes used a dialect of Isan to make the class more enjoyable and entertaining and doing so increased students' attention.

4.2 Discussion

Regarding the first research question, which was investigating teachers' beliefs about CLT, the teachers believed in the CLT principles except for the importance of grammar, so the findings were mostly convergent with the CLT principles elaborated by many scholars in the literature review (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Nunan, 1993; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Savignon, 2006). Considering the EFL context, the teachers focused on grammar teaching because they believed that if the students knew grammar structures, they could use the sentences for communication. According to the studies of Chang (2009), Chang and Goswami (2011), and Saengboon (2002), grammar learning could assist students to understand the linguistic patterns and use them to communicate. It could be a short cut tool for EFL students who did not learn English naturally at a young age. This method could help them remember sentence structures to communicate in real-life situations more easily. In addition, the students needed to pass the grammar-based examinations which are of a traditional test pattern with multiple choices; as a result, grammar teaching is still necessary for such English classrooms

in Thailand. Also, knowing grammar provides a foundation and increases the confidence of students to use English.

The teachers believed that their role was one of facilitator – to assist students learn English in CLT-based classrooms. It seems that their role has changed from that of the past as they no longer act as the authority, as CLT-based teaching utilizes a learner-centered approach where the learners share their ideas and practice speaking, not only the teacher. However, teachers still emphasized error correction when students learned a language through CLT-based teaching. If students' errors were not corrected, they believed that learning development would be interrupted and it could bring about fossilization (Rahman et al., 2018). In terms of activities, teachers believed the students could practice how to use English with their classmates in pair work and group work because CLT-based classrooms required a great deal of practice to help develop communicative competence. It is not an exaggeration to state that the CLT approach has become the favorite teaching approach of Thai EFL teachers in the current educational context.

The second research question focused on teaching practices regarding how teachers integrated the CLT approach in GE classrooms. All teachers attempted to employ CLT to develop students' communicative ability. In terms of the overall English teaching approach, most teachers employed a mixed-teaching approach that included both CLT and Grammar-Translation, and they primarily followed a teacher-centered approach. Because CLT-based teaching consumed a great deal of time and there were large class sizes, the use of pure CLT for the entire teaching time was difficult. A curriculum that focuses on grammar-based examinations may be one of the factors that caused the teachers to teach grammatical rules and focus on test-oriented teaching. This could be regarded as a hindrance in implementing the CLT approach (e.g., Ellis, 1994; Li, 1998; Sakui, 2004). The teachers needed to provide students with strong knowledge of grammar according to the university curriculum and the subject's objective; consequently, teachers were required to teach direct grammar. As can be seen, the teachers were also more familiar with Grammar-Translation (Kwangsawad & Yawongsa, 2009) and it has been the traditional approach employed in English classes. Moreover, the Thai EFL teachers are versed in the typical classroom teaching pattern known as teacher-fronted style (Saengboon, 2002). It has been a familiar approach for several decades, and they experienced direct grammar

teaching when learning English in childhood, so their experiences have influenced their present teaching approach.

Moreover, teaching practices were also influenced by the Ministry of Education policy. For example, the traditional pattern of the national tests such as the Ordinary National Educational Test (O-NET) and the Advanced National Educational Test (A-NET) for primary and secondary levels have been multiple choice tests, so students are familiar with these tests and teachers need to design their tests to be consistent. Students' learning assessment and CLT-based teaching were not consistent. Oral tests should be included to evaluate students' communicative performance (Li, 1998) instead of assessing student grammar knowledge with multiple choice test items. Additionally, due to limited teaching hours, communicative activities such as pair/group work rarely occurred. This might be because the teachers were forced to follow the planned teaching schedule and content and complete them within the teaching hours. Moreover, grammar explanation also took a great deal of time; as a result, teachers adapted the scheduled lesson plans to match the teaching conditions. Since the preparation of teaching materials is time consuming (e.g., Chang & Goswami, 2011; Li, 1998; Sakui, 2004), teachers lack time to prepare and design classroom activities. Also, to complete the course syllabus, lecture-based teaching was regularly used, and the students were assigned to participate in classroom activities such as learning grammatical structures, structure drills, repetition, using choral textbook reading for the entire class, and practicing dialogues repeatedly. The findings are similar to the studies of Nonkukhetkhong et al. (2006) and Sakui (2004) in other contexts.

Commercial textbooks and authentic teaching materials were used because the lesson organization was suitably designed to serve the course objectives which aimed to develop all four language skills and they attract students' attention. It seems that the teachers often employed a teacher-based approach where they lectured. Explicitly, the teachers performed their role as the authority who taught the lessons, and planned, designed, and managed classroom activities. They were responsible for the transmission of knowledge because the students needed to pass examinations and finish the university curriculum's courses. Grammar-based teaching may have resulted in teachers employing a teacher-centered approach where they are dominant in the class, therefore their

role was similar to the role in the traditional approach focusing on Grammar-Translation (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Regarding students' role, learning English through the traditional approach as primary students has affected their learning style. Therefore, they are passive learners familiar with teacher-centered classrooms, spoon-feeding, and lecture-based teaching. They waited to receive knowledge from teachers without any autonomous learning or initiative. Lack of learning motivation and a non-supportive English learning environment can cause them to not perceive the importance of English learning. In addition, in the Thai education system, the teachers mostly lead in the class so the students are trained to be passive, obedient, and respectful to teachers (Nonkukhetkhong et al., 2006). Particularly, Thai students are shy, silent, and rarely share opinions, even among classmates in class. These factors might have caused difficulties when the teachers integrated the CLT approach into GE classrooms.

The teachers still focused on students' error correction and accuracy, such as students' pronunciation and spelling. As can be seen, they continued to emphasize students' language accuracy and fluency because they want students to know correct words and sentence structures as the basic knowledge for communication. Their reasons might be that language accuracy could help students use English for communication meaningfully and effectively. According to Setyaningrum (2018, p. 158), the correct use of grammar causes communication to be "meaningful and appropriate." The teachers used both Thai and English because students had different levels of English proficiency. The use of native Thai could help some students have a better understanding of the lessons and thus they felt more confident. Since students in these contexts had little learning motivation, code-switching between the two languages could motivate classroom participation and attention. The use of a dialect such as the Isan dialect was interesting for students because it could increase their attention and make the class more enjoyable. The teachers' use of a variety of Thai, English, and dialects could contribute to effective and successful CLT-based teaching in these contexts and language use should not be limited only to the target language because the students did not have a solid background in English.

The findings of this study indicated that teachers' beliefs about CLT were inconsistent with their teaching practices; similar findings could be found in previous studies (e.g., Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Kawean, 2018; Li,

1998; Maestre & Gindidis, 2016; Nishino, 2009; Rahman et al., 2018; Sakui, 2004; Setyaningrum, 2018; Tayjasanant & Barnard, 2010). Even though the teachers had strong beliefs regarding CLT principles, they could implement only some principles in their GE classrooms. There might be various reasons for this such as curriculum objectives, limited teaching hours, large class sizes, students' lack of learning motivation, the students' learning assessment focusing on grammar-based examinations or test-based teaching, and a non-supportive learning environment as to why the teachers' beliefs and teaching practices did not match. It is generally recognized that teachers integrated the CLT approach with a traditional teaching Grammar-Translation approach to suit their local classroom conditions. Grammar-Translation methods have been conventionally employed in the Thai education system for many decades. Additionally, the teachers and the students were familiar with the traditional approach which was therefore difficult to change. The shift to a pure CLT approach was also problematic due to the other difficulties discussed above. Thai EFL teachers have long been familiar with the teacher-centered approach where the teachers are dominant and hold authority in the class. Also, direct grammar teaching, which the teachers experienced when they first learned English in childhood, was an influence on their teaching practices. Considering the EFL context, the learning environment for English outside the classroom is not supportive and thus any implementation of the CLT approach should be adapted to be suitable to the local teaching context.

5. Conclusions

Overall, the teachers had a strong belief in the principles of CLT. However, direct grammar teaching remains important because it could help students acquire grammatical knowledge and use language for communication correctly, which is not the approach taken in CLT-based teaching. Group/pair work activities helped students practice how to use English in authentic situations. To develop student language learning, error correction was a focus, but done after the completion of communication flow. The roles of teachers and students could assist the students to learn English effectively and contribute to learning autonomy. Authentic teaching materials could enhance students' learning motivation and performance. In terms of the application of CLT principles, although teachers attempted to implement them in GE classrooms, overall, it was

ineffective and unsuccessful. The teachers did not employ the full spectrum of the CLT approach which they needed to adapt and combine with the traditional approach to complete the learning objectives of class on time and make it suitable for their classroom conditions.

The teachers should encourage students to be self-autonomous learners because they can then practice English through the use of online websites or mobile phone applications outside the classroom. They also needed to motivate students to realize how English is important to their lives so that they could enjoy learning English. The CLT approach was beneficial, and it could help develop students' communicative ability. Since CLT is a western-based approach, the CLT implementation should be carefully adapted to suit Thai culture and Thai EFL students' characteristics. Teachers' beliefs were fundamental because they could affect the teaching methods, teachers' teaching performance, and students' learning performance. This study's findings indicated that there was a discrepancy between teachers' beliefs and practices; limitations possibly stemmed from different teaching contexts. This study was expected to explore how the teachers can implement the CLT approach to be suitable in the reality of a Thai classroom context and for the actual use of English rather than teachers' best teaching practices.

6. Limitations

Some limitations exist in this study. For example, the number of participants was limited, the data were collected in only four public Rajabhat universities, and classroom observations were conducted once in each class. The classrooms were restricted to only GE. For further studies, a greater number of participants is recommended in order to discover how the CLT approach could be more broadly integrated into Thailand's education system. Beliefs of teachers and students should be further studied to have more understanding of how this approach can be used effectively and for greater generalization of the findings. The follow-up classroom observations could be done more than once in a class to examine more fully how frequently the CLT approach is used. The observed classrooms should be broadened to other subjects, such as English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Business English, or English for Career.

7. Implications

Despite its limitations, the results of this study can benefit language teaching and learning as well as suggest ideas for the improvement of students' communicative competence. This study provides both theoretical and practical contributions to the stakeholders (e.g., ESL/EFL teachers, materials/course developers or curriculum planners, policy-makers and related authorities) in Thailand.

First, the findings may provide insights regarding teachers' beliefs regarding CLT and teaching practices. These could guide teachers in applying CLT to develop their teaching methods, improve teaching skills, as well as design lesson plans, classroom activities, and curriculum so that the problems in English language teaching in Thailand could be progressively addressed. When teachers have strong beliefs regarding the CLT principles, they can employ the principles to manage their classes and design activities to develop students' communicative competence. The findings also suggest a possible model for teachers in integrating CLT in a Thai EFL context and other teaching contexts where they can adapt the findings to suit their classroom conditions.

Second, the findings can be beneficial for materials/course developers or curriculum planners and policy-makers to redesign GE courses and develop appropriate teaching materials for students at the tertiary level. A well-designed curriculum should be considered for local contexts, taking into consideration how to develop teachers' teaching approach and professional development and develop students' learning ability for better proficiency in English in the future. Teachers consequently need more opportunity to adopt the CLT approach that promotes student learning skills in a Thai EFL context, which can aid teachers in developing their teaching ability as it is expected that the CLT approach will become increasingly implemented in Thai classroom contexts in the future.

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