

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL Context in Asia

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Abstract

This paper provides an in-depth investigation into the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Asia, and China in particular. It reveals that CLT has not been fully acknowledged and espoused by Asia's English language educators at the classroom level. Additionally, it unpacks the various factors that have impeded educators in Asia from enacting CLT. Through introducing the concepts of "teacher as curriculum implementer" and "teacher as curriculum maker," it brings to surface why a mandated curriculum change as CLT cannot be realized in EFL context in Asia. The paper argues that teachers should be constructors rather than merely receivers of the imposed pedagogical reforms. The top-down educational enterprise of implementing CLT cannot succeed unless it is embraced by teachers with their reconfigurations in light of their specific teaching situations.

Keywords: CLT, EFL, teacher as curriculum implementer, teacher as curriculum maker

1. Introduction

As one of the most predominant language teaching approaches, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has developed and expanded for over 30 years since its emergence in ESL countries in the 1970s. It has its roots in "communicative competence," which Hymes posited and defined as "the ability to use linguistic knowledge of language appropriately in a variety of social situations" (Hymes, 1979, p. 3). Hymes' views of language from a socio-cultural perspective with a focus on the varieties of ways language is used by individual learners laid a theoretical foundation for the evolution of CLT.

The following statements made by Eisenchlas (2010) most aptly described what CLT is:

It is, strictly speaking, an approach rather than a "method," and thus scholars aligned with CLT do not represent a single and united voice but include a number of perspectives embodying diverse goals and analyses that frequently disagree with one another. Common to all the strands within this paradigm, however, is the aim to "(a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching; and (b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication." (Eisenchlas, 2010, p. 15)

Fundamentally, CLT shares a lot of commonalities with the comprehensible input based approach by Krashen (1981). Combining "Comprehension Hypothesis" and the "Affective Filter Hypothesis," Krashen contends that "(w)e acquire language when we receive comprehensible input in a low anxiety situation," rather than "by learning about language, by study of the rules and by memorizing vocabulary" (Krashen, 2003, p. 3). Krashen's stress on a learning environment with rich language input and free anxiety is exactly the key to developing communicative competence in CLT.

Since CLT emerged, it has been interpreted and applied with great variations (Criado & Sanchez, 2009). Though there is not a single model of CLT that has been universally accepted, some salient features exist distinguishing it from other language-teaching approaches: (a) communicative classroom activities, (b) learner-centered approach, (c) authentic teaching materials, (d) error toleration, (e) teachers as facilitators, and (f) fluency above accuracy (Wei, 2011). In a nutshell, CLT views language as a tool for communication, and takes "communicative competence," the ability to produce contextually appropriate language, as the overarching goal of language teaching and learning.

This paper aims to examine how CLT, a language teaching approach originated and developed in ESL (English as a Second Language) context, has been implemented in the EFL (English as a Foreign Language) context in Asia, and China in particular. Many EFL educators and researchers have dedicated to exploring the application of CLT in EFL countries (Criado & Sanchez, 2009; Eisenclas, 2010; Feryok, 2008; Hiep, 2007; Hu, 2005a). As the world's lingua franca, English is being learned by more and more people globally. By conservative estimates, the number of non-native speakers of English in the world today outnumbers native speakers by more than two to one, and the ratio is increasing (Crystal, 2003). This means, with the trend of growing globalization, teaching English to speakers of other languages (TESOL) has become more and more indispensable and significant. This topic, though mainly based in Asian context, is of significance also for the English language education in many other EFL countries across the world.

2. EFL vs. ESL

In recent decades, a set of bewildering terms have appeared successively to refer to the different types of English teaching, such as EAL, English as an Auxiliary Language; EIAL, English as an International-Auxiliary Language; ELWC, English as a Language of Wider Communication; and EIL, English as an International Language. More often than differentiation and clarification, these terms have tended to result in ambiguity and confusion, even among the scholars in academia. In fact, the terms with the most utility and clarity are EFL and ESL, which are also the most commonly used in the field.

As a major world language, in addition to being spoken as a native language by many throughout the world, English is acquired as a second language by a greater number of people, and learned as a foreign language by an even larger population. The basic difference between EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) lies in the language environment in which the non-native speakers learn English (Judd, 2007). A non-native English speaker who studies English in an environment where the majority population speaks a language other than English is studying EFL, whereas if the majority population speaks English, he/she is studying ESL. In EFL context, classroom is the predominant source of learning English. Exposure to English and using English for any purpose outside the classroom are very limited. In contrast, in ESL context, non-native speakers communicate primarily in English, thereby all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—can be practiced in a variety of registers when using English to meet a variety of life demands.

3. CLT in Asia's EFL Context

Criado & Sanchez claimed that the “official curricula all over the world include CLT as the predominant method in foreign language teaching” (Criado & Sanchez, 2009, p. 4). Notwithstanding, the distinct features of EFL context as opposed to ESL determine that the implementation of CLT will not embark on the same path as in ESL context, as much evidence provided by previous research has demonstrated. Much literature has sprung up delving into the reasons responsible for the tough course CLT has undergone in Asia's EFL context.

A study conducted in Vietnam identified class size, grammar-based examinations, and lack of exposure to authentic language as constraints on using CLT (Ellis, 1994). A study of English teachers' perceived difficulties in adopting CLT in South Korea suggested that EFL countries like South Korea need to change their fundamental approach to education before CLT can be adopted, because “the predominance of text-centered and grammar-centered practices in Korea does not provide a basis for the student-centered, fluency-focused, and problem-solving activities required by CLT” (Li, 1998, p. 66). Chowdhury and Ha (2008) condemned CLT as methodological dogmatism, asserting that “Even though CLT claims to create a democratic classroom that is responsive to students' needs, it is often inappropriate and incompatible, neither sophisticated nor responsive enough for the complex educational needs and cultures of students in certain settings” (p. 305).

Another problem that cannot be neglected is students' different communicative needs. In ESL context where English language teaching takes place within an English-speaking environment, students have a far greater need to communicate and far more opportunities to practice and test out language skills in authentic situations. Therefore, a great deal of language acquisition can occur outside the classroom. Moreover, ESL teachers are mostly native speakers, who are more likely to act as a facilitator, providing a more open forum for communication using the language. By contrast, in EFL context, English learning is merely a part of school curriculum, restricted by teachers' language proficiency, the availability of teaching resources and materials, and government curriculum and policies. For learners, the classroom is the primary provider of exposure to English. Without an English-speaking environment, motivation becomes more a product of curricular demands, pressure from academic and professional success, instead of a demand for communication. “The more the communicative needs, the more readily communicative methods seem to be adopted” (Savignon, 2007, p. 124). Therefore, the English

language teaching that takes communicative competence as the invariable goal does not fit in the EFL context where learners' engagement in social interaction with native English speakers is minimal.

Furthermore, some researchers focused on the varied cultural norms and educational practices in Asia's EFL countries that contradict those in ESL countries and therefore affect the pedagogical practices of CLT. For example, Chowdhury and Ha (2008) pointed out that in Asian context, students see learning as a serious process in which knowledge is introduced and transmitted by teachers. Having fun with communicative activities in the language classroom tends to be perceived as not learning anything. Moreover, CLT's "principle of equal teacher-student status challenges the culturally endorsed hierarchical teacher-student relationship and the importance of showing respect to teachers in many Asian countries, and thus faces resistance and unwelcome attitudes in those countries" (Chowdhury & Ha, 2008, p. 309).

In questioning the universal relevance of CLT in terms of the cultural conflicts arising from the introduction of the predominantly Western language teaching approach to Asian cultures, Ellis (1994) suggested that we should concede there are some other ways of viewing educational philosophy and classroom practice which are incompatible with the principles of CLT. Hence, to make CLT suitable for Asian context, it needs to be culturally attuned to the local cultural norms.

Hiep (2007) aptly summed up the contextual factors restraining the implementation of CLT in Asia's EFL countries. He identified three groups of constraints:

- (a) systemic constraints, such as traditional examinations, large class sizes;
- (b) cultural constraints characterized by beliefs about teacher and student role, classroom relationships, and
- (c) personal constraints such as students' low motivation and unequal ability to take part in independent active learning practices, teachers' limited expertise in creating communicative activities like group work.

(Hiep, 2007, p. 200)

Considering all the above constraints, and the gap between the contentions of CLT and the realities confronting EFL teaching and learning in Asia, some research studies maintained that EFL countries should carefully study their English teaching situations and decide how CLT can best serve their needs and interests (Feryok, 2008; Hu, 2010; McPherron, 2008). Some teachers and researchers opposed the obsession with CLT in an attempt to direct people's attention back to the value of traditional teaching approaches (Pan, 2008; Rao, 2002). A rather radical conception even ensued that viewed the promotion of CLT as an imposition of western superiority, associated with the cultural politics of English and English Language Teaching and embedded in the discourses of colonialism (Chowdhury & Ha, 2008, p. 308). In this fashion, a natural concern as the result of CLT may be "the making of a group of learners indoctrinated in the discourse of the native speakers" (Chowdhury & Ha, 2008, p. 307).

There are some who argued for taking "context" into account, pointing out that the dominance of CLT has led to the neglect of one crucial aspect of language teaching—the context in which the pedagogy takes place (Hu, 2005a). Bax (2003) even appealed for the replacement of CLT as the central paradigm in language teaching with a Context Approach or an eclectic approach that places context at the heart of profession. He argued that methodology is not the sole solution; rather, there are many different ways to learn and teach languages; the crucial determiner is the context which includes students' learning needs, wants, styles, strategies, course books, local conditions, the classroom culture, school culture, and national culture. The first priority of language teaching is to understand all the above key aspects of the context before deciding what and how to teach in any given class (Bax, 2003). Some went even further to assert that "the best approach" did not exist at all, because different teaching context asked for different approaches; therefore, an eclectic approach may well be the best way to deal with varied classrooms (Prabhu, 1990).

4. CLT in China

China has the largest English-learning and -using population among all the EFL countries, with an estimated figure between 440 to 650 million (He & Zhang, 2010). As in other EFL countries, CLT has provoked a great deal of deliberation and debate in China. In this section, a panorama of China's English language education will be provided, followed by the introduction and implementation of CLT and the differing views around it in China.

4.1 An overview of China's English Language Education

4.1.1 Development over the Past Few Decades

Since China initiated the policies of opening up and reform in the late 1970s, English language education has been increasingly emphasized for its critical role in "meeting the needs of China's social development and international

exchanges” (College English Curriculum Requirements [For Trial Implementation], 2004, p. 5). To some extent, English language education was considered as a part of China’s reform and opening-up policies, because it was indispensable in providing access to the world cutting-edge development of science and technology in order for China to integrate into the global economy and enhance international competitiveness.

Numerous policies have been promulgated by the Ministry of Education since the late 1970s to promote English language education throughout the entire educational system, such as the “Proposals for Enhancing Foreign Language Education” in 1979, the “Plan for University English Teacher Training” in 1980, the “College English Syllabus for Science and Technology Students” in 1985, the “College English Syllabus for Arts and Social Sciences Students” in 1986, the “English Curriculum Standards” for elementary and secondary schools in 2001, the “Guidelines for Improving the Quality of Undergraduate Teaching” in 2001, etc. (Feng, 2009). With a series of policies disseminated, China has witnessed the fastest growth of English language education in the last couple of decades. By 2002, all elementary schools had started offering English from the 3rd Grade as one of the core subjects in the curriculum. With the stipulation of English proficiency standards across grades, students are required to meet the corresponding proficiency standard to be promoted to the next level of education.

As China strives for economic prosperity in the increasingly globalized world, the status of English in its society and education has reached an unprecedented height. It is commonly perceived that the mastery of English language is of paramount importance to not only the nation’s participation in international economy, but also to individual learners’ access to new socioeconomic opportunities. “The language is considered an essential skill for citizens employed in foreign trade, tourism, scientific and technological context, and is a prerequisite for those wishing to advance in life, either socially or professionally” (Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009, p. 197). English proficiency is even taken as a basic requirement for citizens in the 21st century, which has led to a nation-wide fever of learning English in China’s history. Both students and parents attach a high value to English language learning, and devote a large amount of money and effort into it. Official statistics cited in Wen and Hu (2007) claimed that over 226 million students in elementary and secondary schools and in universities are studying English under the instruction of 850,000 English teachers.

4.1.2 Traditional English Language Teaching Practice

China’s English language teaching is traditionally characterized by preoccupation with intensive reading, grammatical analysis, translation, memorization and rote learning, and an overlook of communicative competence. Many scholars have examined China’s traditional English language teaching (Li & Baldauf, 2011; Wang & Gao, 2008; Wen & Hu, 2007), and this paper summarizes its main features as follows. Generally, teachers are viewed as an “authority,” from whom students are supposed to learn “flawless” language, whereas students are taken as plants that passively wait to be fed with all they need in order to “grow,” rather than empowered to explore and create their own dialogues. Emphasis is placed on language forms and accuracy instead of fluency. Teaching materials feature formal reading in the style of complex sentence structures and elevated literary wording, which for a large part is irrelevant to students’ real life. The concentration on test taking and language forms, though provides a base for vocabulary and grammar development, contributes little to students’ competence of using the language for communication outside the classroom.

4.2 Introduction and Implementation of CLT in China

4.2.1 Policy Decisions Concerning CLT

As early as 1979, China witnessed the initial tide of CLT that rose from the efforts of developing communication-oriented teaching materials by a team of pioneering CLT advocates. As the only Chinese scholar in this team, Li (1984) strongly committed herself to the adoption of CLT in China, though meanwhile foreseeing an uneven course CLT would undergo in China’s context. The call for the adoption of CLT was not accidental. It came as a response to the discontent with the traditional English language teaching approaches featuring teacher-centered, grammar-based, and test-oriented as aforementioned. “Since the late 1980s, the official discourse on reforms of English-language education has repeatedly attributed the low quality of English instruction to the traditional teaching methodologies and called for new pedagogical practice to improve the effectiveness of instruction” (as cited in Hu, 2005b, p. 153). Since the early 1990s, the policy makers have promoted CLT vigorously.

In 1991, “College English Syllabus” was disseminated by the Ministry of Education, purporting to herald a fundamental change in China’s English language teaching through setting the development of communicative competence as the pedagogic goal (College English Syllabus, 1991). It became a remarkable milestone in the history of English language education in China. A revised edition of it was issued in 1999, further highlighting the development of CLT nationwide (College English Syllabus, 1999). In 2004, “College English Curriculum

Requirements (For Trial Implementation)” was issued by Ministry of Education as a national guideline for colleges and universities in formulating their own school-based curriculum in the light of specific circumstances, with “developing students’ ability to use English in an all-round way, especially in listening and speaking” as the objective (College English Curriculum Requirements [For Trial Implementation], 2004, p. 5). Through this document, more freedom was given to individual institutions regarding the time allocated for English language instruction, textbooks selected, and assessment system (Feng, 2009). As a trial version, it was formally spread throughout the country until 2007, owing to which, a clear emphasis was made on the development of overall proficiency especially on oral communication rather than reading. In response to the nation’s cries for deepening college English teaching reform and meeting the needs of the country and society for qualified personnel in the new era, numerous textbooks and corresponding software have mushroomed, featuring communicative tasks and the integration of the four language skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education adjusted the content of CET 4 and 6, the main testing tool of college students’ English proficiency, to align with the “College English Curriculum Requirements” characterized by the development of communicative competence (College English Test Band 4 and Band 6 Reform Program [For Trial Implementation], 2005). Before this adjustment, the success in previous tests derived largely from the meticulous study of language details rather than the ability to communicate. This reform increased its emphasis on practical abilities by augmenting the proportion of listening, and adding fast reading and non-multiple-choice items for the first time. It also stipulated that students who score above 90% would be eligible to sit for a speaking test. The reformed tests ceased grading in three categories “fail,” “pass,” and “excellent,” but issue a report of the score which is 710 in total.

From December 2008, CET 4 and 6 began taking computer-based form at 50 experimental universities around the nation, with 100 test-takers randomly picked out from each university. In June 2009, the number of experimental universities was expanded to 180. The computer-based CET 4 and 6 further increased the proportion of listening and added the section of “listen and read” to test students’ pronunciation and intonation for the first time.

All these official actions indicate a pedagogical reorientation from the traditional grammar-translation and audiolingualism to communicative language teaching approach. However, the intensive top-down promotion of CLT has not produced expected results (Hu, 2005b). The following section will unfold the reasons.

4.2.2 The Discrepancy Between Policy Initiatives and Teaching Realities

A study conducted with approximately 200 teachers from 130 Chinese universities in an in-service English language teacher education programs indicated that the vast majority of teachers expressed a preference for instruction that develops communicative competence, particularly in oral interaction (Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009). However, the fact is that the pedagogical practices in numerous classrooms do not seem to be much different from the past. “It has argued that, despite the espoused adoption of a communicative rhetoric, many of the practices implemented in classrooms are still guided by grammar-driven agendas” (Eisenchlas, 2010).

Many studies have reported that CLT has undergone a tough time as teachers attempt to live it in China (Li, 1997; McPherron, 2008; Sun & Cheng, 2002). Not only English language teachers, but also students, have professed a range of difficulties brought by CLT (Li, 2004; Rao, 2002; Tang, 2007). The first and foremost difficulty is that CLT makes too heavy demands on teachers who are not native speakers of English. Teachers “find themselves in the potentially awkward position of equipping their students with aspects of the native speaker’s sociolinguistic and strategic competence” which is not at their best (Alptekin, 2002, p. 62). Wette and Barkhuizen (2009) identified students’ unwillingness to participate in classroom activities and lack of intrinsic motivation as the most frequently reported source of difficulty. Moreover, the lack of proper training in CLT, heavy workloads, excessive class size, and limited resources available all make the implementation of CLT “a rather daunting task” for teachers (Wu, 2001, p. 191). Also, students find themselves unaccustomed to CLT. Most students have virtually no real-life opportunities to practice their spoken English in genuinely communicative situations, and therefore do not see the merits of CLT. In addition, Chinese students tend to associate the interactive classroom activities with entertainment only. Instead, they prefer traditional settings in which they can sit motionless, take notes, and avoid expressing their opinions in pair or group work for the fear of losing face or offending others.

Another difficulty stems from the lack of effective assessment instruments in alignment with CLT. The high-stakes tests, such as university entrance test, College English Test 4 and 6, are the most prevalent tools of assessing students’ English learning outcome. Though the testing of communication skills has taken up an increasingly larger proportion, the focus is still largely on the discrete-point, structurally based knowledge about English as a linguistic system rather than the ability to use the language for communication.

Moreover, some researchers noted the influence of regional differences on the implementation of CLT (Feng, 2009; Hu, 2005b). Access to resources for English language learning can vary greatly from region to region. While CLT practices suffer from impediment to classroom application in well-equipped schools of socio-economically developed areas, “the official espousal of the methodology has had virtually no effect on the classroom in the vast under-developed regions” (as cited in Hu, 2005b, p. 154). A great majority of teachers working in the rural inland areas do not have the English proficiency or sociolinguistic competence to implement CLT in their classrooms. Developing communicative competence for most students in the under-developed areas is simply an unattainable goal, if not for students in metropolis and other large cities.

In general, the constraints discouraging Chinese practitioners from implementing CLT can be summarized as follows: (a) the traditional Chinese pedagogical norms, culture of learning, and the educational settings that clash with CLT; (b) lack of English-speaking environment for social and vocational purposes; (c) scarcity of authentic language materials; (d) a shortage of supporting resources; (e) teachers’ lack of communicative competence and ability to execute CLT; (f) students’ not being accustomed to CLT and low motivation to use English to communicate; (g) the regional variations in policy implementation at the classroom level; (h) lack of an effective assessment tool in employing CLT; and (i) the nation-wide, test-oriented educational system (Hu, 2005b; Li, 2004; Li & Baldauf, 2011).

4.2.3 Differing Views Regarding CLT

In spite of the enormous gap between the policy initiatives and the real-world practices observed, there are still some teachers and researchers firmly advocating for the application of CLT in China. Yu (2001) optimistically proclaimed that owing to the highly centralized Chinese educational system, this top-down intervention proved to be very effective in urging teachers to teach communicatively in classrooms, and China had witnessed profound changes in teachers’ attitudes towards CLT. Liao (2004) claimed that all the difficulties with adopting CLT can be overcome, and nothing should prohibit its implementation in China for its tremendous benefits of developing learners’ confidence and fluency in oral interaction which is in dire shortage for the majority of Chinese learners. However, given the various constraints on using CLT that cannot be ignored, more proponents of CLT suggested an adaptation rather than adoption, contending that it is possible and desirable to achieve an appropriate blend of communicative competence and linguistic knowledge for Chinese EFL learners (Li, 2004; Rao, 2002).

Amidst the voices from the advocates, the resistance to CLT in Chinese EFL classrooms was also evidenced and well-documented (Hu, 2005b). Some people deplored and opposed the pragmatic orientation of English language teaching for the purpose of meeting the societal demands. Rather, they argued for an increasing emphasis on the humanistic value of English language reflected in the literary works in hopes of achieving a better understanding and appreciation of the cultures/civilization of English-speaking countries (Yin & Chen, 2002). Some people were skeptical about introducing CLT into China, wary about the sufficiency of CLT in providing a solid foundation for foreign language learning (as cited in Wette & Barkhuizen, 2009).

Another group of researchers held a reserved attitude toward whether CLT is an appropriate pedagogical choice in China’s EFL context. They maintained that there are no universally appropriate ways of teaching and learning; the approach that works in one social and cultural context does not necessarily work in a different one (Hu, 2005a). Additionally, they criticized policy makers for downplaying the contextual divergences and forcing homogenization based on the assumed universal principles of CLT. They urged that policy makers take into account the complexity of language education which is subject to the influences of a full range of macro and micro factors. Therefore, they argued for an eclectic approach rather than CLT or any particular approach, with teachers making the most informed decisions having various pedagogical options at their disposal to meet the demands of their specific teaching situations (Hu, 2005a). In brief, there are two completely different points of view underlying the ongoing debate as to the appropriateness of using CLT in China. One is opposition, since “models of appropriacy vary from context to context” (Savignon, 2007, p. 45), and the other is endorsement yet with the necessity of exploring the ways of making CLT more applicable and beneficial in Chinese context.

5. Teacher as Curriculum Implementer vs. Teacher as Curriculum Maker

Pivotal to the differing views of implementing CLT in Asia is the concept of the two conflicting teacher images—teacher as curriculum implementer and teacher as curriculum maker (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). Each of them represents a view of the teacher in relation to curriculum. In the existing literature on the implementation and enactment of CLT in Asia, the two teacher images have long been overlooked.

What is commonly conceived in the educational milieu is the teacher as curriculum implementer image, which considers teachers as “mediators between curriculum and student outcomes” (Craig & Ross, 2008, p. 283). The educational enterprise in Asia has been traditionally dominated by this image, in which, teachers implement

curricula, following as norms the teaching materials, objectives, and strategies, all pre-specified by their superiors, who are, “by virtue of their power, position, or formal knowledge base” (Craig, 2012, p. 91), supposedly more knowing of what should be taught and how it should be taught in the classroom. This teacher image is also widely known as “conduit” metaphor, which Craig (2005, 2012) framed as the “pinned butterfly” image, all depicting the teachers who are held responsible for performing the curriculum demands imposed on them. Clandinin and Connelly (1992) indicated that the teacher as curriculum implementer image reinforces “the assumption that knowledge is conveyed from outside classrooms to the teachers inside them” (p. 393).

Building on many researchers’ scholarship, primarily Dewey, Jackson, Tyler, Schwab, and Eisners, Clandinin and Connelly (1992) presented the teacher as curriculum maker image, which forms a sharp contrast to the pervasive teacher as curriculum implementer image. As the name suggests, it means that teachers make curriculum alongside teachers, students, and other educational practitioners and researchers, instead of being prescribed how they should go about the curriculum. While the teacher as curriculum implementer image debases teacher agency, autonomy, and decision-making power, the teacher as curriculum maker image “strengthens the view of teachers as knowing and knowledgeable human beings” as Craig and Ross (2008, p. 283) stated.

Craig’s question—“Why is dissemination so difficult?” (Craig, 2006) also articulates the query that has ensued distinctly in investigating the implementation of CLT in Asia. As Craig examined a teacher’s struggle as a curriculum maker coming to terms with curriculum dissemination, she brought to light how curriculum dissemination could be more invitingly and fruitfully understood from the curriculum-maker rather than curriculum-implementer perspective (Craig, 2006). This important implication applies to the EFL education in Asia as well: Pedagogical change cannot be realized through curriculum implementation. Teachers are constructors rather than primarily receivers of the imposed pedagogical transition. The top-down educational enterprise of implementing CLT cannot succeed unless it is embraced by teachers with their reconfigurations in light of their specific teaching situations.

6. Conclusion

Asia has witnessed an unprecedented development of English language education and public interest in learning English in the past few decades. Paradoxically, it has not brought about a remarkable change in the approach to English language teaching, even though CLT has been mandated as a policy decision by central education authorities in many Asian countries. Instead, CLT has experienced a variety of difficulties in Asia’s EFL context, and the official espousal of CLT in Asia has virtually very little effect at the classroom level. As delineated in previous sections, a host of contextual factors have contributed to the unsuccessful implementation of CLT in Asia — educational, cultural, economic, and social — arising in the transfer of CLT from ESL context to Asia’s EFL context.

This paper aims to bring to the forefront that the curriculum and instructional decisions made by those outside are less powerful, less meaningful, and less sustainable than the ones that are self-initiated, self-motivated, and self-valued (Wei, 2016). Just as CLT developed in ESL context cannot embark on the same path when being employed in EFL context, not a single second language acquisition theory, language teaching principle, method, or technique can be applied equally well across contexts. EFL countries should carefully study their English teaching situations and decide how CLT can best serve their needs and interests. Instead of being passive receivers, teachers should be active constructors, rebuilding what is told to them into something they feel more relevant, meaningful, and suitable for their own classrooms, in order for their teaching to make an impact on students’ learning outcomes.

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