Primary School Teachers' Perceived Difficulties in Implementing Innovative ELT Methodologies in the Ethiopian Context

Yonas Adaye*

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Introduction

The present Ethiopian government has placed teaching and learning of the English language high on the agenda to ensure that Ethiopia will play active and important role in the world political and economic activities. It is stipulated that "English will be taught as a subject starting from grade one" (TGE, 1994:24). To this effect, a new English syllabus was designed and textbooks were prepared for primary schools. However, the question of appropriate and innovative methodology to teach English in primary schools in the Ethiopian cultural and educational contexts remains the most crucial issue.

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Educational innovations in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) have received considerable attention around the world (Alptekin, 2002, Ellis, 1996; Harmer,2001, Markee, 1997; Moon, 2000; Richards, 1998; Wallace, 1998). Efforts to introduce communicative language teaching CLT) into EFL contexts on EFL countries own initiatives and have prompted many innovations in second as well as foreign language education through international donor projects. In general, such innovations have had a low rate of success (Schmid, 1991) and implementing CLT world wide has often proved difficult (Andersin, 1993; Ellis, 1994; Shamin, 1996). Difficult as it is, many EFL countries, including Ethiopia, are still striving to introduce this approach in the hope that it will improve English teaching in their respective countries.

This paper starts by identifying its purpose reviewing *Communicative Language Teaching* practices in English as a Second Language (ESL) as well as English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. It then analyses the data, discusses the findings, as well as implications and draws conclusions.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to find out primary school English teachers' perceived difficulties in implementing CLT in the Ethiopian cultural and educational contexts with special reference to Addis Ababa Region.

Theoretical underpinning of the study is that in foreign language education, teachers' perceptions of the feasibility of a CLT innovation in a particular context are crucial in determining the ultimate success or failure of that innovation (Kelly, 1997). Based on this assumption, I carried out a case study involving the Addis Ababa Region second cycle primary school English teachers' understanding of the CLT. Because innovative English language teaching methodology is a significant national educational issue in Ethiopian today, this study has very important pedagogical implications.

Definition of terms

The term ESL, in this study, refers to a context where English is used in and outside the classroom. For instance, for an Ethiopian who learns English in England, the context is an ESL one. EFL, on the other hand, refers to a context where English is used mainly in the classroom; there is no *urgent need* for the learner to use the language outside the classroom. The Ethiopian cultural and educational contexts, where there is no urgent need for a student to use English outside the classroom e.g. to buy soap or a notebook from a shop, exemplifies an EFL situation. But the student needs English badly to understand the concepts of biology or physics or geography subjects that he/she learns mostly in the classroom settings.

Literature Review

Since its initial appearance in Europe and the USA in early 1970s and subsequent development in English as a second Language (ESL) countries (e.g. Britain, the USA and Canada) over the past 20 years, CLT has expanded in scope and has been used by different educators in different ways. It had no monolithic identity, and no single model universally accepted as authoritative (Hamer,2001, Markee, 1997; Savingnon, 1991). However, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop the learners' communicative competence. Canale and Swain's (1980) definition of communicative competence is probably the best known. They identified four dimensions: grammatical, socio-lingustic, discourse and strategic competences. This definition has undergone some modifications over the years, perhaps best captured in Bachman's (1996) schematization of what he calls language competence. The most significant difference between the two models is that Bachman takes a far broader view of the role of the strategies than Canale and Swain do and separates strategic competence completely from what he calls language competence (Alptekin, 2002; Bachman, 1996; North, 1997).

In CLT, *meaning* is paramount. Wilkins (1972) classifies meaning into notational and functional categories, which views learning an L2 as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions. According to Larsen-Freeman (1986:132), the most obvious characteristic of CLT is that "almost everything that is done is done with the communication intent." Students use the language a great deal through communicative activities e.g. games, role-plays, and problem solving tasks.

Another characteristic of CLT is the introduction of authentic materials (Dublin, 1995; Reid, 1995; Widdowson, 1996). In CLT, it is considered desirable to give learners the opportunity to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic L2 situations so that they develop strategies for language as actually used by native speakers (Canale and Swain, 1980). In the communicative approach, students often carry out activities in small groups. Students are expected to interact with one another, either through pair or group work in their writings (Finocchiaro and Brumfit, 1983). CLT favours interaction among small numbers of students in order to maximize the time each student has to learn to negotiation meaning. Teachers, therefore, select learning activities according to how well they engage the students in meaningful and authentic language use rather than in the merely mechanical practice of language patterns.

One more dimension of CLT is " its learner-centered and experience-based view" of second language teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 1986:69). In this view, individual learners possess unique interests, styles, needs, and goals that should be reflected in the design of instructional methods (Savingnon, 1991). Thus teachers are to develop materials based on the demonstrated needs of a particular class. Students must be made to feel secured, unthreatened and non-defensive in a CLT classroom, so teachers using CLT should avoid adopting a teacher-centered, authoritarian posture (Tylor, 1983).

In short, CLT is characterised by

- a focus on communicative functions;
- a focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language per se (e.g., grammar or vocabulary study);
- efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through an analysis of genuine, realistic situations and needs;
- the use of authentic, from-life materials;
- the use of group activities; and
- the attempt to create a secured and non-threatening atmosphere.

The above description reflects the weak version of CLT. According to Holliday (1994) the strong version of CLT focuses not on language practice but on learning about how language works in discourse. The lesson input is language data in the form of text, and communication relates more to the way in which the student communicates with the text. Also, students collaborate for helping each other to solve language problems rather than for the purpose of communicating with each other. Because the aim is not to practice language forms, teachers do not need to monitor group and pair work closely, and in fact activities do not necessarily have to be carried out in groups or pairs. As long as students are communicating with rich text and producing useful hypothesis about the language, what they are doing is communicative, according to Holliday (1994:171-172).

CLT in EFL Contexts

A number of controversial reports in the literature deal with CLT innovations in EFL contexts. Whereas some accounts have emphasized the local needs and the particular English teaching conditions in the EFL countries and the importance and success of traditional language teaching methods (Sampson, 1990; Shimid, 1991), others have strongly advocated the adoption of CLT in EFL countries (Li, 1984; Prabhu, 1987). However, the majority of accounts have recognised the difficulties EFL countries face in

adopting CLT (Alptekin 2002; Li, 1998). Alptekin questions the validity of the pedagogic model based on the native speaker-based notion of communicative competence. He further contends that with its standardized native speaker norms, the model is found to be utopian, unrealistic, and constraining to implement in English as a foreign or international language context:

> It is utopian not only because native speakership is a linguistic myth, , but also because it portrays a monolithic perception of the native speaker's language and culture, by referring chiefly to mainstream ways of thinking and behaving. It is unrealistic because it fails to reflect the lingua franca status of English. It is constraining in that it circumscribes both teacher and learner autonomy by associating the concept of authenticity with the social milieu of the native speaker (Alptekin, 2002:57).

Burnaby and Sun (1989) report that teachers in China found CLT difficult to use. The constraints cited include the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching methods, low status of teachers who teach communicative rather than analytical skills and English teachers' deficiencies in oral English and socio-linguistic and strategic competences. Anderson's (1993) study of CLT in China reported such obstacles as a lack of properly trained teachers, a lack of appropriate texts and materials, students' not being accustomed to CLT, and difficulties in evaluating students via CLT. In the same vein, Ellis (1996) carried out similar studies in China and arrived at very similar conclusions. Based on a study that assessed the attitude of Hong Kong educators towards using CLT in the local context, Chau and Chung (1987) report that teachers used CLT only sparingly because it required too much preparation time.

Sano et al. (1984) point out that the Japanese students they studied generally did not feel a pressing need to use English, so that the goal of communicative competence seemed too distant for them. A study conducted in Vietnam identified class size, grammar based examinations, and lack of exposure to language as constraints on

using CLT (Ellis, 1994). Shamin (1996) identifies learner's resistance, among other problems, as a barrier to her attempt to introduce innovative CLT methodology in her Pakistan English methodology classroom.

The grammar based English language syllabus makes the English teaching situation complex and the local use of CLT challenging, according to Kirkpatrick's (1984) study of CLT in secondary schools in Singapore. Gonzalez (1985), who studied CLT in Philippine rural areas, found that English instruction, there, was irrelevant to the population's needs, as people, there, seldom used English.

In studies of CLT outside Asia, Valdes and Johnes (1991) report difficulties. The difficulties include teacher's lack of proficiency in English, their traditional attitudes toward language teaching, the lack of authentic materials in a non-English speaking environment, the need to re-design the evaluation system, and the need to adapt textbooks to meet the needs of communicative classes. Efforts to foster a communicative approach to the teaching of English in KwaZulu, in South Africa, met with pervasive reluctance on the part of teachers and students to adopt the more egalitarian, decentralized ways of interaction associated with CLT (Chick,1996).

CLT in Ethiopia

Although the above studies highlight many of the principal problems in curricular innovations prompted by CLT, many of the studies take the researchers' perspectives. Teachers' perceptions of innovations related to CLT remain largely to be studied in Ethiopia. In his seminal talk in an CLT conference in Ethiopia, Wright (2000) underlined that CLT can work for Ethiopia provided there is work-based training development for teachers, local initiatives, parallel initiatives in other curriculum areas, and training that focuses on learning, imagination and creativity.

This study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the perceived difficulties of the Addis Ababa Region's primary school teachers to implement CLT in their classroom realities?
2. Why has communicative Language Teaching been so difficult to implement in the second cycle primary schools in Addis Ababa Region?

The Study

I used a case study approach to discover second cycle primary school (Grades 5 - 8) English teachers' perceptions of the implementation of CLT. Case studies are the preferred strategies to undertake perception studies in education (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000). When the researcher "why" or "how" questions or has little control over the events or when the focus is on contemporary phenomenon within some real life context, then it is here that the case study will come into its own (Hitchock & Hughes, 1995; Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2000).

Design of the Study

The study consisted of a survey study, a written questionnaire-adapted from Harmer, (2001), Li, (1998) Wallance, (1998) and, an interview. To develop an appropriate instrument for this study in August 2000, I administrated a pilot survey at Addis Ababa University to summer/in-service primary school teachers who came from different parts of Ethiopia. I also conducted focus group interviews with them. The final questionnaire included open-ended questions as well as questions with fixed alternatives generated from the data collected in the pilot study.

In April and May 2001, I administered questionnaires to 20 and conducted interviews with 10 teachers in 5 government and 5 public primary schools in Addis Ababa Region. The schools were chosen

on the basis of convenience (Kuzel, 1992; Patton 1990). I preferred public and government primary schools to others (mission, community, private, etc. schools) for their typicality (Kuzel, 1992) I.e. they are the most widespreed types of schools in Ethiopia.

To ensure that the participants fully understood the questions I distributed the questionnaires at the end of the period/class. They were requested and assisted to read the questionnaires carefully. In some cases translation was used to clarify the questions for the participantes. They filled and handed back all the 20 questionnaires to me. Following the survey, I conducted in-depth interviews with 10 of the 20 participants to explore their background, understanding of English teaching, and perceived difficulties in implementing CLT.

The interviews were unstructured, conducted in a systematic and consistent way but allowing me, the interviewer, sufficient freedom to digress and probe far beyond the answer to the prepared and standardised questions (Berg,1989). The interviews were conducted in Amharic and in English. Although I was aware that the teachers' imperfect English might limit the information they provided, I made certain that they were able to express their ideas fully by preparing and handing over the questions to them well ahead of time.

While formulating interview questions, I made sure that the questions were clear, precise and motivating (Denzin, 1989). All the interviews, which lasted for 30 minutes to 1 hour each, were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim as soon as possible afterwards, I used the earlier interviews to generate new interview questions and provide direction for subsequent ones. Transcripts of the interview were later given to the participants for authentication.

Participants

Survey participants

The participants in the formal questionnaires survey were 20 primary English teachers in Addis Ababa Region.

The 10 female and 10 male participants ranged from 29 to 49 years, with the majority in their 30s;the average age was 37 (see Table2). Their experiences in teaching English varied from 7 to 25 years, with an average of about 15.0 years. At the time of study, 6 participants were teaching in grade 5; 4 were teaching in grade 6; 5 were teaching in grade 7; and 5 were teaching in grade 8.

Table 2: Background of Survey Participants

			Teaching Experiences		
Participant	Sex	Age	Year	School Type	Grades
1	M	38	16.0	Public	8
2	F	34	11.0	Government	6
3	M	36	14.0	Public	7
4	F	41	19.0	Government	7
5	M	33	11.0	Public	5
6	F	39	18.0	Government	8
7	M	49	25.0	Government	5
8	F	39	18.0	Public	8
9	F	42	20.0	Public	5
10	M	37	15.5	Government	6
11	M	33	8.0	Public	5
12	F	30	9.5	Government	8
13	M	45	22.0	Public	7
14	F	35	12.5	Public	5
15	M	34	13.5	Government	7
16	F	37	11.0	Public	5
17	M	47	23.0	Government	6
18	F	35	13.0	Government	8
19	M	29	7.5	Public	7
20	F	29	7.0	Government	6

Interview informants

Ten of the 20 survey participants were chosen for interviews. In selecting interview informants, following Patton's 'maximum variation sampling' in Lincoln and Guba,(1985:100), I allowed for maximum variation in participants age, sex, teaching experience, school type and grades taught. For this purpose, I tabulated the background information on the survey informants based on the completed questionnaires. I first decided that teachers of all grades (5-8) must be represented in the group of interview and informants should be equally represented. Second, I decided to include an equal number of male and female teachers and teachers in government and public schools. I then added the other two parameters, informants' ages and years of teaching, which I wanted to be as varied as possible. The result was a group that was representative of the 20 surveyed teachers (see Table 3).

Table 3: Background of interview participants

			Teaching Experience		
Participant	Sex	Age	Years	School Type	Grade
A	F	35	13.0	Government	8
B	M	38	16.0	Public	8
C	F	29	7.0	Government	6
D	M	49	25.0	Government	5
E	F	37	11.0	Public	5
F	F	41	19.0	Government	7
G	M	33	8.0	Public	5
H	F	34	11.0	Government	6
I	M	45	22.0	Public	7
J	M	29	7.5	Public	7

*In order to maintain anonymity for ethical considerations, I used the English capital letters instead of the names of the participants.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research involves discovering and deriving patterns in the data, looking for general orientations in the data and trying to sort out what the data are about, why and what kinds of things might be said about them. It is not a simple description of the data collected but a process, by which the researcher can bring interpretation to the data (Powney and Watts,1987). The themes and coding categories in this study emerged from an examination of data rather than being determined before hand and imposed on the data (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992). Following the strategy of analytic induction (Goetz and LeCopmpte, 1984; Bogdan and Biklen, 1992; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000), I repeatedly read through the completed questionnaires and the interview transcripts during and after the study. In this process, I identified and noted recurrent themes and salient comments regarding constraints that the primary school teachers had encountered and might have encountered in applying CLT in their classrooms. These themes were then subsumed under four main categories.

Results

The teachers participated in the study were comfortable with the methods they used in teaching English. Fifteen of the 20 participants reported in the questionnaire that they were extremely concerned about the teaching methods, and the other 5 reported that they were fairly concerned about the methods they use in teaching English. All 20 reported that the grammar-translation method, some kind of audio-lingual method, or a combination of the two characterised their teaching. However, 2 reported having tried CLT after attending some kind of workshop/seminar, organized by the Regional Bureau, and having encountered difficulties in such attempts.

The difficulties reported include (a) by the teachers, (b) by the students, (c) by the educational system, and (d) by lack of clear

definition of CLT in the Ethiopian context. Among them, difficulties falling under the first category were mentioned most frequent, almost three times as much as those in the other three categories (see Table 4).

Table 4: Reported Difficulties in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching

Teacher	
➢ Deficiency in Spoken English	20
➢ Deficiency in strategic and socio-linguistic competences	20
➢ Lack of training in Communicative Language Teaching	20
➢ Lack of retraining in Communicative Language Teaching	19
➢ Misconceptions about Communicative Language Teaching	19
➢ Little time, motivation and expertise for developing materials for communicative class	17
Total	115
Students	
➢ Low proficiency in the language	20
➢ Lack of motivation for developing communicative competence	19
➢ Resistance to class participation	18
Total	
Educational System	
➢ Large classes	20
➢ Grammar-based examinations	20
➢ Low incentive for teachers	19
➢ Promotion policy in the first cycle (primary)	18
➢ Lack of support system	16
Total	93
Lack of clear definition of CLT	
➢ Inadequate account of EFL teaching	20
➢ Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments	18
Total	39

*The number of times refers to the number of mention the research participants referred to a theme in either the question or the interview as a constraint in using CLT in their own classroom contexts. The maximum number of mentions possible for each of the themes included within the four major categories is 20.

Difficulties Caused by the teachers

The participants were quick to point out that some of their own problems blocked them from using CLT,Six major constraints caused by the teachers were reported . These are : (a) deficiency in spoken English, (b) deficiency in strategic and socio-linguistic competences in English, (c) lack of training and retraining in CLT, (d) Misconception about CLT, and (e) lack of time, motivation and expertise for developing communicative materials to supplement the textbooks (see Table 4).

Deficiency in spoken English

All 20 participants reported that their own deficiency in spoken English constrained them from applying CLT in their classrooms. Although the teachers generally felt that they were to some extent proficient in English grammar, reading and writing, they all reported that their abilities in English speaking and listening were not adequate to conduct the communicative classes necessarily involved in CLT. The following comment was typical

1. I am good at grammar, reading, and writing. But my oral English is very poor. Since I can't speak English well, how can I teach it to my students? (participant A, 20 April 2001)

Surprisingly, even respondents who spoke English with reasonable fluency and communicated well thought their English was "too poor to use communicative language teaching" (participant A, 20 April 2001). Deficiency in spoken English apparently prevented some teachers from applying CLT, but for others lack of confidence to use the language was more likely to have been the reason.

Deficiency in strategic and socio-lingustic competences

All 20 participants reported that their low strategic and Scio-lingustic competences in English limited their use of CLT. As teachers' socio-

lingustic and stratagic competences must be much greater in a CLT classroom than in a traditional grammar-focused classroom, the participants generally felt incompetent to conduct a communicative class.

2. students some times ask me more questions in the class. I am happy when they ask me questions related to the English grammar. But those questions that are related to socio-lingustic aspects of English are really hard for me. In Ethiopia, when you can't answer all of the students' questions right away, you lose your face value to be a teacher. (participant B, 7 May 2001).

The teacher's ability to answer all questions promptly is highly valued in Ethiopian tradition. The fear of losing face because of not being able to answer students' questions all the time appears to have discouraged teachers from using CLT in the Ethiopian educational and cultural contexts.

3. I once tried communicative activities with my grade 8 pupils after attending a workshop. They enjoyed it. In fact I enjoyed it too, except they asked me so many questions about the English as well as the American culture. The questions were interesting and related to what they saw in foreign films on TV and cinema. Some of them I could answer, and some of them I could not. They made me very much embarrassed. If your pupils find that you cannot always answer their questions very confidently, you are going to lose their respect. In our culture, teachers are supposed to know everything and be always correct. There is no room for tolerance of ambiguity. (participant C,5 may 2001).

Because of their deficiency in socio-linguistic competence in English and fear of losing their respect of their students for being unable to give prompt answers in class, teachers prefer to stick to the traditional grammar-centered, text controlled and teacher-fronted methods. As a result they always had a good idea about what was going to happen in every class and made adequate preparation for it.

Lack of training in teaching English Communicatively

All 20 participants named lack of training as one of the main obstacles they faced in applying CLT in their English classes.

4. like many of us, I just heard about CLT, but did not learn the 'how' or 'what' of CLT when I was studying at TTI. I did not practice using it either. (participant C,2 May 2001)

5. I learned the term communicative Language Teaching at a conference. To be honest, I did not quite understand how it works. (Participant J, 30 April 2001)

This lack of systematic training led to a sketchy and usually fragmented understanding of CLT and made it difficult for teachers to "leave the safe and comfortable traditional methods". (Participant J, 30 April 2001)

Lack of Opportunities for Retraining in CLT

Nineteen teachers reported that there were no in-service opportunities available for retraining in CLT. Of the 20 respondents, no one had had opportunities for in-service training in their last 7 to 20 years of teaching. Only two of the 20 had attended a workshop on teaching methodology. Participant D expressed her frustration when asked about attending any workshop.

6. This is the first time I participant in a workshop in teacher education program. It took me 18 years to get such an opportunity. (Participant D, 26 April 2001)

Misconceptions about CLT

Nineteen respondents referred to teacher' misconceptions about CLT as one of the principal obstacles. A typical misconception was that

held by concentrating on group/pair work and oral fluency, CLT does not teach form at all and thus totally neglects accuracy.

> 7. I thought that communicative language teaching does not teach grammar and only teaches speaking. I did not think that was a good way to teach our children English. After all they have to pass a lot of exams including the national exams of grades 8 and 10 which are grammar dominated. There is no speaking or listening exam. (Participant E, 23 may 2001)

Such realistic "misconceptions" led the teachers to believe that CLT contradicted their beliefs about language learning and did not allow them to prepare students for the various exams that are vital to their future careers.

Lack of expertise, motivation and time to develop CLT materials

Seventeen teachers reported that lack of know-how, motivation and time in developing communicative materials for English classes had been constraints for them. Because most of the teachers were already overloaded (an English teacher should teach for at least 30 hours a week), any additional work was a burden for them. This problem was particularly serious for female teachers because they had to deal with housework as well as child-care in addition to the professional work.

> 8. I teach in grade 7. I have to be at school from 8:00 in the morning to 5:00 in the afternoon. When I go home, I have to take care of my four kids. Because my husband works away (50KM) in a region, I have to take my kids there at weekends or on holidays to see him. I really do not have time for any extra work. (Participant E,17 may 2001).

Lack of expertise in designing communicative activities was also a concern among the teachers.

> 9. I have enough time for material writing, but I do not think I can write any communicative materials. First, I have never been taught how to write materials. Secondly there are very few authentic English materials in our school compound. That means I have to create everything. That is beyond my capacity. It also means I have to spend more time than I can afford. (Participant 1, 19 May 2001)

As a result, the teachers either had given up CLT after a brief try or simply had not ventured to try it.

Difficulties Caused by Students

The second main group of constraints came from the students. These constraints included the students' generally low English proficiency, lack of motivation for communicative competence, and resistance to participate in class or do homework (see table 4).

Low English Proficiency

All 20 respondents reported that one important difficulty preventing them from using CLT was their students' low English proficiency. Even though, according to the New Education policy, pupils start learning English as subject from grade 1, perhaps because of various factors including the teaching methodology, they are extremely poor at English when they reach grades 7 and 8. They usually have a small number of English vocabulary and a limited command of English structures. Because students did not have the necessary proficiency in English, the teachers found it hard to do any oral communicative activities with them.

> 10. The students have very limited vocabulary when they come to second cycle primary. They know limited number of English structures. So they have great difficulty to express themselves in

> English when they are assigned to do communicative activities, provided in the new textbooks. Gradually they lose interest in trying to speak English and become too discouraged to speak English any more. (Participant 1, 29 April 2001)

As pointed out earlier, the majority of primary school teachers believed that CLT involved speaking activities. Therefore, when oral activities were not possible, or appeared to be difficult, the teachers become frustrated with CLT and in most cases give it up.

> 11. In such activities, I often see pupils struggle to express themselves in
>
> English, only to make each other more confused. I do not know whether I am doing the right thing with the pupils. To be safe, I prefer to use the method I am familiar with to help the students. (participant H, 25 April 2001)

Lack of Motivation for Communicative Competence

Nineteen participants identified student's lack of motivation to work on their communicative competence as a great limitation. Although an increasing number of people have realized how important it is to be able to communicate in English rather than to know English grammar well, students in second cycle primary schools still care more about grammar.

> 12. My students know it is very important to learn to use English for Communication. But since their goal is to pass the national exams, they prefer to work on grammar because the national exams are still grammar dominated. (Participant H, 20 April 2001).

Because grammar still plays a decisive role in all English examinations in Ethiopia, "teachers who teach communicative competence are not liked by students as well as those who teach grammar". (Participant B, 16 May 2001).

Resistance to class Participation

Eighteen respondents cited the students' resistance to class participation as a primary constraint in trying CLT. As students have already been in school for over 4 to 5 years by the time they enter second cycle, primary school, they have become accustomed to the traditional classroom structure. For Instance, they sit motionless, copy whatever the teacher writes on board, and speak only when they are permitted to or spoken to. After so many years of schooling in traditional settings students rely on the teacher to give them Information directly, which makes it very difficult for them to participate in class activities.

The inconsistencies among teachers in their expectations of students also discouraged students from participating in class activities.

13. It Is Only In English Class That Students Use English. In Other Classes Students As Well As Teachers Use Amharic Or The Students' Mother Tongues Which Discourages The Students from taking risk to use English. (Participant G, 19 May 2001).

When students were not willing to participate in class activities using English, teachers saw little chance of fulfilling their goal of using CLT, rendering it pointless to adopt CLT in their class.

Difficulties caused by the Educational System

The third main group of difficulties relates to the educational system in Ethiopia today. Four major constraints were identified: large classes, grammar-based examination, lack of support systems, low incentives to teachers, and promotion policy in the first cycle primary school (see Table 4).

Large Classes

All 20 respondents referred to large classes as one of the principal constraints on their attempts to use CLT. They reported to have more than 80 students in their respective classes. The teachers found it very difficult to use CLT with so many students in one class because they believed that oral English and close monitoring of class activities were essential in CLT.

> 14. first, with 90 students in one class it is very difficult for class management if I use the communicative approach. For example, when everyone starts to talk, the class can be very noisy. Teachers and students in nearby classrooms will complain about the noise in the English class. Secondly, it is not possible for the teacher to give each of them (individualised) attention as required by the communicative approach. With nearly 90 or more students in class, it is really difficult to make sure that everyone is on task. As I have found, some kids like to play around group work time. Thirdly, with so many students in one classroom, there is not even enough space for the students and the teacher to move around to carry out the communicative activities. Especially when the desks are fixed, it is impossible to move them and that makes it difficult to rearrange seats to form suitable groups for discussion. (participant F, 15 May 2001)

Grammar-based Examinations

Grammar based exams were named by all 20 respondents as another important constraint. The English language national examination of grade 8 is still dominated by grammar/structure and reading comprehension questions. There is no listening speaking or writing exam in the national exams. However, it is widely accepted

view that these macro-skills are basic means of abstracting the communicative competence of the students. Teachers were under pressure to make their students do well in grammar and reading comprehension tests, often devote valuable class time to teaching test-taking skills and drilling students on multiple test grammar items. This exam has strongly affected the way of teaching English in second cycle primary schools.

> 15. as soon as the students start grade 8, they have a clear goal in mind-the National or "Ministry" exam. Teachers also have a clear goal in mind-to prepare the students for the national or "Ministry" exam. Because it tests students' reading comprehension ability and grammar knowledge, both students and teachers are interested in grammar and reading in English classes. (participant A, 16 May 2001)

Such an attitude leaves little room for CLT for both teachers and students. As Savingnon (1991) observes, many curricular innovations have been undone by a failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation or testing systems.

Low Incentives to teachers

Nineteen teachers mentioned lack of material as well as moral incentives for teachers as a constraint. To implement CLT, relying solely on centrally designed materials may not be adequate; personal commitment including buying commercially available teaching materials seems of necessity. Yet the teachers' salary is barely enough to sustain their family. "Lack of incentives and public respect for the profession, and the low salary to cope with the high living standard de-motivated us, the teachers". (Participant E, 20 April 2001)

> 16. for example, most of us live not in our own houses. We live in rented houses, which are of low quality because of our low salary. Most of us have low self-esteem and

> enthusiasm to prepare lesson plans, leave alone preparing extra materials to teach English communicatively. Besides, the society gives low respect to the teaching profession. We are not proud of telling our profession in public simply because in this country schoolteacher and poverty are interchangeable terms. You better label yourself a merchant, an officer or an administrator to win respect. However hard you try or put your effort in teaching at primary level, no incentive would be given to encourage you as a professional teacher. So, how would one expect such a teacher to try an innovative method? (Participant J, 12 May 2002)

Lack of professional support system

Sixteen respondents mentioned that lack of professional support system was a constraint. Although a few of the teachers had learned about CLT in different. Seminars very occasionally, "applying it was a different thing" (Participant G, 3 May 2001). Because the teachers were inexperienced in using CLT, they would often find themselves in need of help. Unfortunately, they often found nobody with expertise to help.

> 17. when I had questions about what I was doing, I talked with my fellow teachers, hoping to get help from them. Often they could not help me. How I wished there was an ELT expert for questions and support. When I needed theoretical as well as practical advice from books how I wished we had rich and updated libraries. (Participant C, 22 April 2001)

Teachers also found the lack of professional support from school administration frustrating.

> 18. It is difficult to get help from our school administration. The principal in my school didn't care about whatever method I used. He was only interested in my covering of the portion for the

semester and the results my students scored in the exams. (Participant B, 13 may 2001)

The respondents also indicated that they seldom get support from fellow instructors teaching other subjects in the same schools.

19. I sometimes needed co-operation from teachers of other subjects; but for some reasons they showed little interest in what I was doing. (Participant E, 29 July 2001)

Teachers generally found this lack of professional, administrative, and collegial support systems discouraging. Often they loose interest in coping with the challenges of introducing CLT in their classes.

20. This lack of support was extremely daunting. It was so hard when everything was on your shoulder. Finally, I had to give up CLT and return to the peaceful and easy traditional method of teaching English. (participant D, July 7, 2001)

Promotion policy in the First Cycle primary

Eighteen respondents reported that as a result of the new educational policy, there had been a new promotion policy in the first cycle primary, grade 1 to 4. Consequently, when the pupils reach grades 5 and above, they lacked basics of the English language; they could not distinguish small and capital letters. Many teachers complained about the lack of even traditional type of assessment or test to discriminate slow learners from the bright ones.

21. classroom promotion policy (cut-off points of fail' or 'pass' of the pupils) has been cancelled for grades 1 to 4 in the new Educational policy. In my view, this created a big problem to know who is bright and who is less bright pupil when they come to grade 5. If there were clear assessment procedures that could discriminate who did well and did not do well in the previous grade, i.e. grade 4,

> I could direct my attention to the pupils who need my help (Participant F, 12 April 2001)

Difficulties Caused by the Lack of Clear Definition of CLT

The respondents reported two main problems with CLT itself: lack of adequate account of CLT in the Ethiopian context, and the lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments in CLT.

Inadequate Account of CLT in the Ethiopian context

All 20 participants reported that they heard in the school compound how CLT is different from traditional teaching methods but they did not have the practical know-how of the CLT in EFL context like that of their classess. They expressed their frustrations as a fact that the research communities such as universities and colleges did not disseminate the practical methods of CLT as applied to the primary levels in Ethiopia. In addition, the concept of CLT seemed to be group/pair work and oral practices, which would be appropriate in native speaking and small classroom contexts. The participants expressed their concerns about the confusion of primary school teachers on theses issues because no one clearly and practically taught these issues and concepts to them.

> 22. Many teachers tended to be confused when they tried to implement CLT in their own classroom situations using the new materials produced by the Ministry of Education. I think the books were written based on Western syllabi or theories ignoring or misunderstanding the special elements of EFL situations. I think that's why school EFL teachers, usually find Western language teaching methods difficult to use in our context. (Participant, I 20 May 2001)

What is apparent from the above response is that there is a clear mismatch between the implementation of CLT in the ESL and in the Ethiopian educational contexts. It further suggests that there is no

clearly defined account of CLT in the Ethiopian educational and cultural context.

Local Educational Growth

Many teaching methodologies developed in the West are often difficult to introduce into EFL situations with different educational theories and realities (Alptekin, 2002; Daoud, 1996; Edge, 1996; phillipson, 1992). Rather than relying on expertise, methodology, and materials controlled and dispensed by Western ESL countries, Ethiopia as one of EFL countries, should strive to establish its own research contingents and encourage methods specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching theories and methodologies, in turn, should take into account the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts of the country.

Conclusion

It can be inferred from the above analyses and discussions that curriculum innovation involves multiple and interrelated factors that may influence it at different stages. As socially situated activity, its success is affected by ethical and systemic constraints, the personal characteristics of potential adopters, the attributes of innovations and the strategies that are used to mange change in particular contexts (Alptekin, 2002, Harmer, 2001, Markee, 1997; Shamin, 1996). In any attempt to improve education in general and the English language teaching (EFL) in particular, in the Ethiopian context, teachers are central to sustainable changes. How teachers as the implementers and end users of an innovation perceive its feasibility, is a very important factor in the ultimate success or failure of that innovation.

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