

# A Comparison between Students' and Teachers' Ideas Regarding Communicative Language Teaching Implementation in Malaysian Secondary Schools; A Qualitative Survey

Reza Raissi, Faizah Mohamad Nor, Marzilah A Aziz, ZaidahZainal & ZanariahMdSaleh

Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, Skudai, Johor, 81310, Malaysia

---

## ABSTRACT

During the recent decades most of the countries all over the world changed their English teaching methods from the old language teaching approaches which was mainly focused on the teachers' performances to learner centered approaches. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach mainly focuses on the students interactions in the classrooms and attracted many scholars' ideas in the field of language teaching and learning. But CLT mainly originated from the countries with English native teachers and students. In many EFL/ESL countries still many teachers and students have several problems in order to apply CLT in their educational systems. Malaysian ministry of education assigned all of the secondary schools in order to apply CLT in the English classes. During the current research, researchers surfed on net and investigated in several valid data bases but they couldn't find any studies about students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the CLT principles in the context of Malaysia. As it seems very important to know their perceptions and challenges regarding CLT and what they really do in the schools researchers did a qualitative survey investigation in order to find out teachers' and students' perceptions and challenges for implementing CLT in the secondary schools, as the main role makers in the English classes. In this study researchers used stratified sampling method and they had some criteria in mind to choose their samples like school type and school setting. To this aim, 30 students as well as 30 teachers participated in the semi-structured interviews. Participants answered to the three phase semi-structured interviews. Three phase interview has been used in order to find out participants' ideas. Results of the study reflected students' and teachers' perceptions & challenges regarding CLT principles in Malaysia. Although most of the students and teachers were agreed with CLT principles but they had some problems regarding the CLT implementation in Malaysian context like lack of school facilities, quality of textbooks, and some problems regarding the teaching of some skill and sub skills. At the end of the study some pedagogical implications have been proposed by researchers.

**KEYWORDS:** Communicative Language Teaching, English teaching & learning, students' & teachers' perceptions & challenges.

---

## INTRODUCTION

During the recent years many researchers in the field of language teaching offered a learner-centered language teaching approach namely Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). If we want to speak about the origin of CLT, it relates to the British language teaching tradition, on that time many scholars criticized about the language teaching approaches like structuralism and situational methods from the late 1960s (Nunan, 1988; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). According to Richards & Rodgers (2001) from 1970s the views on CLT have been changed significantly and many scholars called it as an approach rather than a single method. CLT has some unique characteristics in comparison with old language teaching methods, the first and most important one is communicative competence which has been recognized as the goal of language teaching in CLT. Second characteristic is teaching different skills and sub-skills through communication, that is all the four skills and sub-skills should be learned through communication and implicitly.

Li (1998) surveyed 18 English language teachers in Korean secondary schools; they have reflected some of their problems regarding the implementation of CLT in Korean secondary schools. Their problems were teachers' deficiency in spoken English, teachers' deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence, students' low English proficiency, large classes, grammar based examinations and lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments. Li (2003) conducted a survey among 164 in-service teachers most of the teachers believed that CLT mainly focuses on fluency and speaking and it doesn't pay enough attention to accuracy and it doesn't have any palace of grammar. Sato & Kleinsasser (1999) asked ten Japanese English teachers' opinions regarding the CLT principles through interviews. Results of the study shows that teachers believed that CLT mostly emphasizes on speaking and listening skills and they thought that grammar is not a part of a CLT. Razmjoo & Riazi (2006) investigated Iranian high school & private institute's teacher's attitudes and practices regarding CLT, results of the study shows that majority

of the teachers were agree with the principles of CLT namely grammar role, group work task, error correction, learner role and teacher role. Although in private institutes teachers performed CLT well but in public schools teachers didn't practice CLT significantly. Karim (2004) examined university teachers' attitudes regarding CLT in Bangladesh. Findings of the study shows that most of the teachers displayed positive attitudes toward the basic principles of CLT and also teachers' practices were align with what they knew about CLT. Hawkey (2006) did both survey and face to face interviews in order to investigate Italian teachers' attitude regarding the CLT implementation in this country. Most of the teachers believed that CLT can improve learners' motivation, interest and communicative skills. Additionally in the interviews they have mentioned that teachers were motivated to use pair-work activities for improving learners' communicative needs. Mangubhai, et al. (2005) investigated Australian teachers' attitude about the CLT principles. Results of their study indicate that Australian teachers were not satisfied with CLT approach. The most important reason for their disagreement related to the role of grammar and error correction. Most of the participants believed that emphasis should be placed on meaning-focused communication rather than the language structure. Liao (2003) investigated high school English teachers' attitude regarding the CLT implementation in China. Findings of the study show that among 302 participants, 94% of them reflected favorable attitudes regarding CLT and they were eager to practice it in their classes. Teachers expressed their agreement with CLT that seems suitable to the needs and aim of the class for enabling students to communicate easily in real life situations.

During the current study researchers attempted to find out different students' and teachers' perceptions and challenges (if any) regarding the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Malaysian secondary schools to this aim they have designed a qualitative study to evaluate their ideas and what really goes on in the classrooms by using semi-structured interviews. According to the assigned curriculum by the ministry of education of Malaysia (KBSM), all of the Malaysian secondary schools have to apply CLT to teach English in their classes. It seems very important to know what do students and teachers feel and think about this language teaching approach, did they find it useful for their pedagogical purposes or do they have any problems and challenges in order to apply this approach in the ESL classes or not. In order to answer these questions researchers designed semi-structured interviews to find out participants' perceptions regarding the CLT principles as well as their challenges in applying this approach in an ESL context of Malaysia. It goes without saying that results of the current study can be increased to the body of knowledge and different people can benefit the results of the current study to see whether CLT is useful for the context of Malaysia from the students' and teachers' view point and if yes what changes should be done in this approach in order to adopt this method for the Malaysian context. The main difference between CLT and old language teaching methods and Grammar Translation Method (GTM) relates to the focus of CLT in language teaching and learning process. The fundamental goal of language teaching through CLT does not refer to structure but communicative function of the language (Littlewood, 1981). The main and most important goal of language teaching and learning relates to the improvement of communicative competence (Li, 1998). In the following table different main characteristics of CLT and GTM has been compared with each other as follows:

Table 1. Difference between GTM &amp; CLT

<b>Grammar Translation Method</b>	<b>Communicative Language Teaching</b>
<b>Much of the vocabulary is taught in the form of lists of isolated words.</b>	Classroom goals are focused on all of the components of communicative competence and not restricted to grammatical or linguistic competence.
<b>Long elaborate explanations of the intricacies of grammar are given.</b>	Organizational language forms are not the central focus but rather aspects of language that enable the learner to accomplish those purposes.
<b>Grammar provides the rules for putting words together, and instruction often focuses on the form and inflection of words.</b>	Fluency and accuracy are seen as complementary principles underlying communicative techniques.
<b>Little attention is paid to the content of texts, which are treated as exercises in grammatical analysis.</b>	In the communicative classroom, students ultimately have to use the language productively and receptively, in unrehearsed contexts.

Hopefully this paper has different scientific contributions and the results of the current paper seem to be useful for a number of people who can benefit from the results of the current study for improving their professional career. 1. executive administrators in the ministry of education of Malaysia, who can benefit the results of the study to know students' and teachers' problems and challenges regarding the CLT implementation in the context of Malaysia. 2. Curriculum developers& material designers can benefit the results to revise the curriculum in a way that seems useful for the pedagogical purposes and student needs in Malaysia. 3. students and teacher themselves who could express and reflect their attitudes, problems and challenges regarding CLT implementation in Malaysia to help the people in charge to improve the assigned English curriculum in Malaysian secondary schools.

The remainder of the current paper organized as follows: in the materials and methods section researchers discussed about the research design, participants and interview protocol which elaborates completely on the methodology of the study. In this study researchers used qualitative method of data collection in which a three phase

interview has been used. Participants of the study as well as interview protocol have been discussed in detail. Also in the results and discussions section results of the three phase interview have been analyzed and also different students' and teachers' ideas regarding the CLT implementation in Malaysian secondary schools compared with each other. In the conclusion section of the paper conclusion and pedagogical implications have been discussed in detail and teachers' as well as students' evaluations regarding CLT principles and its implementation in the Malaysian context have been discussed in detail.

## MATERIALS &METHODS

### *Research design*

In this study researchers used qualitative research method in which they used semi-structured interviews in order to ask students' and teachers' perceptions about the nature of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and its implementation in the context of Malaysian secondary schools. After the data collection procedure researchers analyzed the collected data qualitatively by comparing participants' ideas and challenges regarding CLT implementation in this country.

### *Participants*

Participants of the current study were 60 teachers and students of the secondary schools of Pasir Gudang district, Johor, Malaysia. 30 students as well as 30 teachers have participated in the semi-structured interviews designed by the researchers in order to investigate their perceptions, problems and challenges regarding CLT implementation in Malaysian secondary schools. Researchers used stratified purposeful sampling method in this research and they had some criteria for choosing their sample, the first and most important criterion related to the type of the schools; all of the participants were studied or taught English courses in Malaysian governmental secondary schools that are following and using the assigned curriculum by the ministry of education of Malaysia (KBSM). Second criterion refers to the level of the schools; in this study, researchers considered secondary school teachers and students; as secondary school students are more proficient in English and teachers can apply CLT in these classes more easily. Third criterion refers to the setting of the schools; that all schools located in Johor district which was accessible for the researchers and they could generalize the findings to the whole country.

### *Interview protocol*

Researchers designed a three phase interview in order to find out students' and teachers' perceptions regarding the CLT approach and their challenges and problems to adopt and apply this approach in Malaysian secondary schools. In the first part of the study researchers asked participants' favorable or unfavorable attitudes regarding the CLT approach, and their problems and challenges (If any) they had for implementing this approach in Malaysian secondary schools.

In the second phase of the interview, researchers asked participants' ideas about the quality of English textbooks and other supplementary materials that they are using in the schools. Also researchers asked participants' ideas about using authentic tasks in the schools and the quality of the schools facilities in order to make real life situation tasks for the students.

In the third part of the interview researchers asked different questions from teachers and students. In this part researchers asked teachers some questions regarding teaching methods and teachers' beliefs, as well as in-service training courses and its effect on the teaching procedure of the teachers, and asked some questions about the process of learning different skills from the students. Also researchers attempted to focus on exploring participants' ideas about teaching grammar and error correction in CLT.

## RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

### *Results of the first phase of the study*

In the first phase of the interview, researchers asked participants' ideas about their favorable or unfavorable attitudes regarding the CLT approach and whether they found it useful for Malaysian context, also researchers asked their tentative problems and challenges regarding the implementation of CLT in Malaysian secondary schools.

Table 2. Teachers' attitudes regarding CLT principles

		teachers			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	<b>favorable</b>	23	76.7	76.7	76.7
	<b>unfavorable</b>	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>		30	100.0	100.0	

Researchers asked teachers' perceptions about the CLT principles and its applicability in the context of Malaysia, as it has been shown in the above table 76.7% of them reflected favorable attitudes regarding CLT and 23.3% reflected unfavorable attitudes regarding the CLT and they believed that CLT is not appropriate for the Malaysian context. As it has been shown in table 2, most of the teachers believed that CLT is appropriate and useful for the context of Malaysia and they found it useful for their pedagogical purposes. Researchers asked teachers who were not agree with the CLT and its principles for the reason of their unfavorable attitudes regarding CLT implementation in Malaysia which will be discussed in the following sections.

Table 3. Students' attitudes regarding CLT principles

		students			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
<b>Valid</b>	<b>favorable</b>	25	83.3	83.3	83.3
	<b>unfavorable</b>	5	16.7	16.7	100.0
<b>Total</b>		30	100.0	100.0	

Researchers asked students' perceptions about the implementation of CLT in Malaysian secondary schools as it has been shown in table 3, most of them 83.3% reflected favorable attitudes regarding CLT and its implementation in the Malaysian context while only 16.7% reflected unfavorable attitudes regarding the CLT implementation in Malaysian secondary schools. As it seems clear from both table 2&3, most of the participants (Teachers & Students) were agree with the CLT principles and they found it useful for their pedagogical purposes. For further details and the reason of the rejection of CLT from some of the participants, researchers asked participants' ideas who were not agree with CLT principles for the reasons of their rejection which will be discussed in detail in the following sections.

According to the frequency tables most of the teachers as well as students were agreed about the CLT principles. Although most of the participants showed favorable attitudes regarding CLT features but researchers asked participants who have been reflected unfavorable ideas regarding tentative problems or challenges about the implementation of this approach in Malaysian secondary schools to investigate why they reflected unfavorable attitudes regarding CLT and its features. Most of the teachers who had unfavorable attitudes regarding CLT feature reflected some problems for CLT implementation in the ESL context of Malaysia like variety of L1 backgrounds among the students. As Malaysia is a multicultural society it seems very difficult to work with the students from different races namely Malay, Chinese and Indians. Malaysia has been recognized as a society with different people from different cultures. Not surprisingly people from three main races namely Malay, Chinese and Indian live with each other and share their customs and cultures with each other. According to the Wikipedia, the free internet encyclopedia in 2010, Malay people had majority of population with 60.3% while Chinese were second with 22.9% and Indian were third with 7.1% of the total population. It goes without saying that such a country with three main races of people has people with three different cultural backgrounds. In language teaching and language learning process the cultural differences of the total population can affect students' learning too. As language classes in Malaysian secondary schools consists of three main races with three different language backgrounds these kinds of variations can affect their process of language learning too. As some of the teachers mentioned that while they want to discuss and challenge with the students from different races, their first language background may affect their learning process and for sure their problems in language learning is not same with each other as they have different linguistic backgrounds.

Another problem referred to teaching grammar that most of the teachers believed that, it is more useful to teach the grammar explicitly rather than implicitly. Third problem which teachers who were not agree with the CLT, expressed was error correction that they believed that it seems better to correct students' errors immediately in order to don't let them fossilized in the learners' mind.

On the other hand students who did not agree with the CLT principles mentioned some of their problems regarding CLT implementation in their classes. Like the teachers' ideas regarding the CLT features, most of the students who were not agree with CLT principles mentioned the same idea for culture and L1 differences for CLT implementation in Malaysia and they believed that it seems very difficult to implement CLT in a society with variety of cultures and L1 backgrounds. Most of the students who were not agree with CLT principles also mentioned that school facilities are not sufficient for conducting CLT in Malaysian schools. In sum most of the students as well as teachers showed favorable attitudes regarding CLT features and it seems that by applying some changes, CLT is applicable and useful for the Malaysian context and it should be adopted to be applied in this country.

#### *Results of the second part of the interview*

In the second part of the interview, researchers asked participants' ideas about the quality of English textbooks and other supplementary materials. Also researchers attempted to investigate participants' opinions regarding the authentic tasks which they should practice in the ESL classes. Most of the teachers mentioned that all of the secondary schools in the Johor state should use the same textbooks which have been designed especially for this

state. And they have mentioned that they are not just focusing on the assigned textbooks and they are using some supplementary materials like grammar and workbooks beside these materials. In evaluating the English materials most of the teachers reflected favorable attitudes regarding different sections of the books but they have criticized about the amount of authentic tasks in the textbooks for increasing opportunities for the students to speak, also they have mentioned that book designers should pay more attention to the cultural and language diversity in Malaysia for designing the textbooks. Regarding authentic tasks and creating real life situation activities they have mentioned they try their best to do activates and usually they have 2 or 3 days English campuses in Desaru beach (a beach which located in the south of Malaysia in Johor district) or other resorts. But some of them mentioned that they don't have enough facilities in order to conduct CLT appropriately in the secondary schools.

On the other hand students mentioned that, although enough attention has been given to the four skills in the English textbooks, but not enough attention paid to sub-skills like grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation, and they have mentioned that supplementary materials were not working well either. When researchers asked students about the authentic tasks in the classroom most of them mentioned that the amount of class discussions, group & pair work and games are satisfactory in the English classes and teachers try their best to improve their communicative competence during the class procedures while some of them complained about the facilities of the schools and they have mentioned most of the times they couldn't use language labs because of different reasons.

*Results of the third part of the study*

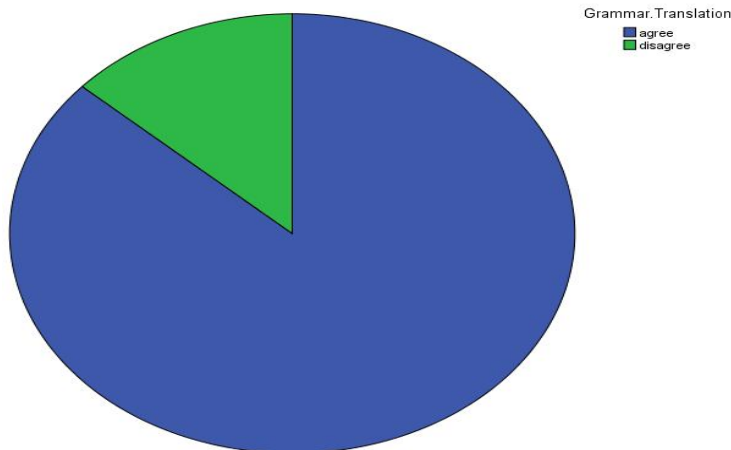
In the third part and last part of the study researchers asked different questions from the students and teachers. Researchers asked teachers some questions about the teaching methods and their beliefs, in-service training courses, and their perceptions regarding CLT which distinguished CLT from teacher fronted approaches like grammar teaching, error correction, translation, and accuracy or fluency based classes. Most of the teachers mentioned that they have maximum of five periods of in-service training for one week, but not special attention have been given to thee CLT and CLT features in those classes and instructors mainly focus on incoming activities. Teachers mentioned as they are working and as the time goes on they become more experienced and they can be more familiar with the students' needs, and they can understand their L1 variations as well as their cultural differences so that they can adopt CLT to their classes according to the students' needs analysis. Most of the teachers mentioned that some changes should be done on the CLT in order to make it applicable to the context of Malaysia. For example they prefer to teach grammar, semantic and syntax rules explicitly rather than implicitly to make all the rules clear for their students and avoid any ambiguity in grammatical points. Also they were eager to implement translation in some cases as students are not proficient to comprehend all English elements in English. They believed that accuracy and fluency have the same degree of importance and accuracy should be emphasized in ESL classes in the same way as fluency.

Table 4. Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching explicit grammar and translation application

Valid	agree	26	86.7	86.7	86.7
	disagree	4	13.3	13.3	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	30	100.0	100.0	

As it seems clear from the above table most of the teachers (86.7%) were agree with explicit grammar teaching versus implicit type. Also they have mentioned that they were think sometimes it is essential to use translation while teacher wants to discuss about vocabulary elaborations on reading comprehension section.

Graph 1. Teacher's attitudes regarding teaching explicit grammar and translation application



As it has been reflected in graph 1, most of the teachers were agree with explicit type of grammar teaching as well as teaching semantics and syntax explicitly versus implicitly. And they have mentioned that sometimes it seems essential to use translation in English classes as students are not well proficient in English and they cannot comprehend content clearly. Although teaching grammar explicitly and using translation in class has been banned by teachers in CLT but sometimes it seems essential to use these old techniques which relates to GTM method in order to make CLT appropriate for the context of Malaysia and adopting CLT to the Malaysian language teaching context.

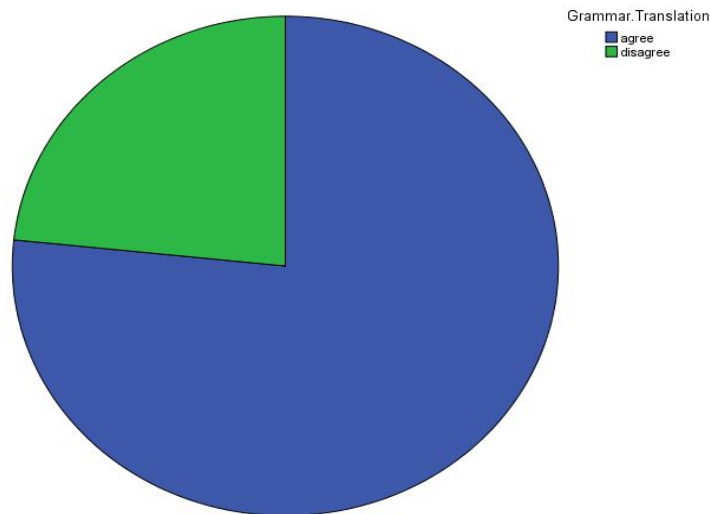
On the other hand students have answered some questions regarding the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their classes regarding different skills as well as sub-skills. Most of the students mentioned that their receptive skills (reading & listening) have been improved during the class while their productive skills (speaking & writing) didn't improve to a high extent. They mentioned that teachers spend a big amount of time on teaching reading skill, but they do not spend much time on writing and peer-reviewing activities. They mentioned that they have not many opportunities to speak in the classrooms so that their speaking abilities and pronunciation cannot be improved to a high extent. Most of the students believed that grammar instruction by explicit way can help them a lot, because by implicit instruction many grammatical and syntax points will be left ambiguous. Most of them were agreed to immediate and explicit error corrections and essential translations in the classroom.

Table 5. Students attitudes regarding explicit grammar teaching, using translation and explicit error correction

		Grammar. Translation			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	agree	23	76.7	76.7	76.7
	disagree	7	23.3	23.3	100.0
	<b>Total</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

As it has been reflected in the above table most of the students (76.7%) have been agreed with explicit grammar teaching and translation when it is necessary in class and also explicit and immediate error correction.

Graph 2. Students perceptions regarding explicit grammar teaching, using translation and explicit error correction



As it has been reflected in the above graph, although translation, explicit grammar teaching and explicit error correction has been ignored by CLT principle, but most of the students believe that it is essential to teach grammar rules explicitly and elaborating the rules on the board. They believed that by teaching implicit grammar they cannot understand grammatical rules easily and some grammatical points will be left ambiguous in their minds. When researchers asked students about using translation in the class, most of the students believed that using translation can help them to understand the meanings more clearly and sometimes it seems to be a vital component in language teaching and learning as it avoid misunderstandings. When researchers asked about students' ideas regarding error correction most of them believed that it seems very essential to correct errors immediately in the class because by ignoring errors they will fossilize in the learner's minds. As it seems clear from the above discussions sometimes we can use some techniques of GTM and combine them by CLT techniques to adopt our curriculum to the specialized context of teaching.

## Conclusion & pedagogical implications

During the recent decades many countries all over the world replace Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their countries through the educational reformations. CLT mainly focuses on communicative competence of the students and has many advantages compared to old language teaching approaches like Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Audio Lingual Method (ALM). According to CLT all the skills and sub-skills facilitates through communicative competence improvement and fluency has priority to accuracy. Students should be engaged to real-life situation and authentic tasks to learn language in an authentic context. According to the assigned curriculum by the ministry of education of Malaysia all of the secondary schools follow CLT in their classes, but it is not clear that to what extent do English language teachers apply CLT principles in their schools and do teachers as well as students found CLT useful for their pedagogical purposes or not. In this research researchers attempted to investigate teachers' and students' perceptions regarding CLT principles and what challenges (if any) they have in order to apply this approach in the ESL classes. As it has been discussed earlier CLT originated from western countries with native English backgrounds and it should be adopted in order to make it applicable in another countries. Malaysia is a multi-cultural society with three main races namely Malay, Chinese and Indian students. It seems crystal clear that in such a condition teachers should pay attention to the students' cultures and their first languages. From the survey data which has been presented in the earlier sections we can conclude that pure CLT implementation cannot be beneficial for the context of Malaysia. As it has been discussed before most of the students and teachers mentioned that they found CLT useful for their pedagogical purposes but most of the participants believed that it should be more adapted to the context of Malaysia. By considering some techniques of other language teaching approaches like translation in essential times, explicit grammar teaching and immediate feedback to the students' errors, CLT would be more adopted and more applicable in the Malaysian secondary schools.

Hopefully results of the current study are useful for a number of people who can benefit from the findings of the current study. First executive administrators in the ministry of education of Malaysia, who can use the findings in order to revise the curriculum in the beneficial way for the students' pedagogical purposes Second material writers to revise the materials according to the learners need. And last but not least English language teachers and learners who could reflect their attitudes and challenges regarding the CLT implementation in Malaysia.

## Acknowledgments

Researchers want to express their deepest gratitude to the participants of the study who have kindly cooperated with the researchers during the process of data collection.

## REFERENCES

- Karim, K. M. R. (2004). *Teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and expectations about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in post-secondary education in Bangladesh*. Unpublished master thesis, University of Victoria.
- Lia, X. (2003). *Chinese secondary school teacher's attitude toward communicative language teaching and their classroom practice*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, the University of Aukland.
- Li, D. (1998). It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine: Teachers' perceived difficulties in introducing the communicative approach in South Korea. *TESOL Quarterly*, 32, 677-703.
- Li, C.Y. (2003). A study of in-service teachers' beliefs, difficulties and problems in current teacher development programs. *Applied language studies*, 7, 64-85.
- Littlewood, W. T. (1981). *Communicative language teaching*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Mangubhai, F., Marland, P., Dashwood, A., & Son, J. (2005). Similarities and differences in teachers' and researchers' conceptions of communicative language teaching: Does the use of an educational model cast a better light? *Language Teaching Research*, 9(1), 32-65.
- Nunan, D. (1988). *The Learner-centred Curriculum*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Razmjoo, S. A., & Riazi, A. (2006). Do high schools or private institutes practice communicative language teaching? A case study of Shiraz teachers' in high schools and institutes. *The Reading Matrix*, 6(3), 363.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2001). *Approaches and methods in language teaching (2nd ed.)*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sato, K., & Kleinsasser, R. (1999). Communicative language teaching (CLT): Practical understandings. *The Modern Language Journal*. 83(4), 494-517.