

Communicative Language Teaching: Practical Difficulties in the Rural EFL Classrooms in Taiwan

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Abstract

English education in Taiwan has experienced a number of modifications over the past decade. The Ministry of Education (MOE) has initiated several reforms since 1994 with a purpose of changing the pedagogy, focusing on grammar-translation, to a more communicative one aim at cultivating learners of greater communication proficiency for the demands resulting from internationalization and globalization. Although the outcome may be promising, the process has proven to be challenging. The studies regarding Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in many EFL settings suggested that factors, associated with socio-culture, school administration, classroom dynamics and personnel, have negatively influenced teachers' willingness to implement CLT. Notwithstanding the comprehensive discussion about the difficulties, rare were they related directly to rural teachers whose experiences might be different from their urban peers. Their distinct insight and impressions are necessary, and therefore worthy of the investigation in order to further understand the whole CLT-resulted phenomena. Using a multi-methodological approach of quantitative survey and qualitative interview, this study aims at uncovering the difficulties rural EFL teachers have encountered when implementing CLT in their classrooms. Seventy-five teachers were surveyed. Based on their participating willingness, 15 of them were further contacted for in-depth interviews. The result of the study revealed that besides the repeated issues, the teachers have faced problems, including students' low L1 cognitive resources, parents' indifferent attitudes toward communicative-English education, and the assortment of students of heterogeneous language skills into the same class, which are unique to the rural setting because of geographical and socio-economic confinement.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), multi-methodological approach, learning motivation, communicative competence

1. Introduction

To follow the rapidly-growing global economy, and increase the number of effective English-communication citizens, many Asian countries, with the recognition of English as an international communication tool, have reformed their English education within the past two decades (Littlewood, 2007). New English syllabi aiming at "teaching English for effective and appropriate communication" have been released regularly in Singapore (Zhang, 2006). The MOE in Hong Kong promulgated a policy of trilingualism (English, Cantonese and Chinese) emphasizing the development of oral proficiency (Law, 2003). English has been used as the medium for instruction at schools led by native English-speaking teachers (NESTs). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) pedagogy was first introduced in the 6th curriculum (Yoon, 2004), and further reformed in the 7th curricula in Korea in 1997 to initiate new elementary English. English was promoted as a compulsory subject at every primary school. CLT was utilized in order to enhance students' interest in English communication (Jung & Norton, 2002). The CLT movement started early in 1985 in Japan and has sustained. In 2003 (Bulter & Iino, 2005, Gamble et.al., 2013) and 2013 (Ohashi, 2015) educational movements highlighting 'practical English' were generated respectively to develop learners' oral-aural communication ability in order to make students the functional users rather than knowledge accumulators of English. Globalization has been a driving force for the education reformation in China, too (Chang, 2006; Cheng, 1988; Garbe & Mahon, 1981; Hu, 2005; Hui, 2001; Zhu, 2003). Despite the resistances after the implementation of CLT at undergraduate and high school levels, the State Education Development Commission (SEDC) in China authorized and issued three major English-reformed syllabi in 1992, 1993 and 1996 respectively to enforce the cultivation of communicative competence (CC) starting at the secondary level (Liao, 2004). The ambition was advanced in 2001 through the application of task-based instruction starting from the 3rd grade (Hu, 2005; Hui, 2001). The wind of communication mode blew to Taiwan in the years of 1994 and 1995 when a new curriculum for junior and high schools was published with a clear objective asserting that "communication-orientedness is the principle of high school textbook compilation and classroom instruction." (Wang, 2002, p.135) New textbooks featuring communicative activities have been used since 1999. English learning was further lowered to the 3rd grade in 2004 with the suggestion of English-only policy and the adoption of 'active and interactive' models via various teaching genres, realia and materials of diverse topics (Ministry of Education, 2014).

2. The Importance of Communication and CLT Activities

The great debate of the constituents of communicative competence has been repeated in the literatures regarding

second / foreign language (L2) education (Berns, 1990; Canale & Swain, 1980; Omaggio, 2001, Savignon, 1983). Such repetition revealed the significance of communicative competence and its development using authentic CLT activities, which encourage learners maximum communication in many different contexts (Wu, 2008). When engaging in CLT activities, learners learn by doing and test each other's perceptions through interaction in a positive and non-threatening environment. They acquire the meaning and knowledge of their own (Hendrickson, 1991) and gain in the areas of grammatical/sociolinguistic/discourse/strategic competence (Pokoma & Vasylieva, 2014). Simply having the knowledge of a language is not enough. Ideas or concepts of the activities mattering to learners increase their motivation of involvement. Only through meaningful negotiations can students become efficient learners and administer what they have learned (Allwright, 1984; Antón, 1999; Englander, 2002; Oxford, 1997; Rao, 1996). Zhang (2006) also confirmed that the ultimately successful language learning experiences were created through interactive and meaningful communication. Including communicative competence one of his teaching principles, Brown (2007) argued that it is the 'goal' of language classrooms and should be achieved by constant and extensive language use. Littlewood (1981) summarized several contributions CLT activities make. They provide learners with whole-task practices, structured to suit learners' level of ability and help maintain (or enhance) learning motivation. Learners' motivation is more likely to be maintained if seeing how and what they have learned is successfully employed in communication with others. The more effective in communicating with others, the higher the motivation will be maintained, or even enhanced. CLT activities allow natural learning. Much language learning happens through natural processes when real communication is achieved, thus making either inside- or outside-communicative activities a key portion of the total learning process. Positive relationships were fostered when doing CLT activities, thus humanizing the classroom by turning it into learning-supportive context (Chang, 2011). Cheerful atmospheres among teachers and students was produced, which consequently sustains students' efforts to learn.

3. CLT Practices and Resistances in the Classrooms

CLT's emergence in the 1970s and prosperity in the western countries made more innovative teaching techniques (content-based instruction, task-based teaching and problem-based learning) available (Richards, 2006; Spada, 2007). Despite the wide acceptance, its sequential introduction into eastern context has led to widespread dissatisfaction and resistances in many EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts (Ahmad & Rao, 2012; Barkhuizen, 1998; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1997; Hu, 2002; Kumar & Kainth, 2015; Li, 1998; Lo, 2001; Shamim, 1996; Yu, 2001). Cultural differences were the most-referred factor, as Ellis (1996) pointed out process and meaning are what CLT emphasizes while content and forms are what highly valued in EFL classrooms. The distinctive learning motivation held by learners is another reason. ESL (English as a second language) learners have an urgent need to communicate because of the English-speaking community beyond the classrooms. In contrast, EFL learners lack of such urgency. Oftentimes, English is merely a compulsory school subject or a 'maybe' useful tool for job-hunting in the future (Sreehari, 2012). Echoing Ellis's viewpoint, Lo (2001) asserted that many EFL practitioners, despite receiving a master or doctoral degrees in the fields of language instruction in English-speaking countries, found it difficult to carry out ESL-based theories (CLT included) after returning their home countries due to sociocultural variances.

Littlewood's (2007) review of several published paper revealed that factors associating with classroom management, students' avoidance of English, minimal demands on English competence, and conflicts with educational values and traditions, possibly constrained CLT. Hiep's (2005, 2007) interview of Vietnamese teachers asserted the existence of contextual conflicts, such as large class size, traditional examination, personal beliefs of teachers' and students' roles (Iwashita & Ngoc, 2012), and students' low motivation. In Singapore, Zhang (2006) noted that the consequence of applying CLT marginalized grammar teaching, leading to the failure in achieving the target outcome of teaching reading and writing. Aldred and Miller's (2000) investigation pointed out that the active roles learners play in CLT classrooms contradicted the sociocultural tradition in Hong Kong, where students are supposed to be silent and avoid making mistakes by not raising their hands to ask or answer questions. Similar pitfall was unclosed by Karakas (2013) who observed that Turkish students' lack of learning autonomy and reluctance to take responsibility for their own learning paralyzed CLT. In Thailand, Saengboon (2002) confirmed that school administrative policy might sometimes impede CLT by grouping a large number of students (up to 100) with heterogeneous levels of English proficiency in a class. Teachers were forced to use non CLT-based textbooks to teach for tests. In Korea, Jung and Norton's (2002) observation suggested that many teachers complained that materials development and large class size were hindrance to CLT activities. Likewise, Li's (1998) survey revealed that many constraints, caused by teacher themselves (deficiency in spoken English, low strategic and sociolinguistic competence, lack of training in CLT, few CLT re-training opportunities, misconceptions about CLT, and insufficient time, and no expertise in CLT material development), students (low English proficiency and motivation to advance communicative competence), educational system (large class size, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding and lack of supports from schools) and CLT per se (CLT's inadequate account of EFL teaching, and lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments) impact negatively CLT (Kleinsasser

& Sato, 1999; Sato, 2002). In Japan, Kubota (2002) revealed an unwelcome attitude held by the teachers of public secondary schools toward NESTs. They even regarded CLT as a virus impeding students from intellectual and cultural virtue development. In China, Burnaby and Sun's (2007) study suggested that many teachers believed CLT is mainly applicable for English-majored students; likewise Zhu (2003) observed that Chinese students were strongly influenced by Confucian concepts. They were trained to be obedient, but not to challenge authority. Consequently, they tended to hold their opinions and hid passively their ability to be knowledge-receivers. Hu (2002) also noted that CLT tenets contradict Chinese culture in terms of their embodiment of opposite teaching philosophies. It advocated interactivness, learner-centeredness, verbal activeness, independence and individuality; whereas Chinese learning cultures asserted ancient epistemology, teacher dominance, mental activeness, receptiveness, and conformity. In Taiwan, Wang (2002) reported that due to insufficient channels for CLT-related training, low supports from school administrators, and parents' demand of good test result and standardized answers to check their kids' learning outcome (Su, 2006), most teachers neglected the communicative activities compiled in the reformed textbooks. They stuck to the traditional grammar translation method (GTM) for convenient and immediate learning outcome. Some parents even believed that the best teachers are the ones who teach their children to score high in tests, instead of skillful communication. Learning assessment was another problem. Standardized discrete-point tests attributed to CLT failure, as Wang noted "even with teachers' best efforts, communicative teaching becomes unfeasible without a change in assessment" (p.141). Thus, the development of new assessment techniques, such as a portfolio or teacher observation of learner's interaction for different achievements, was obviously crucial.

The discussion regarding CLT's practical difficulties in diverse EFL settings revealed not only its significance, but also the concern of the resulted controversies and its cultural appropriateness (Tanaka, 2009). Despite the extensive investigations about logistical problems, rare were they conducted in rural settings. Since rural teachers' voices may be at variance with those from urban, their insight and impressions are worthy of consideration. Employing multiple data resources, the purpose of the current paper was to disclose the possible issues pertinent to EFL teachers' CLT practice in rural Taiwan.

4. Methodology

4.1 The Questionnaire and Survey

The methodological assumptions utilized in the study were derived primarily from Kleinsaser and Sato's (1990) work. Targeting at investigating clearly teachers' difficulties in practicing CLT, the study adopted a mixed-method approach because a quantitative approach provides a general (broad) view that controls statistically the bias and external factors of the phenomena studied. Conversely, the multiple sources collected via qualitative approach provided a more complex (deep) understanding. The hybrid use of quantitative and qualitative approaches increases validity and gives more insights. A questionnaire titled, "Teachers' Perceived Difficulties in using CLT in the Classrooms" adapted from Li's (1998) and Rao's (2002) study was administered. It was divided into two major parts. Part One contained questions relevant to the subject's background information, including age, education degree, years of teaching, grade level teaching. Part Two was statements about the constraints rural teachers encountered for their CLT practice. The survey was on a one-to-one basis either in Chinese or English personally through either telephone to encourage cooperation and to create rapport (Dörnyei, 2003) for feasible interview later.

4.2 The Interviews and Interview Questions

Interviews are the best way of learning about people's interior experiences and how they perceive and interpret their perceptions, affected by their thoughts and feelings about a particular event (Weiss, 1994). The narrations and viewpoints elaborated by the subjects are a convenient, yet faithful channel beyond any possible substantial boundary for a glance at their worlds (rural CLT practice in this study) for reliable scientific explanations in order to understand the meaning of the phenomena described. In the study, the interviews were conducted in Chinese in a systematic and consistent manner, allowing sufficient freedom to digress and probe beyond the answers to the questions prepared. Each interview lasted 30-60 minutes. The whole process was audio-recorded. Interview contents were later translated and transcribed verbatim to ensure richness and for analysis. The interview questions mainly consisted of three portions: (a) The major questions: open-ended descriptive questions regarding teachers' general views on CLT, the development of students' communication ability and their actual classroom teaching, and the issues resulted from their CLT practice; (b) Follow-up questions: additional questions used to "explore particular themes, concepts, and ideals introduced by the conversational partner" (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.136), for instance, "how do you usually teach vocabulary / sentence patterns / main text?; how do you think of MOE's supplementary policy for CLT?; do you think it applicable at the school where you teach?; how many students do you usually have in one class?; have you ever thought of any ways to overcome difficulties?"; and (c) Probing questions: used to clarify missing information or ambiguous concepts while keeping the discussion going, for example "what do you mean by....?; would you explain....?; please give me an example of how you....; can you

say something more about....” (Biklen & Bogdan, 2003).

Following the “tree and branch model”¹, all the main questions “were first asked, and then the follow-up questions drawn from each interviewee’s responses to each main question. Occasionally, appropriate probes (repetition of particular words with questioning intonation, asking questions for more detail, showing attention to encourage elaboration and asking for explanations or clarification) were used to ensure vivid, and detailed description (Rubin & Rubin, 2005).

4.3 The Setting and Participants

The research was conducted at County M (CM), located in the north-central part of Taiwan. It is famous as “Mountain Castle” for its mountain and hill terrain. Approximately 560,903 people (accounting for 2.6% of the total population in Taiwan) inhabited and dispersed among 267 villages at CM. This castle contained 168 schools (121 primary, 30 junior and 17 senior high schools) situated mostly at remote mountain areas (Ministry of Education, 2014). Students came to school around 7:30 A.M.. Classes started at 8:00. The thirty minutes before classes were usually for quizzes, especially English because of its significance. The day ended at 4:00 P.M.. Junior and senior high school students often stayed one or two more hours to attend the so-called “subsidiary classes” to reinforce the learning of school subjects tested on major entrance exams. Teachers and students met 40-50 minutes each session and two to five times per week. Restricted by the “near-limited rule”², each class has no more than 35 students. Depending on the funding received, some classrooms were equipped with high-tech facilities (Figure 1); while some weren’t.



Figure 1: A classroom located at a remote school receiving a large amount of funding from local government and is equipped with good teaching equipment, such as LCD TV screen, computer and DVD player stored in the steel cabinet at the left of the blackboard.

The selection of participants was on a random basis to “minimize the effects of any extraneous or subjective variables that might affect the outcome of the survey study” (Dörnyei, 2003, p. 73). Seventy-five English teachers, selected randomly from school websites, were contacted and surveyed. The participants aged from 24 to 58 years, with the majority in their 30’s. Seventy-two percent of them had less than ten years’ teaching experiences, and 28% had more. Thirty-four (45.3%) of them received a bachelor’s degree and 41 (54.7%) a master. Based on their participating willingness, 15 were further interviewed. (See Table 1 for the interviewed participants’ background information).

¹ In the tree and branch model, “the interview is likened to tree with the trunk as the research problem and the branches as the main research questions. Each deals with a separate but more or less equal concern. In the interviews, the researcher would try to ask all the main questions and then follow up on each obtain the same degree of depth, detail, richness and nuance” (Rubin & Rubin, 2005, p.145).

² A rule set by the local government, regulated that each class should have maximum of 35 students. Therefore, the number of classes at each school decided by the students enrolled and further divided by 35. For example, if there are 68 students enrolled this year. 68 divided by 35 is 2, which means there will be two classes of 34 students each. But if there are 72, which is divided by 35 and then two classes will have 35 students each, but leave two students without any classes to fit in. Under this circumstance, 72 will be divided by 3 and there will be three classes of 24 students each.

Table 1: Teacher interviewees background information

No.	Name	Gender	Age	Teaching Years	Field of Study	Degree/country
1	Wen-Wen	F	40	10	Social Study	MA/USA
2	Meng-Jie	F	25	2	Language Ed.	BA/TW
3	Kai-Wen	F	38	13	TESOL	MA/USA
4	Fong-Zhu	F	52	30	N/A	MA/TW
5	Kuo-Jin	M	28	1.5	Art and Media	MA/AU
6	Yi-Tang	F	37	15	Special Ed.	BA/TW
7	Shu-Min	F	30	6	English	BA/TW
8	Mai-Wen	F	37	13	English	BA/TW
9	Mai-Ron	F	40	10	Piano/ Counseling	MA/USA/UK
10	Yue-Lien	F	39	10	Business Management	MA/TW
11	Mei-Zhu	F	51	29	English	BA/TW
12	Luo Laoshi	F	34	11	Language Ed.	MA/TW
13	Shu-Zen	F	41	17	English Literature	MA/TW
14	Xin-Pei	F	31	5.5	TESOL	MA/UK
15	Yin-Yi	F	36	11	TESOL	MA/UK

4. 4 Data Analysis

The collected survey data were analyzed using SPSS to calculate the means and total number of the participants' responses, frequency and percentage marking on each response for each statement. These quantitative data were sorted into several categories to integrate with qualitative data. Translation and transcription of interview data were the second phase of data analysis. After repeated reading through the complete questionnaire and the interview transcripts, recurrent salient comments regarding the constraints the rural teachers had encountered during their practice were first noted. The concepts¹, themes², events³ and topical markers⁴ were then identified, following by a further and more thoughtful examination for clarification of unclear concepts and themes to synthesize different events for better comprehension of overall narratives. The final stage of data analysis was coding. As Weiss (1994) stated, "the idea in coding is to link what the respondents says in his or her interview to the concepts and categories that will appear in the report" (p. 154). Appropriate codes were derived primarily from the identified concepts, themes, events and topical markers or from the relevant reviewed literature. The categories of codes applied include (1) activity codes: behaviors occurring regularly (teachers' description of their teaching situation); (2) event codes: specific activities occurring in the setting or the lives of the interviewed subjects (the mention of the difficulties encountered); and (3) strategy codes: methods, techniques or other ways interviewed subjects used to accomplish something (possible techniques teachers used to overcome their problems).

5. Results and Discussions

All of the interviewed teachers asserted that the cultivation of students' communication ability is important. They agreed on CLT's tenets and practiced CLT activities when time is sufficient. To fulfill CLT, most of them (13 out of 15 interviewees) conducted a semi-traditional teaching approach, (or a 'reconciling communicative approach', Rao, 1996, p456), a mixture of two main teaching approaches, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Grammar Translation Methods (GTM), as Mei-Zhu said, "I combine CLT and GTM, unaware. Actually, I used different teaching methods for different units and parts. I don't just use a single method. A CLT activity may be good for sentence practice; and GTM works for reading". During the fulfillment of CLT, they encountered certain types of constraints, which centered on topics: (1) students' low first language cognitive resources; (2) students' low English proficiency; (3) student's 'communication' problems; (4) students' lack of learning motivation; (5) parents' attitude toward English learning and CLT; (6) teachers' English proficiency; (7) lack of in-service training; (8) classroom management problem; (9) class agenda problems; (10) CLT textbooks and (11) standardized paper-based tests. (See Table 2 for statistics)

¹ A concept: is a word or term that represents an idea important to the research problem.

² Themes: are summary statements and explanations of what is going on.

³ Events: are occurrences that have taken place.

⁴ Topical markers: are names of places, people, organizations, pets, numbers...and so on (Rubin & Rbuin, 2005, p.207)

Table 2: percentages counted on items regarding the difficulties and problems teachers encountered.

Constraints	% Teachers (n=75)
Students' insufficient motivation toward English learning	55%
Students' unbalanced engagement in CLT activities	75%
Students' unwillingness to communicate in English	23%
Students' tendency toward using Chinese for group discussion	64%
Students' low English proficiency	29%
Students' heterogeneous English proficiency	72%
Students' heterogeneous English skills	61%
Students' use of single, two-word phrase or even Chinese for questions asked	69%
The pressure from students to teach for exams	21%
Unbalanced interaction between teacher and students	59%
School authorities' indifferent attitude toward communicative English learning	7%
Insufficient class meeting time	57%
Tight schedule	58%
Big classes	59%
Classroom management problem resulted from practicing CLT activities	34%
Insufficient CLT-related workshops	76%
Use of textbooks with insufficient CLT-related features	61%
Insufficient teaching equipment	16%
Teachers' insufficient communication proficiency	58%
Teachers' lack for knowledge related to appropriate English usage	67%
Standardized paper-based tests	63%
The exclusion of oral proficiency tests at schools	12%
Parents' indifferent attitude toward communicative English learning	56%
Parents' pressure on good testing results	51%

5.1 Students' Low First Language Cognitive Resources

Each second / foreign language learner owns a different level of L1 cognitive resources (L1 literacy and knowledge). When learning a second / foreign language, the L1 cognitive resources transfer into learners' background knowledge and affect their L2 acquisition (Carrell, 1983; Johnson, 1981, 1982; Echevarria & Short, 2005). Because of the different cognitive levels a person has, "L1 is used not only for communicative interaction, but also to regulate the cognitive process. It stands to reason that learners must necessarily rely on this language in order to mediate their learning of the L2" (Lantolf & Thorne 2007, p. 201). Generally speaking, literature L1 learners usually do better and make faster progress than their illiterate peers in terms of L2 learning; namely, the retention of a high level of L1 speeds up the acquisition of L2 (Bell, 1995).

More than half the survey teachers in the study indicated that students' low L1 literacy and knowledge was a problem. Because of geographical isolation in the mountain region, many CM students fall short of L1 cultural stimuli and language capability. Such deficiency complicated students' difficulties in acquiring English. "Mountain kids are not good at Chinese, not to mention English" stated Yi-Tang. Students are sometimes deemed to be 'academically immature'. "Most middle schoolers don't possess the knowledge they should have", complained Maiwen. Similar problems existed among elementary school students, as Fongzhu responded, "this is the main problem I have encountered so far. These students are bad at not only English, but also Chinese, mathematics and music. Almost 90% of my students belong to this category".

Owing to the deficiency of L1 cognitive resources, teachers found that students' acquisition of English laborious. "Memorizing the learned vocabulary is already a tough challenge, not to mention the ability to comprehend the words when hearing," commented Yuelien. Without sufficient comprehensible input, teachers found it hard to conduct free discussion, as Maiwen commented, "making the students to discuss for a specific topic is difficult". Writing was a problem, too. When being asked to write something, students tended to leave the paper blank. Gradually, they developed a negative feeling toward English learning.

Low Chinese proficiency...Students may be able to speak Chinese, but if being asked to write something down, they write nothing. Many students scored 0 for the Chinese writing section on basic competence test. They wrote wrongly in Chinese, not to mention other foreign languages, like English. They developed a sense of rejection toward English. (Yi-Tang)

Droop and Verhoeven's (1998) and Latham & Markham (2006) 's cross-cultural comparison confirmed that the background knowledge transformed from L1 helped significantly L2 learners' comprehension of the target language. Learners tended to be able to produce more detailed and accurate contents associated with their native

culture. As a L2 learner (English and Japanese) myself, I realized from my own experience the significant role my L1 cognitive resources played during the learning process. I relied heavily on them in the beginning. I often felt frustrated and clumsy when dealing with reading and listening contents beyond the scope of my knowledge, especially under pressured circumstances (such as taking tests), which once demotivated me.

5.2 Students' Low English Proficiency

Many survey teachers (63%) agreed that students' low English proficiency was one of the principal obstacles for CLT. Such agreement asserted by half of the elementary and secondary teacher interviewees who noted that their students' English proficiency was lower than it was expected despite their early English learning started at the 1st or 3rd grade. Junior-high teacher, Maiwen, found that her newcomers did not possess enough amount of English vocabulary and knowledge after graduating from elementary school. She stated "last summer I tested their vocabulary ability. Elementary school students should learn at least 300 words listed in the curriculum. The result showed that less than 50% of the newcomers knew more than 100 vocabularies." Teaching at a remoter area, Marion faced a more serious situation. Each year, she meets newcomers who may not recognize the 26 alphabets and the corresponding phonics. To deal with the situation, she spent extra time teaching these basic concepts before the beginning of the new semester, as she noted "newcomers' lack of basic knowledge. It often take me two to three weeks to re-build the foundation." The above-mentioned situation repeated among senior high schools, thus creating a vicious circle. Meizhu blamed this on students' indifferent attitude and the failure of an adequate testing system, as she said, "these students have given up learning since they were elementary students. Some of them didn't even know the 26 alphabets. Still, they graduated and came to my class without fundamental knowledge and motivation to improve." Teachers' concern extended to sentence-structure and eventually conversation level. Most students were not equipped with the ability of spontaneous utterance. Therefore, a CLT activity, despite the spirit embedded, would no longer be communicative-oriented,

I tried before to ask my students to role play the dialogues in the textbook. Then, they need to discuss freely about the topic. Only few of them can do it. Many of them rely on the textbook to read aloud the dialogues.
(Wen-Wen)

Evidently, students' inadequate English ability and insufficient proficiency impeded teachers' CLT realization. With such deficiency, no matter how hard the teachers tried, all of the efforts put and good intentions embraced could be 'military tactics on paper'.

5.3 Student's 'Communication' Problems

Students' unwillingness to communicate was pointed out by 63% of the survey teachers as a constraint. Differing from Zhu's (2003) and Rao's (2002) suggestion that Chinese students tend to be silent in the classroom because of cultural values and traditional styles, English competence was the first factor swaying students' willingness to communicate at CM. "Students' English proficiency and willingness to speak English are positively correlated," suggested Shuzen. Self-confidence was the second factor. "Huh...maybe they were not confident. If I asked them questions in English, they did not give me many responses or answers," stated Luo Laohsi. Occasionally, they used their mother tongue or even the local dialects for responses, as Mengjie reported, "if being asked to answer in English, they hemmed and hawed. Sometimes, they uttered in Taiwanese or Hakka with their frowning eyebrows." Students used English when they were forced to. Often Chinese was the main tool for activity preparation (as agreed by 64% of the survey teachers that students tended to communicate in Chinese when doing group discussion). English was utilized later for presentation. They used Chinese more for group discussion and English to perform or for whole-class discussion", suggested Xinpe.

No matter which language is chosen as the major instrument, a communication-unbalancing situation existed. Only few students were able to answer questions correctly and loudly. Most of them were silent. Those better-proficient students (almost a quarter of the students) were more willing to express their opinion and be involved in the activities. Undoubtedly, "these better-proficient students were more active in terms of doing discussions and answering questions" (Shuzen). The unbalanced situation polarized class interaction, thus irritating the teachers. One-third of the teacher interviewees reported that their few more capable students engaged actively and communicatively; whereas the passive and unwilling ones did things other than English communication, or nothing, as Maiwen asserted, "The better students participated more. The others (low proficient) might just chat (usually in Chinese). Sometimes, they sat idly and silently as if they did not care at all". Even though the better-proficient students were capable of communicating in English, teachers (one-third of the interview and almost 70% of the surveyed teachers) found the words and sentences they produced were limited. Their utterances were usually in either single word, or two- or three-word phrases (Deckert, 2004). Rarely were they able to produce full sentences.

Those who understood..., they seldom answered in complete English sentences. They answered things, like "Yes", "No"...or in single name and very short incomplete phrases. For example, if I asked, "Is Amy crying in the living room?", they might say 'Yes', or "Amy cring" instead of "Yes, she is", or "Yes, Amy is

crying”.

5.4 Students' Lack of Learning Motivation

Gardner and Lambert (1972) categorized L2 language learning motivation into integrative and instrumental orientations. Learners' L2 learning is integrative if they learn with a desire to interact with and become similar to the members speaking that L2. On the other hand, instrumental-oriented learners value the potential benefits the L2 learning may bring, such as getting a better job or higher salary in the future.

More than 50% of the survey teachers reported that students lacked in motivation to learn English. For many school learners at CM (even in many EFL settings), English was just one of the important school subjects tested (usually reading and grammar) regularly, but not an imminent one (Ellis, 1996) affecting significantly their daily lives. After all, the communities they live didn't rely on English as a main medium for communication. They lacked integrative motivation for advancement. Therefore, learning English became a 'need-to-do' routine, instead of 'want-to-do' passion. It was robotic. Students oftentimes memorized only the formulae (vocabulary, sentence patterns and even the whole dialogues) in the textbooks and neglected the application (communication), as Wenwen observed, “the sentences were more like mathematic formulas for the students. They may remember what was taught, but they won't use them after leaving the classes. Why?? No chances and needs to do...”

Some CM students were mountain aborigines who depended economically on agricultural tourism. Compared to their city or downtown peers, these learners' need for English and its application seemed frail. For example, DH village was famous for strawberries, sunflowers and hot springs, which brought considerable tourists and profit to its residents each year. The earnings might be even higher than those of a white-collar worker in big cities. On account of these agricultural and tourism benefits, most DH parents wanted their children to continue their business after accomplishing the fundamental education. Naturally, going to school and learning English didn't matter that much. Students' instrumental motivation was low. “Students were not interested in developing communication proficiency. Obtaining a higher education was not an incentive. They have no motivation. They could find jobs easily, like planting strawberries, to support their families.”, noted Yitang.

5.5 Parents' Attitude toward English Learning and CLT

Parental influences could be a decisive factor swaying students' learning success. The learners whose parents held a positive attitude toward a L2 were usually more motivated to learn and vice versa (Gardner, 1968). Yet, this positive attitude might become a negative force if it was overdone. Su (2006) observed that parents in metropolitan Taiwan tended to overemphasize English learning, which creates stress to the teachers and learners. Similarly, Anderson (1993) found that parents tended to put pressure on teachers to teach based on examinations.

Similar scenarios occurred here, but in a slightly different format. Fifty-six percent of the survey teachers pointed out that parents were indifferent toward communicative English learning; while 51% of them said that parents put much pressure on them for good testing results. When being asked if CLT has been carried out successfully so far, Yitang responded, “not even close...their indifferent attitudes bothered me...”. Many parents did not share the responsibility. They lacked involvement in their kids' learning and left it to the teachers, as Maiwan emphasized, “many parents thought it was us who needed to supervise their kids. They should be more involved. Simply making sure if their kids reviewed and listened to the assigned listening homework help.” The opposite extreme of 'indifferent' parents is the 'helicoptered' type. They were test-oriented. They cared about nothing, but high scores on all sorts of tests, resulting in constant pressure on the teachers and swaying their choice of teaching methods. To satisfy the parents and comply with the CLT policy, some teachers employed a 'method-switching strategy'. They used different teaching methods at different periods during the semester to satisfy parents' need and fulfill the policy.

I used CLT at the beginning of the semester and after each term exam. Before the term exams,

I needed to change back to the traditional method to give my students more grammatical and written exercises. Teach for the tests. This is countryside. Parents valued the test scores and seen them as an index for learning outcome. (Kuojin)

5.6 Teachers' English Proficiency

English proficiency has been a concern to many EFL teachers (Bulter, 2004). This concern took several forms. Some teachers worried that their language were unbalanced among four skills (Bulter, 2004; Chang, 2006; Li, 1998), deficient in oral proficiency (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999), and low on strategic and sociolinguistic competence (Li, 1998). Many others felt that they were not equipped to teach communicatively (Anderson, 1993) and unable to deal with students' unforeseen needs (Littlewood, 2007). Accordingly, they struggled in conducting communication-oriented activities, or avoided teaching communication courses (Wada, 2002).

Many teachers in the study showed similar concerns about their English. Fifty-eight percent of them asserted that their communication proficiency was insufficient, and 67% claimed that they lacked knowledge related to appropriate language usage. “Non-native English-speaking teachers (NNESTs) have insufficient

confidence in oral communication”, responded Kaiwan. The root of the diffidence was inadequate practices and low motivation for improvement, as Yuelien responded, “after teaching English for more than ten years in secondary schools, I find that degrading is just a natural phenomenon. No chances to practice and no need for improvement.” These teachers’ worry reflected Cullen’s (1994) suggestions about NNETs, indicating a fact that NNETs “need to improve their own command of the language so that they can use it more fluently, and above all, more confident in the classroom.” (p. 164).

5.7 Lack of in-service training

Insufficient in-service training has been reported as one of the constraints, leading to teachers’ failure in CLT implementation (Li, 1998), and forcing teachers to stick to the traditional method (Brutt-Griffler & Samimy, 1999). This was an unfortunate reality, because training opportunities were often the occasions where teachers expected to find feasible solutions to the problems they have encountered. They became especially essential if they were related to new educational policy, which required extensive modifications for instruction.

To promote CLT policy, the MOE and many textbook publishers in Taiwan offered numerous on-the-job training workshops, although according to one-third of the teacher interviewees, many of them were fruitless. They were usually the announcement and advertisement of testing plans. “The workshops are not CLT-related at all. Many of the topics discussed were about General English Proficiency Test (GEPT)”, commented Luo Laoshi. Some were about the explanations of education ordinances, as Maiwen stated, “the occasions did not focus on teachers’ needs. The workshops or seminars... all they talked about was the latest education ordinances”. Similar dissatisfaction was observed in the survey, as 76% of the teachers thought that there were not enough CLT-related workshops to help dispel their doubts for enhancement. Despite the considerable amount of knowledge about language instruction teachers obtained before their on-site service, they inevitably encounter problems during their actual practices, especially for a new method, like CLT – the one learned at university method courses, but seldom or never operated in the field. It is natural that they concerned about their ability and CLT’s feasibility if the keys to their puzzles are not found.

5.8 Classroom management problem

Classroom management has been another concern since CLT’s popularity in EFL contexts (Littlewood, 2007). Among the factors causing this class-managing issue, large class size (30-100 students) and grouping students with heterogeneous language proficiency in the same class were constantly mentioned (Hiep, 2005, 2007; Jung & Norton, 2002; Saengboon, 2002; Yu, 2001). Similar scenarios occurred in this study, as many teachers (59%, 72% and 61%, respectively) asserted that big classes, students’ heterogeneous English proficiency and skills caused chaos, thus generating different kinds of problems. The issue of big class-size led to ‘controlling problem’. Teachers found it difficult to give balanced attention to all students, especially the low-proficient ones, as Yinyi agreed, “too many students.... more than 30. It was hard to monitor and often out-of-control when I asked them to do pair discussion. It was impossible to pay extra attention to the low-proficient ones.” Students’ heterogeneous English proficiency resulted in ‘grouping problem’. Teachers had difficulty to find suitable ways to group the students. Whatever technique they administered, an unbalance emerged ultimately.

I tried to categorize the students as the good-and low-proficient groups. I also mingled them by putting students of various proficient levels in one group. The good-proficient students dominated the activities, no matter inter- or intra-group discussions. They talked. The low proficient ones listened. (Xinpei)

Having students with heterogeneous language skills in one class is a CLT-constrained has not been addressed in previous studies. The students who can listen and speak fluently, but can’t read and write were included with the students possessing the opposite skills in one class, as Yuelien responded, “I have students good at speaking, but make spelling errors often for writing. I also get students who write good sentences, but have difficulties in speaking.” Such arrangement caused teachers troubles and extra effort in designing appropriate activity in order to ensure equal and balanced opportunities for language practices, as Maiwen admitted, “It requires much attention and concern to design and organize the activities. I have to make sure that the activities are good and flexible enough to involve all students. “

5.9 Class agenda problems

In the past, class meeting time was longer, but shortened along with the alternation of course outlines. “Chinese and English were listed in the category of language under the new course outlines. The subjects of the same category need to share a fixed amount of meeting time, reducing the class time of both subjects.”, pointed out Shuzen. Many teachers (57% of the survey and eight out of the 15 interviewed) complained that such alternation made class meeting insufficient. Too many materials needed to be taught as Luo Laoshi commented, “my students and I meet four times a week, which is obviously insufficient. I have to teach the contents of more than 20 pages”. Under the time pressure, despite their belief in the importance of developing students’ oral communication ability and strong desire in practicing CLT, teachers found it unrealistic. “It takes time to conduct CLT activities. I run

out of time every time when I do free talk”, suggested Menjie.

Another class logistic constraint remarked by more than half of the survey (58%) and interview (three-fifths) teachers was tight schedule. To possibly cover entire materials, school authorities pre-designed a schedule, listing in detailed the dates of three main term exams and other curricular-related events. Teachers were always forced to accept the fixed schedule and designed their lessons accordingly and strictly. They sacrificed students’ fun time, as Yinyi said, “I need to use all of the time to teach the content pre-arranged by school authority in order to deal with the term-exams. So, we do not play games often.” As a result, they gave up after a brief venture for CLT, and stuck to the traditional teacher-lectured GTM for quick and effective test results.

5.10 CLT textbooks

Teaching materials are the best and the most convenient resources allow teachers access to various activities and ideas to facilitate instruction and promote communication among students (Pan, 2013). Unfortunately, according to Jung & Norton (2002), they were usually the most difficult part for CLT realization. In Taiwan and many Asian countries, textbooks compiled after CLT policy followed a similar pattern, starting with a set of CLT-featured guidelines released by MOE. Publishers compiled, and revised the textbooks accordingly. Teachers were usually put at the end of this assembly line. If they were lucky enough, they were permitted to make ‘personal’ choice among these licensed textbooks. If not, they were just forced to use the ones selected by school authorities who were usually not English teachers (Richards, 1993). Seldom were teachers’ voices taken into account during the process. Compared to the previous non-CLT textbooks, these CLT-featured editions, albeit the improvement and localization (Cam Le, 2005), still didn’t meet many EFL teachers’ needs. Being the first-hand users, over 60% of the survey teachers confirmed that the textbooks circulated currently, were not CLT enough (Wu, 2001).

One-third of the interview teachers perceived the difference. They felt that the textbooks were not as interesting as many ESL (English as a second language) versions, thus failing to win students’ attention. “I don’t like the contents of the textbook. They are not appealing and vivid. The designs and format are dull. They lack motivational elements. The American-based materials are more colorful and better.”, commended Meiwen. Orientation was another dissimilarity observed among the textbooks of different grade levels. The materials used for elementary students listed contents related more to students’ daily life and background knowledge. The activities suggested in the manual granted teachers easier access to provide learners CLT experiences. Contrarily, the books for junior and senior high levels were text-oriented. “The only CLT activity inserted was pre-reading activities connected to the main reading of each unit” (Meizhu).

5.11 Standardized paper-based tests

EFL teachers were often pressured to teach to meet with pre-designed language testing requirements for assessment in schools or higher education entrance examinations, which were usually paper-based formats (Aldred & Miller, 2000; Kleinsasser & Sato, 1999; Li, 1998; Saengboon, 2002; Sato, 2002; Wang, 2002) testing students’ reading, grammar and translation. These standardized paper-formed tests (include questions of true-false, matching, multiple choice, fill-in-the-blank and translation between English and learners’ native language) often “have limited utility in contexts of assessment” (Canagarajah, 2006, p.240). They failed to reflect accurately and fairly students’ language competence and learning outcomes, and became one of the restraints for CLT (as reported by 63% of the survey teachers). “Because the paper-based tests are the major testing formats, developing communication proficiency via CLT becomes difficult. Oral communication is not even tested”, noted Wenwen. Higher education entrance examination (HEEE) was another test-related constraint. The influences of HEEE were so significant that its result swayed each learner’s enrolling opportunities among senior high schools and universities, thus making English teaching score-oriented, as Yinyi asserted, “the major examinations for higher education impeded CLT. Still, I have to teach for the big exams.” Actually, the MOE in Taiwan reformed the format for HEEE a few years ago, by including translation and composition. But, the test of communication proficiency was excluded. The exclusion decreased teachers’ willingness to adopt CLT in their classes, rendering it difficult to further fulfill the spirit of CLT and the goal of the education reformation per se, as Xinpei commented, “Tests and teaching content must be correlated. It’s hard to teach communication, if it is not tested. I believe many teachers spend time teaching for that, but I believe they spend much more time teaching reading and writing for tests.”

6. Implication of the Study

Many of the constraints mentioned in the rural settings in the study occurred in other big cities and many other EFL contexts. The following discussion, despite its particular focus on EFL teaching in rural settings, extends to other contexts where CLT prevails.

6.1 Enhancing learners’ L1 cognitive resources and English proficiency

Despite the geographical isolation and shortage of cultural stimulation, students residing in mountainous regions

and rural places still possess a certain amount of L1 cognitive capability and English proficiency, which may contribute significantly to learners' learning if being wisely activated and utilized. To build up students' new cognitive capability based on what they have already had, the building background component and activities (BBCAs) imbedded in the Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model¹ are feasible.

According to Vogt and Echevarria (2008), the emphasis of BBCA was the provision of explicit concepts linking directly to learners' familiar background experiences and the new ones through various techniques. KWL chart (What We Know / What We Want to Learn / What We Learned) is a good example of a BBCA. When teaching an American Holiday, such as Thanksgiving, teachers using KWL chart (Figure 2) firstly elicit students' existing knowledge through whole-class discussion. Students may not be able to say everything in English. Teachers therefore translate what students say into English or let students who understand help with the translation. For W (what you want to know) and L (what you learned), classroom activities are transformed into group-work or pair-work. Learning together, students scaffold one another's knowledge and push their L1 and L2 cognitive capability to an upper level. Then, they develop to be multi-competent speakers rather than imitative English speakers (Cook, 1999)

Thanksgiving

K	W	L
What do you <u>KNOW</u> about Thanksgiving?	What do you <u>WANT</u> to know about Thanksgiving?	What did you <u>LEARN</u> about Thanksgiving?
美國人吃一種動物慶祝感恩節。 (Americans eat a kind of animal to celebrate Thanksgiving.)	The animal is...??	It's turkey.

Figure 2: An example KWL Chart for topic-Thanksgiving.

6.2 Using students' short utterance and L1 production

According to Cook (2001), Harbord (1992), Shin (2006) and Tang (2002), students' short utterance (one of the characteristics of foreigner talk²), and judicious use of first language actually facilitate foreign language learning. To create and promote interaction and communication using learners' foreigner talk and first language, teachers create learning opportunities, or utilize the ones created by learners. The construction of learners-created opportunities should be based on a non-threatening and opinion-welcoming learning atmosphere (Kumaravadivelu, 1992). Teachers view themselves as facilitators or participants who try to utilize students' utterances (either in L1 or L2). They view students' each utterance as a ball. When a ball is generated and thrown to them, teachers should always toss the ball back to their students (for more techniques for utilizing students' short utterance, see Klippel, 1984). The following is a simulated illustration. The teacher initiates a topic and receives an answer in Chinese from a student. He / She further uses the Chinese answer as a cue to elicit more interactions.

¹ Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol (SIOP) Model: is a research-based and validated instructional model that has proven effective in addressing the academic needs of English learners throughout the United States. The SIOP Model consists of eight interrelated components: lesson preparation, building background, comprehensible input, strategies, interaction, practice/application, lesson delivery, and review/assessment. (SIOP Model Professional Development, p.1) For more detailed about SIOP, please visit <http://www.cal.org/siop>.

² Foreigner talk is a natural L2er utterance occurring during L2 learning process. Simple and high-frequency vocabulary usage is one of the characteristics. Other features include long pauses, slow speech rate, careful articulation, loud volume, and stress on key words, simply grammatical structures, topicalization, more syntactic regularity and retention of full forms (Long, 1996 cited in Saville-Troike, 2006, p.106)

T: What can you see in the zoo?
S1: 老虎 (láohǔ)..
T: (look at others and ask) What is a 老虎 (láohǔ) ?
S2: a 老虎(láohǔ) is a tiger.
T: So tell me ‘what can you see in the zoo?’
Ss: Tigers
T: (open her arms to gesture ‘saying again in full sentence’) I can see

Ss: I can see Tigers
T: What else??
S3: I can see Monkeys.
T: good. Now stand up and ask a classmate ‘What can you see in the zoo?’
Ss:.....

6.3 Motivational strategies

Dörnyei and Csizér (1998) proposed ten most efficient language motivational commandments, which effectively activate students’ English learning motivation: (1) Set a personal example with their own behavior: share personal interest in and the learning of English by showing students that teachers’ own learning experiences lead to enrichment to their life; (2) Create a pleasant, relaxed learning atmosphere: avoid negative criticism and treatment and use special anxiety reduction activities, like pair work, games and realia. (Young, 1991); (3) Present language learning tasks properly: try to match the tasks with students’ abilities and make them as learning opportunities, but not requirements to be judged. Raise students’ interest in accomplishing the tasks by connecting to what they have already known; (4) Develop good relationship with the learners: be empathic (sensitive to learners’ needs, feelings and perspectives), congruent (behave teachers’ own true self) and acceptive (non-judgmental and positive) to develop a warm rapport with the students; (5) Increase learners’ self-confidence: constantly highlighting what students *can do*, rather than *can’t do*. Demystify mistakes and point out that communication is more important than not making mistakes or finding the right words. Talk openly teachers’ English shortcomings (6) Make English classes interesting: select and adapt various activities and games. Make sure there is always something innovative about each new activity to increase or maintain students’ involvement. (see Betteridge, Buckby & Wright, 1984; Shaposhvili, 2002; Klippel, 1984 for ideas for more teaching activities and games); (7) Promote learner autonomy: share responsibilities for organizing learning time and effort with students, and invite them to design and prepare activities to enhance peer-teaching (like project work); (8) Personalize the learning process: base the syllabus on students’ need analysis and discuss with students the choice of teaching materials; (9) Increase learners’ goal-orientedness: help students to set sub-goals for language learning (like learning 50 new words every week). Students are more likely to invest learning strategies and achieve success with a goal (Ames & Archer, 1988); (10) Familiarize learners with L2 culture: play English music, films or TV program. Invite native speakers to classes or find pen pals for the students (Dörnyei, 1994, p281-282).

Among the above ten motivational recommendations, seven and ten more or less resemble CLT’s spirit and share some similarities with Savignon’s (2001) 21st century CLT curriculum. They help increase not only students’ English learning motivation, but also communication ability with proper application.

6.4 Alternative assessment: assessing students’ communicative competence

Developing a suitable tool for oral-proficient assessment can be a challenge for many EFL teachers. Integrated Performance Assessment (IPA), a tool designed to meet the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines¹, provides a good model to meet the need for valid and reliable assessment to determine students’ competence (Adair-Hauck et al., 2006). Under IPA’s framework, language performances can be divided into three types of task. Each is further originated to fit the learners of a specific level.

- I. Interpretive communication task: students are required to read or listen to an authentic text (weather forecast, commercial, a letter...etc.) and then reiterate the text or answer questions relevant to the text either in spoken or written form.
- II. Interpersonal communication task: dual interpretation and negotiation between two learners are the requirement for the task. One student is given exclusively information that the other person do not have about a particular topic. They therefore need to exchange and negotiate to obtain the missing information.
- III. Presentational task: the activity used at this phase is one-way. Learners are required to give presentation of an assigned topic to a specific group of audience (teachers, classmates or parents), such as giving a

¹ American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Language (ACTFL) proficiency guidelines: are standards developed by ACTFL to serve as a direct reference when deciding learners’ target language proficiency for teachers of the foreign languages taught in the USA. (For more information, please visit <http://www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1>).

speech on an event or introducing things they created.

If the IPA model is proper to oral proficiency assessment, portfolio assessment would be an excellent assessment tool for other language skills (mostly reading and writing). Portfolio assessment, is a purposeful “collection of evidence used by the teacher and students to monitor the growth of the students’ knowledge of content, use of strategies, and attitudes toward the accomplishment of goals in an organized and systematic way” (Moore, 1994, p. 170). What goes into students’ portfolios are determined by teachers or students themselves, depending on the learning goals and what should be shown for goal achievement (Pierce & O’Malley, 1992). Farr & Tone (1998) provided some general guidelines for collections, and Chen (2000) suggested the actual items should include: (1) sets of papers reflecting students’ cognitive learning processes, such as rough drafts from different genres (letters, essays report and personal narratives), polished products, and learning log; (2) reaction and reflection papers showing feelings, problem solving and critical thinking, and dialog journal reflecting numerous purposes for writing and reading; (3) books or other reading materials, selected classroom tests, audiotapes of students’ reading, displaying the examples of what students accomplish and read; and (4) Art, audio/video recordings, photographs, exhibiting students’ mastered skills.

In Pierce & O’Malley’s (1992) words, these two types of assessment (performance and portfolio assessment) complement each other in terms of evaluating students’ overall performance and bring the washback effect on teachers’ instruction. They emphasized that performance and portfolio assessment “together represent authentic assessment, continuous assessment of student progress, possibilities for integrating assessment with instruction, assessment of learning process and higher-order thinking skills, and a collaborative approach to assessment that enables teachers and students to interact in the teaching/learning process”(p.2).

7. Conclusion

“In our daily lives, we are surrounded by the shifting tides of change. Change is natural, varied and complex, simply a part of the way we live” (James, 2001, p.9). English has long been recognized as an international communication tool. In an attempt to increase the number of people who can communicate efficiently in English for the fast-growing economic globalization, many Asian countries have launched a series of English education reformations (Littlewood, 2007). New syllabi featuring Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to enhance students’ interest in English communication and develop learners of effective and appropriate communicative competence (proficiency) were released (Hu, 2005; Jung & Norton, 2002; Zhang, 2006; Yoon, 2004). English was suggested as the major instrument for instruction. Communication-oriented classes implemented at undergraduate and high school levels were lowered and practiced starting from the secondary, even the 3rd grade (Hu, 2005; Hui, 2001; Liao, 2004; Wang, 2002) in many EFL contexts. The publication of a ‘fresh’ curriculum emphasizing CLT-related characteristics initiated a new era for English education in Taiwan, too. The CLT-featured textbooks were subsequently recommended and adopted. English-only policy was advocated then (Ministry of Education, 2014; Wang, 2002). Doubtlessly, many of the actions further declared English’s dominance in the classrooms and the momentousness of teaching and acquiring it through CLT. However, despite the ambition and the good intention embedded within the reformation, without sufficient supports and comprehensive preparation, the results could be disappointing.

In fact, prior to its prevalence in EFL settings, CLT has long been alienated due to its failure in fitting into the social-cultures in Asian countries after its debut. Problems have consequently been reported and doubts regarding its applicability have risen (Barkhuizen, 1998; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei & Thurrell, 1997; Hu, 2002; Li, 1998; Lo, 2001; Shamim, 1996; Yu, 2001). Simple factors, such as learning motivation, values and belief (about students’ and teachers’ roles in the classroom and teaching philosophies) potentially impaired its implemental efficacy (Aldred & Miller, 2000; Ellis, 1996; Lo, 2001; Zhu, 2003). The policies administrated by school authorities aggravated the ‘alien problems’. (Hiiep, 2005, 2007; Zhang, 2006). They tended to put a large number of students with various-degree of English proficiency in one class (Li, 1998; Saengboon, 2002) and asked teachers to use non-CLT-oriented textbooks to teach for paper-based examination. Parents’ high expectation of good test result forced teachers to moved back to the traditional GTM (Su, 2006; Wang, 2002).

The English-reformed movemets in Asia, the discussion of the impact of CLT-related activities on language acquisition and many of the previous descriptions about practical resistances asserted a fact that CLT was indeed appreciated by teachers. The cultivation of students’ communicative competence was undeniably essential. Despite the extension, rare were they linked directly to rural teachers whose distinct perspectives counted.

During their CLT practice, rural teachers in Taiwan faced various issues related to themselves, students, parents and school system. They found themselves under-proficient in their communicative competence because of lack of constant practices, and felt most in-service workshops were not for CLT, but for the advertisement of educational policy. They noticed most of their students lack adequate English proficiency, L1 cognitive resources (low L1 literacy and knowledge) and low learning motivation and had communication-willingness problems (willingness to communicate in their L1, in single or short utterances. They thought classroom management problematic because of inappropriate students arrangement (school authority’s grouping students of heterogeneous

proficiency and skills in the same class), large class size (usually more than 30) and unbalanced-dominant situation (some students engage actively in the CLT activities, but some just sit silently). They worried about problems caused by class agenda, including short and insufficient class meeting time, tight schedule (too many materials need to be covered), textbooks, standardized paper tests and parents' heterogeneous (either indifferent or too concerned) attitudes.

Most of the constraints revealed in the study resemble what has been reported in many reviewed studies. These issues include (1) teachers' concern of their English proficiency (Bulter, 2004; Burnaby & Sun, 2007; Cheng & Sun, 2000; Kubota, 2002; Li, 1998; Littlewood, 2007; Wada, 2002) and lack of CLT training opportunities (Li, 1998; Wang, 2002); (2) students' low English proficiency (Li, 1998), low learning motivation (Ellis, 1996; Hiep, 2005; 2007; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002); (3) students communication willingness: avoiding of English while preferring for Chinese or communicating in single English words or short phrases (Bulter, 2004; Littlewood, 2007;); (4) parents' over-emphasis on their children's English learning outcome (Aldred & Miller, 2000; Su, 2006); (5) classroom management problems, including large class size (Hiep, 2005, 2007; Jung & Norton, 2002; Li, 1998; Saengboon, 2002; Yu, 2001), grouping students of heterogeneous language proficiency in the same class (Saengboon, 2002); (6) class agenda problems, including short class meeting time and tight pre-designed schedule (Yu, 2001); and (7) issues engendered by the so-called CLT-ized textbooks (Jung & Norton, 2002) and standardized paper-based tests (Hiep, 2005, 2007; Li, 1998; Saengboon, 2002; Wang, 2002). Major differences unclosed are students' low L1 cognitive resources, parents' indifferent attitudes toward communicative-English education, and the assortment of students of heterogeneous language skills into the same class. Scholars who are interested in the continuous exploration of the similar topics may consider classroom observation for the witness of rural teachers' actual CLT practice and data enrichment. The phenomena regarding students' low L1 cognitive resources were topics worthy of further investigation.

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