

## **WILL COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING WORK? TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS TOWARD THE NEW EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN SOUTH KOREA**

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**Abstract:** This study examines how Korean elementary and secondary school teachers perceive the seventh national curriculum focusing on communicative language teaching. Thirty-seven participants were surveyed with a questionnaire designed grounded in Li (1998) and interviewed individually for about 15-20 minutes. The collected data was analyzed based upon Stake's (2000) theme-based approach. The results showed that teachers' perception onto CLT was very limited to speaking skills. The main issue concerning the teachers coming from different school levels was varied. Elementary school teachers were more concerned about enhancing students' involvement, whereas secondary school teachers pointed out the difficulty of implementing CLT due to the heavy focus on the paper-and-pencil format of college entrance exam. In addition, novice teachers were more skeptical than experienced ones in terms of the feasibility of CLT in the actual classroom context, even though they were thought to be more familiar to the concept of CLT. This study is expected to provide us with an opportunity to revisit a decade-old concept of CLT in Korean context in more critical way.

**Keywords:** communicative language teaching, curriculum, teachers' perception, language policy

## **AKANKAH PENGAJARAN BAHASA KOMUNIKATIF BERHASIL? PERSEPSI-PERSEPSI GURU TERHADAP REFORMASI PENDIDIKAN BARU DI KOREA SELATAN**

**Abstrak:** Kajian ini meneliti bagaimana guru-guru sekolah dasar dan menengah Korea memahami kurikulum nasional ketujuh yang berfokus pada pengajaran bahasa komunikatif. Tiga puluh tujuh peserta dijangki pendapatnya dengan sebuah angket yang dirancang berdasarkan temuan Li (1998) dan diwawancara satu per satu selama sekitar 15-20 menit. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis berdasarkan pendekatan berbasis tema oleh Stake (2000). Hasilnya menunjukkan bahwa persepsi guru terhadap Pengajaran Bahasa komunikatif (*Communicative Language Teaching/CLT*) sangat terbatas pada keterampilan-keterampilan berbicara. Masalah utama yang berhubungan dengan latar belakang sekolah guru yang berbeda-beda sangat beragam. Guru-guru sekolah dasar lebih memperhatikan peningkatan keterlibatan siswa, sementara guru-guru sekolah menengah menyebutkan kesulitan penerapan CLT karena fokus yang sangat besar pada format ujian tertulis masuk universitas. Selain itu, para guru pemula lebih skeptis dibanding yang berpengalaman dalam hal keterlaksanaan CLT dalam konteks kelas yang sebenarnya, meskipun mereka dianggap lebih mengenal konsep CLT. Kajian ini diharapkan bisa memberikan kesempatan bagi kita untuk mengkaji ulang konsep CLT yang sudah berumur satu dekade dalam konteks Korea dengan lebih kritis.

**Katakunci:** Pengajaran Bahasa komunikatif (CLT), kurikulum, persepsi guru, kebijakan bahasa

In the middle of 1990s, the Korean government made an ambitious plan of educational reform in the teaching of English. This ambitious educational reform came from the long-held criticism that Korean students could not express themselves in English even though when they had learned English for a long time. The goals of the educational reform were to begin teaching English to young children, and to focus on Communicative Language Teaching (hereafter, CLT) as opposed to the traditional grammar/translation approaches. As a result, students from the third grade in elementary schools began learning English as an official subject. In secondary schools, a newly reformed English language educational policy put more emphasis on communicative competence development (Ministry of Education, 1997).

It has been more than 10 years since this monumental policy was implemented in the actual English classroom settings, and there have been quite amount of research with regard to the advent of CLT in Korean English language education. Most previous literatures presented how inappropriate CLT was in the English as a foreign language (hereafter, EFL) contexts, and how substantively CLT should be readjusted to the specific teaching-learning context (Bax, 2003; Guanyoung & Liying, 2000; Li, 1997, 1998; Nunan, 2003). Another line of research illustrated why listening to teachers' voice was important (Choi, 1999; Eun, 2001; Gorsuch, 1999). Choi (1999) and Gorsuch (1999) showed that even though teachers believed in the benefits of CLT, they were not consistent with their beliefs in their teaching practices. They also pointed out that teachers' misunderstanding of CLT could mislead the well-planned policy in different directions. In other words, despite the

central role of teachers in implementing the educational policy, disempowerment of teachers and exclusion of practitioners' opinions when deciding an educational policy are still pervasive (Eun, 2001). In addition, as Li (1997, 1998) and other researchers (Guanyoung & Liying, 2000; Nunan, 2003) identify that there are still several concerns among Korean teachers of English about not having sufficient English proficiency, materials, proper assessment for CLT, and so on.

It is true that these studies have shed light upon the government policy change and the logical reasoning why we need to consider teaching communication skills with CLT in our English classrooms especially in a theory level. However, the critical approaches to CLT would add some insights to the educational policy, the relations and gaps between the policy and actual classroom situations, and practical concerns of English teachers. In addition, since previous research did not involve elementary school level concerns when implementing CLT, including elementary English teachers' voices will add valuable information. It will be very meaningful to listen to practitioners' opinion toward the new policy change and their concerns about it. With this in mind, I surveyed and interviewed Korean elementary and secondary English teachers in terms of their perceptions toward CLT in Korean context and their opinions about CLT that dominates the new educational policy. The main objectives of the present study are to identify the current teachers' perception onto CLT, their opinions and concerns regarding the curriculum change, and the differences of their opinions between *pre*- and *post*-curriculum change.

### **What Happened in Korean English Educational Policy?: Contextual Information**

Korean English educational policy has been changed seven times since 1964. The official name of the current national curriculum is "the modified seventh national curriculum," which shows the close connection to the seventh national curriculum. It is sometimes referred to as the eighth national curriculum, but that is not an official name from the Ministry of Education. The importance of the communicative competence has been emphasized since the fourth curriculum period on paper. However, it is the seventh curriculum period that the "practical" teaching guideline for teachers was shown to improve students' communicative competence. The purpose of the English education in the seventh curriculum is stated as following.

Compared to the sixth national curriculum, the seventh national curriculum has six conspicuous characteristics (Lim &

Jeon, 2001), and again, these characteristics are applicable to the current national curriculum as well. Thus, the word, "modified," is inserted in the parenthesis before the word of the seventh national curriculum. First, the seventh national curriculum highlights the communicative competence, and the development of the language use ability. It makes students understand the importance of English as a global language and be prepared in this knowledge-information based era with proficient English communicative skills. In fact, it is difficult to make a unified definition of the communicative competence. After Hymes (1971) suggested a concept of the communicative competence consisted of tacit knowledge and ability for actual language use, several scholars tried to interpret the communicative competence in line with Hymes (Bachman, 1990; Breen & Candlin, 1980; Canale & Swain, 1980; Widdowson, 1978).

#### Table 1. The Purpose of English Education in the Seventh National Curriculum

The purpose of the English education is to develop students' English communicative competence that can enable them to understand and use English in everyday life. In addition, English education is to provide the basis of expanding our own culture as well as receiving foreign cultures properly.

- A. Students have an interest and confidence toward English, and are supposed to grow communicative competence in English.
- B. Students can communicate with general topics in everyday life.
- C. Students can understand various foreign tones, and develop ability to utilize them.
- D. Students can comprehend foreign cultures so that they are supposed to perceive our own culture in a new way, and grow right sense of value.

(This data is from Ministry of Education, 1997, p.27)

Among these different definitions, Canale and Swain's (1980) concept of communicative competence is especially noteworthy because it categorizes four sub-competences that expand the concept beyond the realm of linguistic competence. The four sub-competences of communicative competence are (1) grammatical competence, (2) sociolinguistic competence, (3) discourse competence, (4) strategic competence. The grammatical competence is the linguistic

competence such as phonetic, syntactic, and semantic aspects of the language. The sociolinguistic competence is the ability to use the language according to the given social context. The discourse competence refers to the capability to compose the text coherently and cohesively based on the grammatical knowledge. The strategic competence means the skill to proceed the conversation with a proper linguistic/ meta-linguistic competences. Since Canale and Swain's (1980) definition of

communicative competence is the closest to what the Korean Ministry of Education means by communicative competence, I follow Canale and Swain's (1980) definition of communicative competence when I come up with a checklist for data analysis.

Second, the (modified) seventh national curriculum stresses oral language education. This is based upon the criticisms that the Korean English education has been focused on written language education too much, although the educational purpose mentioned the equal improvement of the

four skills. This principle affects both in the elementary and in the secondary levels. For the elementary level, English education starts without letters and for the secondary level, much attention is drawn upon the sounds, compared to the past. The (modified) seventh national curriculum presents the categories of sound language and written language in relation to the four language skills. Based on Table 2, the emphasis on the sound language means the attention on listening and speaking in this article.

Table 2. Language Functions and Language Skills

Language Function	Oral Language	Written Language
Receptive Skills	Listening	Reading
Productive Skills	Speaking	Writing

(This data is from Ministry of Education, 1997, p.27)

Third, the (modified) seventh national curriculum emphasizes the activity-, process-, and task-based learning. The (modified) seventh national curriculum invites various games, role-plays, and songs in order to make students learn English in interesting and natural ways through group and experiential activities. The (modified) seventh national curriculum

clearly mentions the 13 teaching methods as following Table 3. The emphasis on various activities is presented well in number (1), (2) and (9), and the highlight on the process and task-based learning is reflected on (3), (6) and (7). I refer to these six categories in particular to define the classroom activity and task-based learning.

Table 3. Recommended Teaching Methods in the (Modified) Seventh National Curriculum

Teachers are to develop and use various teaching methods in order to promote students' task-based learning.

- (1) Use chants, and songs to enhance students' interest and motivation.
- (2) Activities such as plays and games are encouraged.
- (3) Language proficiency level based teaching is recommended. Both individual and cooperative learning are supported.
- (4) Various teaching methods should be applied according to the study purpose and content.
- (5) Teaching materials for the deeper/supplementary classes ought to be designed.
- (6) In addition to various teaching materials for the deeper/supplementary classes, various forms of students' activities- individual, pair, small-group, big group- should also be encouraged so as to facilitate learner-centered learning.
- (7) Individual, small-group activities are especially proposed for the supplementary classes.
- (8) The purpose for the supplementary classes is to help students be involved in the class with the modified teaching materials in accordance with their language level.
- (9) Use as much as audio-visual teaching materials and multimedia.
- (10) For the beginning level of speaking and writing, focus on the transmission of the meaning, then, gradually stress on the fluency.

- (11) In terms of speaking teaching, avoid instant feedback of students' error especially they are in the beginning level.
- (12) Introduce English-speaking countries' culture with appropriate contexts.
- (13) Let students know the difference between Korean and English.

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(This data is from Ministry of Education, 1997, p.41)

Fourth, the (modified) seventh national curriculum specifies the goal of English education by offering detailed contents of communicative function examples and increasing the number of basic words to be taught significantly. Communicative function is a concept as complex as communicative competence. Communicative function is mainly about the intention that the speaker wants to convey in communicative contexts (Halliday, 1978). Since the communicative contexts themselves are extensive and complex, it is hard to have one clear picture of communicative function. Among several interpretations of communicative function (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Halliday, 1978; van EK, 1976; Wilkins, 1976), van EK's classification of communicative function is noteworthy. He classifies communicative function into six categories (1) Imparting and seeking factual information, (2) Expressing and finding out intellectual attitude, (3) Expressing and finding out emotional attitude, (4) Expressing and finding out moral attitude, (5) Getting things done (suasion), and (6) Socializing, and presents the sub-functions of each communicative function systematically. Since communicative functions shown in the seventh curriculum consists of (1) Socializing, (2) Exchanging factual information, (3) Expressing intellectual attitude, (4) Expressing emotions, (5) Expressing moral attitude, (6) Giving advice, and (7) Imagining, it can be said that communicative function in the seventh curriculum is mostly consistent with van EK's definition of communicative function. By communicative function, I mean these

seven communicative functions in this article.

Fifth, the (modified) seventh national curriculum encourages the proficiency level-based curriculum (deepening/supplementary activities). It gives more opportunities to both advanced level students and lower level students by providing level-specified contents. It stimulates small group activities that can help teachers develop the ideal individual teaching-learning environment (Lee, 2004). The proficiency level-based curriculum is applied from 7<sup>th</sup> graders to 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and the Ministry of Education mentions the basic definition as follows:

Stratified proficiency level based curriculum: This is applied from the 7<sup>th</sup> grade to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Students only who pass the test at the end of the class can be promoted to the next level class. This can be called as a free-of-grade level based curriculum. If there is a gap within one level, deeper/supplementary classes are operated. (p.29)

By definition, the (modified) seventh national curriculum introduces unprecedented concept like "individualization of the learning rate." In this article, I define proficiency level-based learning as individualized lessons according to students' proficiency levels.

Finally, the (modified) seventh national curriculum highly emphasizes on learner-centered education. It respects students' interests and needs. It also draws attention to students' voluntary participation and self-responsibilities as well as teachers' awareness toward the concept of the learner-centeredness (Lee,

2004). In fact, the term of learner-centeredness has been used since the sixth curriculum period; however, it was not a real learner-centered class reflecting on the definition of the (modified) seventh national curriculum. The (modified) seventh national curriculum elucidates learner-centered English education with the explication of two main factors: language proficiency level based learning, and right to select the subject based on students' own needs. The first notion is related to Breen and Candlin's (1980) definition of the learner-centeredness that means learners participate and negotiate actively in meaningful interactions in order to interpret and construct meaning by themselves. In other words, students are to learn English grounded in their English proficiency level, so that they can participate actively in the class. The second notion is associated with Nunan's (1988) idea of learner-centeredness that refers learners can learn better when they are aware of their own goal. In other words, giving students a right to choose the subject is a broad meaning of

the negotiation of the curriculum that can enhance students' motivation to take part in the class more actively. The learner-centeredness in this article indicates two elements mentioned above; proficiency level based learning and students' rights to select the subject depending on their needs.

Summing up, the seventh national curriculum can be called as a "dramatic change" in Korean English language education both in the policy and actual classroom implementation stages- the overall goal of English language education aims to enhance the communicative competence of students by inviting several new concepts and activities that are different from the past ones into the Korean English classrooms. However, more close investigations are needed in terms of teachers' readiness toward CLT because it is the teachers who are in charge of fulfilling these classroom activities, and leading the policy into success. That is why this study especially focuses on the teachers' perception toward the new educational reform in Korea.

#### *Appropriateness of CLT*

CLT in EFL contexts is a controversial issue in previous research in terms of whether CLT is an absolute solution in EFL contexts. For example, Bax (2003) argues about the strong need for a contextual approach, rather than emphasizing a method as a complete picture. According to Bax (2003), the aspects of contexts such as learners' attitudes, cultural expectations sometimes play more important role than the methods of teaching. Investigating the contexts where the specific teaching method will be implemented is the most important, but often neglected part. Choi (1999), Li (1997, 1998) and Guogyong and Liying (2000) demonstrate the empirical evidence which support Bax (2003). Guogyong and Liying (2000) examined how CLT curriculum can be implemented appropriately in EFL contexts. The research is conducted in

Private Pui Ching Commercial College (PPCCC), focusing on an English teaching program for students. Guogyong and Liying researched the dynamic nature of the contexts such as educational policy, educational tradition, language setting, teaching materials, instructors and learners. After understanding some contextual information of each variable, they try to question how the original meaning of CLT can be modified, what realistic goals of CLT can be achieved, and how teaching activities will look like. They adjust their curriculum for more learner-friendly; they adjust some activities to be meaningful to their students and to be feasible in their educational settings. Guogyong and Liying confirmed the need for compromise between CLT methodology and EFL contexts.

To focus more on teachers' perceived difficulties, Choi (1999) explores the three levels of teachers' perceptions of CLT in their English teaching: their beliefs on CLT, their CLT practices, and their perceptions on appropriateness of CLT in current school and classroom situations. Ninety seven junior high school English teachers are surveyed according to these three parts. The results show that even though teachers think CLT would benefit their students, they do not implement CLT much and keep using traditional grammar translation English teaching. School and classroom teaching environments are considered inappropriate for CLT as well. The participants had misconceptions about CLT in that CLT equals to "no grammar," and that CLT only means teacher-student interactions, rather than students-students interactions. This misleads their teaching practices of CLT. Moreover, testing blocks teachers' attempts to implement CLT since the tests are mostly about reading. This study implies that teachers should be provided not only a better environment to act upon what they believe in their real teaching but also an appropriate understanding of CLT and adjustment of CLT into their local contexts.

Li (1998) replicates a research done in China (Li, 1997) to Korean contexts to explore how educational reform to CLT can cause some difficulties on teachers' sides because of the misunderstandings and the mismatch between educational theories in CLT and the Korean-specific context. With a written questionnaire and follow-up interviews of 18 Korean EFL teachers, three categories of difficulties in relation to teachers themselves, students, educational system and CLT itself are found out. To elaborate more, teachers do not feel competent in their English pragmatic proficiencies, and they commonly point out lack of training and time constraints. Also, students' low motivation, proficiency, and resistance to participate in class are common concerns. Educational system

including class size, grammar-based exams, insufficient funding and support discourages CLT implementation. The main difficulty comes from CLT itself in terms of inappropriateness in EFL situations. The results from both Choi (1999) and Li (1998) have been a decade since the surveys were done, and the situation becomes different from when the policy was just enacted. Now, it is very possible that teachers have different concerns and opinions on the new policy of CLT. Thus, it will be meaningful to study this theme again in accordance with the current Korean contexts.

## **METHOD**

This study uses collective case study method of 37 Korean English teachers in order to examine *current* teachers' opinions and concerns related to the decade-old seventh national curriculum. According to Creswell (1998), the researcher collects multiple cases so as to describe and provide insight onto a particular issue in the collective case study. This is in the same line with Stake's (2000) notion of the case study that related sources are collected based upon the target topic investigated. Since the original purpose of case studies is to represent the specific cases and the contexts (Stake, 2000), there is no attempt to generalize the findings of this study and the interpretations are limited to the contexts of this specific research.

### *Participants*

Thirty-seven English teachers were selected both from elementary and secondary levels. Sixteen elementary school teachers were all homeroom teachers, and taught English as one of the subjects three class hours per week. Among 21 secondary level teachers, thirteen taught in the high school, whereas nine were middle school teachers. They were all English teachers who teach English 16 to 21 class hours per week, which means three or four hours per day. Six elementary

school teachers worked at the same school located in Seoul, and ten teachers worked at a school in Kyung-ki Province which is near Seoul. All of the secondary teachers worked at different schools- seventeen of them worked in Seoul, and four of them worked in Kyung-ki Province. The participants' teaching experiences ranged from 2 years to 26 years and their ages ranged from 24 to 49. They were divided into two groups, pre-curriculum change versus post-curriculum change, based upon the year that they had started teaching. If they had started teaching before the year 1997 when the seventh national curriculum was implemented, they were categorized as pre-curriculum change group. Thirteen of them were in pre-curriculum change group, while the rest of the participants were classified in the group of post-curriculum change. Finally, all of the participants were females except 2 high school teachers.

#### *Data collection*

Survey questionnaire on CLT, new educational policy and their teaching practices were collected in 2011. Li's (1998) survey questionnaire is duplicated with slight modification, by getting rid of one question that is not applicable to the present study (question #6) and adding the section for elementary school that Li (1998) did not target for. I add two more questions to understand the participants' perceptions on 7<sup>th</sup> curriculum (question # 11, 12) (See Appendix for detail). These two questions were asked as a form of verbal interview. I met each participant individually, asked them to fill out the questionnaire, and started an interview for about 15-20 minutes. All the interviews were done in English, recorded under the agreement of the participants, and later transcribed by me.

#### *Data analysis*

The survey and interview data were analyzed by theme-based approach. Stake (2000) argues that in case studies, the

themes emerge, rather than being presumed by the researcher beforehand. Thus, I focused on the contents or topics discussed, and interpreted those based upon the frameworks Li (1998) provided. As one way, discourse analysis was used with all the survey and interview data to see how the participants posit themselves and how they perceive the difficulties and think of the new curriculum in Korean English education. More specifically, narrative structural analysis (Labov and Waletzky, 1967) as one type of discourse analysis was applied. That is, wordings and pronoun usages and structures of their written discourse along with their relations to the bigger arguments and the use of transition words in their surveys and interviews were analyzed. In addition, to answer the third research question, I came up with six principles that the seventh national curriculum recommends teachers to do for communicative language teaching, and compared teachers' interpretations of communicative language teaching with those six principles.

### **FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The results consist of three different themes emerged. The first theme was linked to the first research question *Do teachers understand CLT well?* The second theme, about how teachers' perceptions changed from Li's (1998) findings, targets for the second research question and the last one, *Differences between novice and experienced teachers*., adds some insights for the third research question regarding the teacher variable.

#### *Do teachers understand CLT well?*

The data showed that many of the participants perceived CLT in very extreme ways. Most teachers (31 out of 37) regarded CLT as opposed to explicit grammar instruction, and CLT meant only oral communication. This was in the same line with what Choi (1999) found out in her study. This extreme position of CLT was

consistent with one of the seventh national curriculum principles: emphasizing sound language over written language. However, the seventh national curriculum also emphasized grammatical competence and increasing numbers of vocabulary to be taught. Thus, it could be concluded that teachers' understanding was quite limited. For example, when participant 1 and participant 16 mentioned what they understood regarding the seventh national curriculum, they both described CLT as speaking and listening.

Speaking and listening. The curriculum focusing on spoken language is good for students in a sense that it motivates them and interests them. I think actual abilities to use language in natural settings is far more important than reading and writing. CLT is good for developing students' speaking and listening abilities compared to other teaching method.  
(Participant 1)

The seventh national curriculum concentrates on CLT, that is speaking and listening. I taught in high school for more than 15 years, but before CLT the textbook was filled with blanks and grammar and vocabulary. Rote memorization was everything. But after CLT, one chapter starts with listening activity, and then usually it deals with speaking and group work. This shows how speaking and listening are valued in CLT.  
(Participant 16)

Other participants such as participant 30 and participant 31 even excluded other skills except speaking and contradicted grammar with CLT directly.

The curriculum focuses on communication skill more than grammar although it insists integrated learning. The name itself is communicative language teaching, right? Communication is the center and all the activities and games and other things are all about having a conversation with other people. That's CLT.

(Participant 30)

(...) The biggest characteristic of CLT is non-grammar characteristic. Before CLT, grammar was everything. All the school tests and exams were about grammar and you need to understand the text based upon grammar thing. If you don't know the grammar, you don't go to a good college and so on. At that time, no one really cared about communication. However, things are changed after CLT comes up. It's the opposite to grammar based teaching. Nowadays, we don't even mention grammatical terms in the classroom. If you can speak English well, that's the most important thing today.  
(Participant 31)

In addition, 22 out of 37 teachers argued that Korean testing system which focused mainly on reading and grammar blocked them to change their teaching practices in line with CLT. The original intention of their common comment was to point out the excessively dominant influence of the testing system in general, but at the same time, their comment displayed their biased perception onto CLT, "other than" reading and grammar. As seen in the previous section, however, the original concept of CLT includes balance reading and writing with speaking and listening in its characteristics (Canale & Swain, 1980). Hence, this showed that there should be reconceptualization of CLT in a more inclusive way.

(...)Under present system, what students want most for their English teachers is to get them well prepared for KSAT which largely evaluates one's proficiency in reading and grammar. Even though I want to do CLT things in the classroom, students don't really like it. You can see it, actually. They think it's just waste of time.  
(Participant 18)

What I usually do in the classroom is reading. I think I spend most of class time on reading and solving some questions about the reading text. I sometime do

communicative things like role play and those kind things, but students know that it will not be in their exam, so they don't do their best. And it's very very difficult to control them while you're doing those kind of activity. So, I usually just do the reading things, and I think most English teachers do like me in reality.  
(Participant 35)

Again, the ways that the teachers made sense of communicative language teaching were quite limited and extreme, and this did not represent the CLT principles in the seventh curriculum well at all. Even though it has been many years since the previous research pointed out the discrepancy in between the perception of CLT by English practitioners and the concept of CLT, the problem seemed to be still out there without changing (Choi, 1999; Eun, 2001; Gorsuch, 1999). Teachers need to have better understanding of what communicative language teaching means, and what teaching techniques or strategies would fall into this category of teaching method. Communication includes both oral and written interactions, and all four skills of language- speaking, listening, reading, and writing- should be balanced for better and sophisticated communication. Also, in order to communicate successfully, both proper grammar knowledge and vocabulary are needed to be taught, especially in EFL context like South Korea. Teachers should be aware that teaching grammar or instructing reading and grammar does not mean that it is against CLT. However, teaching only those does not mean CLT, either. What they need to do is that they should broaden their concepts of CLT in more inclusive way and find an optimal balance for the integration of four skills in language teaching.

### **The Policy Change is Still too Ambitious: Elementary vs. Secondary Level Concerns**

Li's (1998) findings are mostly confirmed in this research. The difficulties of students

and educational system are saliently consistent with Li (1998). Thirty-three teachers expressed their difficulties in terms of large classroom size, students' low proficiency level to do communicative activities, and tight curriculum that they should follow, giving them little room for communicative language teaching. What was different in the present study were that teachers do not think the communicative language teaching materials were lacking, and they felt confident with their English proficiency—their strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English—compared to what Li (1998) found out. That is, teachers agreed that CLT was important but difficult to be effectively practiced because of the above mentioned reasons, but they did not think their own proficiency of English block their communicative language “teaching.” This was especially in the case of post-curriculum change group.

Interestingly enough, the most frequently discussed theme regarding teachers' difficulties using CLT in elementary and secondary school levels were very distinctive. For the secondary level, the contents of college entrance exams dominated their teaching practices, emphasizing reading, writing, vocabulary, and explicit grammar instruction. Fifteen out of 21 secondary level teachers expressed the need for communicative language teaching by showing their concerns about their students' low oral proficiency level and resistance for learning English in communicative ways. About using CLT in classrooms, participant 13 expressed her concerns, but at the same time, she justified her teaching:

Yes. I often doubt whether my teaching is able to help students improve their oral fluency.(...) However, I don't think my teaching largely focusing on reading texts and explaining grammars is useless because reading ability is the most wanted skill in college, and therefore, should be

acquired prior to other skills especially in EFL country like Korea.  
(Participant 13)

Some participants showed frustrations about their trial to do some CLT activities with resistance of students to her new approach. Participant 37 displayed a very pessimistic point of view by mentioning that CLT was not appropriate for the Korean high school context.

Very difficult. Whenever I try to speak English in the class, students become puzzled and don't concentrate the contents. Students get a lot of pressure about using English in the class and don't even try to use it. (...)  
(Participant 28)

(...) Using English only in English class, 50% essay questions in the exam etc...That's important in teaching and learning English and everyone knows that, but it is too ideal to adopt in the real class in high school in Korea.  
(Participant 37)

Like this, even though they were worried about their students' lack of oral proficiency and lack of motivation to learn English in more communicative ways, secondary school teachers commonly discussed the strong need to perform grammar-translation method because their primary task is to have students prepare for the college entrance exam which still focuses on grammar-translation skills. All 21 secondary school English teachers mentioned the inevitable influence of Soo-Neung, the college entrance exam or Korean Scholastic Aptitude Test (KSAT). Here are some examples.

As in Korea, college entrance exam takes significant part in secondary education, and it entirely gives influences on class, we cannot help teaching grammar and sentence structure mainly in the class(...)  
(Participant 2)

I understand what the new curriculum wants from teachers and students. However English entrance exams and school exams haven't changed much, and we teachers must teach students to get good score the exams.  
(Participant 6)

Because high school students considered university entrance exams as important, I have to focus on the exam (...)  
(Participant 14)

(...) On top of that, as Korean SAT does not deal with communicative abilities, students have little motivation to go beyond traditional classroom teaching and learning.  
(Participant 15)

In contrast to the secondary teachers, however, elementary level English teachers' main concerns were motivating children to learn English and designing their classes fun. Among 16 participants, fifteen stated the word "motivation" in common.

My main concern is that designing my class interesting, constructing natural setting for my students to acquire English. Because they are young, they can learn fast. And the bottom line here is that how can I, as a teacher, can motivate my students.  
(Participant 4)

You know how hard it is to design a class for kids. Their attention period is very short and they often don't pay attention to class if it's not interesting enough. I always want my students not giving up English and motive them to learn English.  
(Participant 19)

Along with the difficulty of motivating their students, ten teachers mentioned that students' gaps in English proficiency levels and a tight schedule to cover all the contents as main problems in elementary

schools. Additionally, even though the number was small as four, it was noteworthy that teachers' somewhat low English proficiency level was pointed out only in this group of teachers.

I am still worried about my English. Some students, they lived in America or Canada they speak better than me. I went to TESOL program in Canada, too, but their pronunciation is better than me. I got stress sometimes and begin my master's last semester.

(Participant 20)

This days, students start English education very early, and they know almost everything in the textbook already. So I need to bring some interesting games and chants, but new games and chants don't have teachers' guide or directions. I need to explain everything in English, but I often forget what to say in English. This is very embarrassing.

(Participant 32)

As seen above, teachers' perceived difficulties reflect the inconsistency between elementary and secondary level English education. On one hand, it is quite understandable that English teachers in elementary and secondary schools have different concerns. Elementary school students need to be motivated a lot, and they are more likely to be influenced by their previous exposure to English, making gaps in their English proficiency levels. These make elementary level English teachers concern about planning for interesting and motivating classes by implementing CLT with activity-based approaches. On the other hand, however, when students enter a secondary school, the way they are educated in English classrooms is different from what they have been taught; students learn English with grammar and reading-based instructions, and they are forced to get ready for the university entrance exam which is quite away from developing their communicative competence. There is no mediation step for

students to prepare for those different ways of learning English in curriculum levels. Notably, there should be some connections between elementary and secondary curriculum and instructional methods that facilitate students' learning in more structurally-consistent ways. The policy makers should be aware of these gaps between elementary and secondary levels, and consider making the transitions in curriculum levels.

### **Differences Between Novice and Experienced Teachers**

In this study, teachers' career span ranged from 2 to 26 years. And in order to divide the participants into two groups, novice versus experienced, there needed to be a criterion of the distinction. Year 1997 was chosen for the criterion because the seventh national curriculum had influenced the National Teacher Selection Exam starting from that particular year. Thus, grounded in 1997 as a standpoint, there were 13 pre-curriculum change (or experienced) teachers and 24 post-curriculum change (or novice) teachers. It was very remarkable that novice teachers expressed negative sides of the educational policy change more, and showed much stronger skepticism onto CLT. Nineteen out of 24 post-curriculum teachers stated that they were very busy following the required school curriculum so that they did not see enough room to implement CLT related classroom activities which usually took quite amount of class time. Participant 2, who had three-year of teaching experience, was very skeptical about CLT.

I think teachers hardly use CLT in regular class in high school in Korea. Theoretically we should speak English in our class, but it is too difficult to use English as our communication tool in class. I am always behind the school schedule and I don't think I will use any kind of CLT teaching method that I learned in college.

(Participant 2)

Participant 37 expressed the overwhelming feeling when she had to try different teaching methods other than grammar-translation method.

(...) I try to use other methods, but that requires a lot of specialized skills and time on the part of teachers. The textbook also has some communication activities, but there is no time to do it in every class. Then, you skip it first time, second time, and then later on, you don't do it at all. Frankly speaking, I don't know where to start again now. I just keep using GTM like I learned English in school days.  
(Participant 37)

Novice teachers became teachers by passing the National Teacher Selection Exam focusing on the new curriculum, and they had to get a teacher training provided by the Ministry of Education regularly in terms of implementing CLT in their actual classrooms. It was notable, however, that they had this negative attitude toward CLT and its related classroom activities. On the other hand, experienced teachers utilized more holistic and skillful ways to balance CLT with other methods to make students learn better. Nine out of 13 pre-curriculum change teachers mentioned that they tried new teaching strategies which they have learned in the teacher training programs and brought new materials to deliver the same knowledge in creative and different ways. Participant 11 showed her confidence in terms of trying various teaching approaches, and she even tried to develop creative ways to combine CLT with grammar/translation method.

Yes. I tried to use various kinds of teaching methods in order to develop students' overall English proficiency including listening, speaking, reading and writing and make students interested in learning English. I tried to give them as much as English input. (...) Next, I gave

students work sheets that I created. Then, I used communicative language teaching while teaching listening.  
(Participant 11)

Participant 24, also said that she has tried to implement various teaching methods since she started the teaching profession 26 years ago. She emphasized the effort of the teacher to develop new teaching method in accordance with the new curriculum and new educational environment.

I think teachers should definitely study all the time. Also, they need really good ability to adjust the new environment better than others. You know, teaching profession is really dynamic, and interesting one. The very first time I started my teaching, it was long time ago, I just tried to use the methods that I learned in college. But soon, I found that the classroom is not the place like a...how can I say...the classroom is not fixed place, and students are not like a robot that is always ready to learn the things I teach. As time goes by, I feel like I became more flexible in terms of bringing new teaching methods with some games or songs or small-group activities that were not familiar to both students and me myself. When I look back on my experience as an English teacher for 26 years in Korea, I think I can say I am a quite innovative teacher who does not afraid of changing. I give advice to novice teachers in my school that they have to know students needs in these days because they are always a young-blood and bring their own needs to the classroom. Teachers should always be aware of these characteristics and be ready to adapt themselves to the new educational environment.  
(Participant 24)

These discrepancies between novice and experienced teachers are interesting and need further investigation. Unlike the general thought that post-curriculum teachers would be more active with regard to CLT, pre-curriculum teachers displayed

more positive attitude toward the policy change as well as the new teaching method. It was true that novice teachers might be more familiarized with the concept of CLT. However, it did not guarantee that they would enact what they knew in the actual classroom context. Likewise, it seemed that experienced teachers tried to adapt their teaching in accordance with the new policy. They had flexibility in terms of interpreting CLT grounded in their long-term teaching experiences. However, they also needed to have organized guideline and structural directions for the right implementation of CLT in their classrooms.

This is where two possible ways to empower both novice and experienced teachers came in. First, systematic collaboration between novice teachers and experienced ones should be encouraged at the real school setting. As aforementioned, it was interesting to see novice teachers felt so hopeless about making a new curriculum feasible and effective, whereas experienced teachers were flexible and tended to do what they could do for communicative language teaching that the new curriculum emphasizes. About these, novice and experienced teachers can both benefit from sharing their concerns and ideas about a new curriculum and from collaborating each other. Collaboration at the same school, the same district, and the higher levels will significantly facilitate both novice and experienced teachers to teach with a new curriculum more effectively.

Second, teachers should be encouraged to organize their own professional groups in various ways. Although many teachers want to participate in some professional organizations that they can share their teaching experiences and talk about English education in Korea more professionally, the number of such organizations is still insufficient. Teachers can use pre-existing teacher conferences or in-service teacher education programs to share their professional experiences and get some insights from other teachers, or they also

can make their own group, especially through on-line that can enable them to meet regardless of time and space.

## CONCLUSION

Although it has been quite a long time since the concept of CLT was introduced in South Korea, teachers' general perception onto CLT was still very restricted to "communication, or speaking skill." When the participants were divided into two different groups, elementary school teachers were more concerned about planning for interesting classes that would motivate young second language learners, whereas secondary school teachers were worried about the low feasibility of CLT due to students' lack of proficiency/motivation and reading-focused KSAT. There were also difference of perceptions between novice and experienced teachers especially in terms of CLT management in their own classrooms. Contrary to the general expectation, novice teachers were more reluctant to enact CLT than experiences ones.

Further studies are encouraged to improve the limitations of the present study. This research was based upon only 37 participants, and they were all from Seoul/Kyoung-gi area, which might not represent of the whole population of Korean English teachers. Also, the data was collected by limited methods—a survey questionnaire and a short-time interview—because of its convenience in management. However, using different ways of gathering data such as in-depth interviews, observation of the actual classrooms, and attending teachers' formal and informal meetings, and so forth, for future research is strongly recommended to ensure the triangulation of the collected data (Creswell, 1998). In the same line, ethnographic study should be noted since not enough ethnography study is done in this field, and teachers' perception would be more a matter of how they take actions and how they present

their beliefs and ideas in real professional lives. Thus, longitudinal ethnographic type of research design will provide us with more convincing and solid information regarding this issue.

The limitations of the present research, however, do not decrease the significance of the information and the implications. Teachers are the ones who implement the curriculum and give valuable feedback how the new policy change works in actual classrooms. Unfortunately, however, the policy makers provide teachers with too idealistic curriculum and blame teachers not to be capable of teaching the curriculum. The educational policy makers should include in-service teachers in the process of curriculum development and make curriculum more feasible by listening to their difficulties in applying the curriculum in classroom settings. Empowering teachers like this will be one way to solve difficulties teachers that articulate in Li's (1997, 1998) study and the present study. Also, the policy makers of Korean English education should listen to authentic voices of teachers to see if their policy making is feasible in real classrooms.

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