

A comparison of learners' and teachers' attitudes toward communicative language teaching at two universities in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT

This study compares Vietnamese learners' and teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of four factors: grammar instruction, error correction, group and pair work, and teachers' role. A questionnaire was administered to 37 teachers and 88 university pre-intermediate to intermediate learners of English in Vietnam, and their responses were compared. The results show that both groups held favorable attitudes towards CLT, but that teacher participants had more positive attitudes than learner participants for all the factors, except group and pair work. The participants' favorable attitudes were taken to indicate positive signals for the implementation of CLT in the Vietnamese context, since its core tenets, learner-centeredness and learner autonomy, appear to be accepted in the context of this study. However, the study also indicated that for CLT to be implemented successfully, it is important to consult learners in order to establish a match between teachers' and learners' views. Since both learners and teachers are major

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stakeholders in CLT, learners' voices need to be heard before effective pedagogical decisions can be made.

INTRODUCTION

Since the economic reforms (*đổi mới*) beginning in 1986, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth and social development. The adoption of a socialist-oriented market mechanism, globalization, developments in information technology, and the government's ambitious objective of achieving industrialized country status by 2020 have brought with them the need for major reforms of the education system. Many changes have been initiated in the last few decades, including the emergence of English as the main foreign language and the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Unfortunately, despite the great efforts made in teacher education programs, the quality of English teaching and learning in Vietnam is still a concern for many educators (Le, 2007; Pham, 2004, 2007; Sullivan, 1996). The present study investigates attitudes towards various aspects of CLT in Vietnam from both teachers' and learners' perspectives, the latter of which seems to have been ignored by policy makers and educators.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF CLT IN VIETNAM

CLT is a language teaching approach that emphasizes the communication of meaning rather than the practice of grammatical forms in isolation. It aims at developing among language learners the knowledge and skills needed for appropriate interpretation and use of a language in different communicative settings. The adoption of the principles of CLT marked the beginning of a paradigm shift that led to many changes in how second language teaching is conducted and conceived (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These changes, considered to be some of the characteristics of CLT in practice, include learner-centeredness, focus on both meaning and linguistic forms in context, use of collaborative activities, promotion of authentic materials and of relevant and meaningful classroom activities, and new roles for teachers as facilitators and negotiators of meaning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

In Vietnam, CLT has gained approval since it was first implemented in the early 1990s. As Le (1999) revealed, two essential

factors encouraging the use of CLT in Vietnam are the support from government policy and Vietnamese teachers' favorable view of this approach, as evidenced by a number of studies (e.g., Lewis & McCook, 2002; Nguyen, 2002; Pham, 2004, 2007). A new set of locally-written textbooks was introduced in 2002, following the introduction of a new national curriculum which stated that communicative skills should be the goal of teaching of English in secondary schools and that formal knowledge of the language should only be seen as the means to an end (MOET, 2006). This new curriculum was officially approved in 2006 and was implemented national-wide from grades 6 to 12. However, these facts do not allow us to conclude that CLT is being implemented successfully in Vietnam. The truth is that after a long period of learning English, most Vietnamese learners still cannot use it effectively as a means of communication. It is estimated that in a class of fifty English major learners, fewer than ten graduates have the English skills needed for jobs as interpreters, translators, tour guides or teachers of English (Pham, 2004).

Among many practical factors militating against the effective implementation of CLT in Vietnam are the academic curriculum and grammar-based examinations. Although, as mentioned, some changes at curriculum level have been made in order to promote CLT, little has been done regarding the nature of examinations at either the national or institutional level. In most cases, exams are designed to test only linguistic competence rather than communicative competence. This is clearly manifested in the lack of listening and speaking components in many examinations, including the university entrance and graduation examinations at tertiary level. Suffering from negative wash-back from such high-stakes exams, English classrooms in Vietnam continue in practice to be more grammar-oriented than communicative (Ellis, 1996; Pham, 2004). Other practical constraints on the implementation of CLT include the EFL context, low learner motivation, large class size, and teachers' low language proficiency. Living in an EFL context, many Vietnamese learners have little immediate need to use English, and lack motivation to communicate in English outside the classroom. They learn English more often to communicate with people from other regional countries than to communicate with native speakers of English (Do, 2006). Le (1999) even concluded that the requirement to provide learners with "an

opportunity to take part in meaningful communication interaction with highly competent speakers of the language, i.e., to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic second language situations” (Canale & Swain, 1980, p.27) is unrealistic and impracticable in the Vietnamese context. In this ‘cultural island’ where teachers and textbooks serve as major input for communication needs (Le, 1999, p.2), the lack of exposure to the target language results in students’ lack of motivation. Indeed, their learning motivation actually depends largely on the teachers’ initiative and the learners’ will to succeed (Ellis, 1996).

Secondary schools in Vietnam have an average class size of between 42 and 52 students (Le, 1999), while at tertiary level the average class size is 65 (Bock, 2000). Due to such large student numbers and the limited time allocated to each lesson, it is challenging for teachers to carry out supplementary communicative activities when there is a strict requirement to cover all the items in the curriculum. In addition, many Vietnamese teachers of English have low English language proficiency. The results of a recent test administered in 24 of the 64 provinces by the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) that measured whether English teachers have the required level of English to teach were disheartening (e.g., Baotintuc.vn, 2011; Parks, 2011; Vietnam Net, 2012). The required level of teachers’ language proficiency is B2 of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) for Language Learning, which is the equivalent of an IELTS score of between 5 and 6. In Hue, in central Vietnam, and Hanoi, the capital city, only about a fifth of those tested made the B2 grade. Alarming, the pass rate was as low as one in 684 in the Mekong Delta's Ben Tre province.

Besides these practical constraints, there are deeper issues, such as clashes between Western and Vietnamese cultures and values, which give rise to serious challenges for Vietnamese teachers in their adoption of CLT. The literature points out that CLT techniques, which originated in Western countries, are not always culturally attuned to the Vietnamese cultural context, due to differences such as individualism versus collectivism and a small power distance versus a larger power distance (Ellis, 1994, 1996; Sullivan, 1996). Ellis (1994) concluded that CLT in its original form was not suited to the Vietnamese context. He also made the more general observation

about the implementation of CLT in non-western contexts that CLT should not be adopted but rather adapted and redefined to be both “culturally attuned and culturally accepted” (Ellis, 1996, p.1).

TEACHER AND LEARNER ATTITUDES

It is ironic that in discussions about CLT and its learner-centeredness, the attitudes of learners themselves are often neglected (Savignon & Wang, 2003). Reports on the appropriateness of CLT in different contexts have been based mainly on teachers' attitudes and practices (e.g., Li, 2001; Pham, 2004; Sato & Kleinasser, 1999; Thompson, 1996). Thompson (1996) pointed out four widely-held misconceptions about CLT among ELT practitioners, that: 1) CLT ignores grammar; 2) CLT means teaching speaking only; 3) CLT equals doing pair work and group work, such as role plays; and 4) CLT demands too much from teachers in terms of time, skills, and energy. He argued that these misconceptions led to negative attitudes towards CLT that need to be eradicated in order for CLT to be implemented effectively. It has also been found that, in cases where teachers' attitudes to CLT are positive, there is often a mismatch between these attitudes and actual behaviors in the classroom (e.g., Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Sato & Kleinasser, 1999). While teachers held favorable attitudes towards CLT, their classroom practices often deviated considerably from the principles of CLT. Sato and Kleinasser (1999) concluded that the implementation of CLT depends on uncovering and examining teachers' attitudes, as well as their practical understandings.

In the Vietnamese context, studies on CLT have investigated two aspects: teachers' attitudes to and perceptions of CLT (Lewis & McCook, 2002; Pham, 2007; Sullivan, 1996), and how Vietnamese teachers cope with conflicts between Western values embedded in CLT and traditional Vietnamese values (Pham, 2004; Sullivan, 2000). Lewis & McCook (2002) found that teachers had various degrees of success in implementing CLT into their classrooms. Pham (2004, 2007) maintained that although Vietnamese teachers espoused communicative theory, they were doubtful and confused as to how it could be realized in practice. In their attempt to use CLT, the teachers only made surface changes to activities, practices and materials. An earlier classroom study by Sullivan (1996) pointed out

that, though CLT was often not adopted holistically, many aspects of CLT such as encouraging speaking and using language games were integrated into the language classroom. Phan (2004) observed that, in trying to implement CLT, the Vietnamese teachers struggled with conflict between their two identities. As teachers of English, they needed to be a facilitator rather than a controller. At the same time, in order to be good Vietnamese teachers, they needed to perform their traditional duty as behavioural educators or moral guides. These traditional roles of mentor and imparter of knowledge in the classroom lie at the heart of the pedagogical practices in Vietnam (Kramsch & Sullivan, 1996).

Numerous studies have investigated learners' attitudes towards language learning in general and towards specific language learning activities but, despite warnings that mismatches between teachers' and learners' views can have negative effects on instructional outcomes (e.g., Horowitz, 1990), relatively few studies have compared teacher and learner attitudes. The studies of this kind show that teacher and learner perceptions do not always match. Nunan (1988) compared 60 Australian ESL teachers' rating of ten language learning activities according to their usefulness with those of 517 learners from Willing (1988) and reported that only one out of ten activities received the same rating from the two groups. Schulz (1996) examined and compared US post-secondary foreign language learners' and teachers' beliefs regarding the benefits of focus on form grammar instruction. The results revealed some discrepancies in teacher and learner attitudes concerning the role of explicit grammar teaching in foreign language learning in general, and error correction in particular. While the learners were in general favourably inclined towards grammar instruction and error correction, their teachers' opinions varied considerably regarding the effectiveness of a focus on forms. Spratt (1999) compared learners' preferred language learning activities with teachers' perceptions of what those preferences were. There turned out to be considerable discrepancies between the two groups, with teachers' perceptions of learners' preferences corresponding with learners' actual preferences in about 50% of cases. The results of these studies suggest that teachers cannot assume confidently that they know what their learners' preferences are. These findings also indicate that learners hold various ideas and

beliefs about how they should learn a foreign language and how teachers can help them do so effectively (Kern, 1995).

Specifically in relation to CLT, attitudinal gaps between teachers and students have also been identified. In Japan, Matsuura *et al.*, (2001) compared university student and teacher beliefs about important instructional areas, goals and objectives, instructional styles and methods, teaching materials and cultural matters. Many students preferred traditional styles of ELT pedagogy such as learning isolated skills, focusing on accuracy, and learning through a teacher-centered approach, while their teachers' preferences appeared to have shifted towards a learner-centred approach, integrated skills, and a focus on fluency. While the students were interested in learning correct pronunciation, the teachers reported that pronunciation was not strongly emphasized in their classrooms. Most students relied on translation for reading comprehension and a majority of the students thought that translation into Japanese was necessary, whereas most teachers expressed negative attitudes toward the use of translation. In Thailand, Jarvis and Atsilarat (2004) examined Thai practitioner perceptions of CLT and student attitudes towards CLT in order to consider whether CLT was appropriate in the Thai context. The results showed that while teachers understood CLT, they all struggled with its implementation. In addition, many of the students indicated a preference for learning styles that were fundamentally incompatible with CLT.

RATIONALE AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

It is worthwhile to investigate how learners' attitudes towards CLT differ from teachers' because such differences can influence the effectiveness of classroom instruction. Savignon (1997) claimed that, "ultimate success in learning to use a second language most likely would be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner" (p.107), so policy makers, teachers and researchers should consult learners and involve them in the teaching and learning process (Schulz, 1996).

Despite evidence that learners' views of classroom pedagogy frequently differ from those of teachers, little information is available concerning Vietnamese learners' attitudes towards the implementation of CLT. Since CLT is intended to embody a learner-centered approach, it is particularly important to consider learners'

attitudes towards its implementation, including learners' needs and preferences. The present study results from the need to explore this issue in the Vietnamese context.

In an attempt to let learners' voices be heard, this study compares learners' and teachers' attitudes towards four factors relating to CLT: the importance of grammar; the quality and quantity of error correction; the use of group work and pair work; and the role of teachers in the classroom. These factors have been chosen because they reflect core elements of CLT and because studies in other Asian contexts have reported different attitudes to these factors on the part of teachers and learners (e.g., Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004; Matsuura *et al.*, 2001).

The research question is: Do learners and teachers hold the same attitudes towards CLT?

In this study, the term 'attitudes' is used to refer to participants' tendencies to accept or reject ideas by indicating whether or not they feel favourably towards these ideas or beliefs (Gay, Mills & Airasian, 2006).

METHOD

Participants

The 88 first-year learners and 37 in-service teachers who participated in the study came from two universities in Hanoi, Vietnam. One university is a long-standing member of one of the two national universities. In Vietnam, there are universities within the national universities. This university consists of nine departments, among which the English department is the largest. This department is responsible for offering programs to train English language teachers, translators and interpreters, as well as offering English courses for students with non-English majors. The other university is a young university, established in 2005. Its English department is mainly responsible for developing non-English-major students' language skills. The teacher participants were all Vietnamese teachers of English currently employed at these two universities. The learner participants were all first year students at these two universities. They were around 18 years old, and had an English proficiency of

either pre-intermediate or intermediate standard, as students with higher proficiency levels were not required to attend first year English courses at these two universities.

Instruments

A 4-point Likert-scale questionnaire (see Appendix A) was developed by adapting questions from different surveys used in various studies on attitudes towards CLT (Huynh, 2006; Jarvis & Atsilarat, 2004; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Saengboon, 2002). Due to the limited English proficiency of the student participants, a translated Vietnamese version of the questionnaire was administered together with the English version, so participants could choose to do either the English or Vietnamese version. An 'undecided/neutral' option was not included in the Likert scale to prevent participants from avoiding making a real choice or from not taking the questionnaire seriously (Dörnyei, 2003). All items were positive or negative statements about CLT principles, except item 13, which was multiple choice. Participants were asked to justify their choice for items 4, 13, 14 and 15. The reliability in terms of Cronbach's α for the whole questionnaire was 0.68, which approaches the reliability coefficient of 0.70 recommended in most social science research situations (Santos, 1999).

Data analysis

The sixteen items were categorized into four sub-groups of CLT-related factors: the importance of grammar (items 1,2,3,4), the quantity and quality of error correction (items 5,6,7,8), the use of group and pair work (items 9,10,11,12,13), and the role of the language teacher (items 14,15,16). Items with Likert scale responses were coded by assigning each response option a number for scoring purposes. For the positive statements, participants' responses were coded as follows: strongly agree = 4, agree = 3, disagree = 2, strongly disagree = 1. For the negative statements, the point values were reversed: strongly agree = 1, agree = 2, disagree = 3, strongly disagree = 4. Thus, the higher the score, the more positive the attitude towards CLT. A participants' response to any item, therefore, fell between the highest possible score (4) and the lowest possible score (1). After all 16 items had been coded, the two groups' (teacher

and student) average scores for the whole questionnaire, as well as average scores for each of the four sub-groups (representing four CLT-related factors) were calculated. These average scores also fell within a range between 4 and 1. For presentation purposes, a score of 2.5 was considered to be the neutral point. An average score higher than 2.5 for the whole questionnaire or for one of the factors would suggest a favourable attitude. However, it should be pointed out that a respondent could obtain a score of 2.5 by having a combination of strongly favorable and strongly unfavourable attitudes towards different items. Thus, an averaged midpoint score does not necessarily reflect a neutral attitude (Oppenheim, 2001).

Teachers' and learners' attitudes towards CLT in general and towards each of the four CLT-related factors were compared using mean scores and standard deviations. In order to determine whether there were any significant differences between teacher and learner attitudes, independent t-tests were carried out with the alpha level set at .05. In addition, where necessary, participants' qualitative responses (parts of items 4, 13, 14, and 15) were discussed together with the quantitative data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Regarding the average scores for the whole questionnaire, all teacher participants scored higher than 2.5 while approximately 68% of the learner participants scored higher than this midpoint. An independent t-test revealed that the teachers' attitudes ($M = 2.97$, $SE = .04$) were significantly more favorable than those of the learners ($M = 2.62$, $SE = .03$) where $t(123) = 7.13$, $p < .05$. This represents a large effect ($r = .54$). The average scores for the whole questionnaire for both teacher and learner participants were higher than the midpoint of 2.5. This means despite the significant difference, both groups of participants had mildly favourable to favourable attitudes towards CLT in general. The two groups' maximum and minimum average scores for the whole questionnaire are presented in Table 1. The teacher participants' average scores for the whole questionnaire ranged from 2.54 to 3.47 ($M = 2.98$, $SD = .25$). The learner participants' responses ranged from 2.13 to 3.21 ($M = 2.62$, $SD = .25$).

TABLE 1
Comparison of maximum and minimum total scores of the two groups

	Teachers (<i>N</i> = 37)	Learners (<i>N</i> = 88)
Maximum	3.47	3.21
Minimum	2.54	2.13
<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	2.98 (.25)	2.62 (.25)

Table 2 presents the average scores for the four CLT-related factors. The items used to calculate the average scores for each factor are listed. Table 2 shows that teachers' attitudes were more favourable than learners' attitudes for all factors, with the exception of group and pair work. The highest mean scores for both teachers and learners were obtained for the third factor, group and pair work.

TABLE 2
Attitude towards the four factors relating to CLT

	Factor 1		Factor 2		Factor 3		Factor 4	
	Grammar instruction (Items 1,2,3,4)		Error correction (Items 5,6,7,8)		Group & pair work (Items 9,10,11,12)		Teachers' role (Items 14,15,16)	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teachers (<i>N</i> =37)	2.83	.41	2.91	.42	3.11	.39	3.07	.38
Learners (<i>N</i> = 88)	2.42	.45	2.24	.48	3.08	.40	2.77	.36

The first attitudinal gap between the two groups concerns the importance of grammar instruction and grammatical accuracy. The difference between the teacher participants' attitudes ($M = 2.83$, SE

=.67) and the learner participants' attitudes ($M = 2.42$, $SE = .48$) was significant ($t(123) = 4.77$, $p < .05$) and represented a medium-sized effect ($r = .40$). While the teachers' responses were more in accord with CLT principles of grammar instruction, their learners' attitudes indicated a preference for aspects of traditional methodology including explicit grammar teaching and emphasis on grammatical accuracy (Item 1, teachers $M = 2.92$ $SD = 0.55$, learners $M = 2.07$ $SD = 0.67$). A closer examination of the data revealed that, on the one hand, most learner participants realized that grammar alone was not sufficient to develop communicative competence and should be taught as a means to achieve certain goals rather than as an end in itself (Item 2, $M = 2.74$ $SD = 0.69$; Item 3, $M = 2.84$ $SD = 0.79$). On the other hand, their responses showed their strong desire for accuracy (Item 5, $M = 2.26$ $SD = 0.81$), as they were influenced by the deeply rooted belief in the importance of learning structural aspects of language as a foundation of language learning (Item 1 $M = 2.07$ $SD = 0.67$; Item 4 $M = 2.01$ $SD = 0.74$).

Secondly, the two groups had different attitudes towards teacher feedback and error correction. The teachers' attitudes ($M = 2.91$, $SE = .69$) were significantly more positive than the learners' attitudes ($M = 2.24$, $SE = .51$) where $t(123) = 7.25$, $p < .05$. This represented a large effect ($r = .55$). While the majority of learners thought that their performance should be judged on grammatical correctness, most of their teacher did not share that view (Item 5, teachers $M = 3.08$ $SD = 0.60$, learners $M = 2.26$ $SD = 0.81$). While most teachers viewed errors tolerantly, most learner participants viewed errors negatively (Item 7, teachers $M = 2.81$ $SD = 0.66$, learners $M = 1.96$ $SD = 0.88$). Most learner participants expected to be corrected frequently, whereas the majority of teacher participants indicated that errors should only be corrected if they might cause communication breakdown (Item 8, teachers $M = 2.89$ $SD = 0.66$, learners $M = 1.78$ $SD = 0.77$).

These findings accord with Lewis and McCook's (2002) view that verbal perfection has traditionally been valued across many Asian cultures. As a result of the desire for perfection, the learner participants in the current study felt more secure holding on to the traditional view of errors as something bad that should always be corrected. This also accords with the findings of studies conducted in

other contexts (e.g., Horwitz, 1988; Kern, 1995) in which most language learners expressed a desire for error correction.

The third mismatch between teacher and learner attitudes concerned the role of the teachers in the classroom. The teachers' attitudes ($M = 3.07$, $SE = .62$) were significantly different from those of the learners ($M = 2.77$, $SE = .38$) where $t(122) = 4.16$, $p < .05$, and this difference represents a medium-sized effect ($r = .35$). While for most learners it was the teachers' role to be the fount of knowledge, most teachers thought it was more important to facilitate learners' autonomy and train them to be responsible for their own learning (Item 15 teachers $M = 2.47$ $SD = 0.70$; learners $M = 1.94$ $SD = 0.58$). Responses to the open-ended question in item 14 revealed that the learner participants were aware of the many different roles teachers were expected to fulfil in the language classroom. Besides the traditional role as the source of knowledge, students also expected their teacher to be their friend and personal advisor who would motivate them, introduce them to different learning strategies, and help them to be more responsible and independent. Of these roles, the learner participants considered the traditional role as transmitter of knowledge to be the most important (Item 15 $M = 1.94$ $SD = 0.58$).

This finding is consistent with Kramsch and Sullivan's (1996) claim that Vietnamese teachers were always expected to be expert 'knowers' of the language. Interestingly, the majority of learner participants also claimed that an important role of the teacher was to develop learners' autonomy and responsibility (Item 16 $M = 3.23$ $SD = 0.60$). The learners' responses, on the one hand, indicated their advocacy of learner autonomy and learner-centeredness; teachers, therefore, should encourage them to play more active roles in the language classroom. On the other hand, their responses implied that while they might be able to take charge of their own learning, they first needed to be oriented to that role and still needed their teachers' guidance and instruction.

The only factor that did not reveal a significant difference between teacher and student attitudes was the use of group and pair work (items 9, 10, 11, and 12). The difference between the teachers' attitudes ($M = 3.11$, $SE = .64$) and the learner participants' attitudes ($M = 3.08$, $SE = .42$) was not significant ($t(123) = .42$, $p = .68$). Since the two groups' average scores were much higher than the

midpoint 2.5, the results show that both groups had favorable attitudes towards communicative activities such as group and pair work. Results from the multiple-choice question in item 13 showed that the majority (65% indicating choice D and 78% indicating choice E) of the student participants preferred group and pair work activities over other activities. Items 10 ($M= 3.44$ $SD= 0.66$) and 11 ($M= 3.20$ $SD= 0.59$) showed that the learner participants held a strong conviction that group and pair work enabled them to explore problems themselves, and helped them co-operate with their friends to acquire knowledge effectively.

The findings for group and pair work seem to be contrary to the findings of Sullivan (1996) who argued that communication in the classroom was easier for Vietnamese learners in a comfortable whole class setting, rather than in small group settings. On the other hand, the findings seem to support Nguyen's (2002) claim that Vietnamese learners are no longer completely passive but, in fact, enjoy participating in activities that help them to use the language and may also reflect that, in general, learner preferences seem to be moving from traditional whole-class settings towards group and pair work activities (e.g., Huynh, 2006). This may be a gradual change in progress, as the result for item 9 ($M= 2.62$, $SD= 0.71$), which was about attitudes towards the effectiveness of group and pair work in comparison with traditional whole class settings, showed that attitudes were only mildly favourable and that attitudes among participants varied greatly.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The present study compared teachers' and learners' attitudes towards four factors relating to CLT. The results revealed that both groups of participants held moderately favourable attitudes towards CLT. This is a positive signal to those interested in the implementation of CLT in Vietnam, since it shows that core CLT tenets, namely learner-centeredness and autonomy, have a reasonably good level of acceptance in this context. Gaps, however, do exist between teachers' and learners' attitudes towards the importance of grammar, error correction, and the traditional role of the language teacher as a transmitter of knowledge, with learners

having more positive attitudes towards these aspects of classroom teaching.

A powerful factor which is likely to influence learners' preference for a focus on the structural aspects of language is the wash-back from the grammar-based discrete point testing methods currently used in Vietnam at all levels of study. High-stakes English language examinations in Vietnam typically aim to test linguistic competence rather than communicative competence, and seldom contain listening and speaking components. This is true of almost all examinations at primary and secondary level, and of university entrance and graduation examinations. Such traditional, discrete-point testing methods may have convinced learners that what language learning requires is just a good knowledge of grammar. As long as the situation does not change, communicative language teaching and learning will suffer from negative wash-back from the traditional examination system (Le, 1999).

It should be noted, however, that the learners' favourable views of traditional grammar instruction and error correction should not necessarily be considered obstacles to the implementation of CLT. Contrary to common misconceptions, CLT does not exclude grammar instruction or error correction. Indeed, current thinking tends to be that the explicit teaching of grammar can occur without disturbing the communicative flow of the classroom (Ellis, Basturkmen & Loewen, 2001), and that positive outcomes can be attained by integrating formal instruction of grammatical points, such as the use of English articles, into communicative tasks (Muranoi, 2001). Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) suggested that grammar should be taught with reference to meaning, social factors, discourse, or a combination of these. Larsen-Freeman's (1991) position was similar, as form, meaning and function were considered to be three interacting dimensions of language. Language teachers, therefore, should be encouraged to incorporate grammar and corrective feedback into CLT, as long as this is done with attention to meaning and context.

A limitation of the current study is that the quantitative analysis of Likert-scale data does not give us insights into the exact nature of participant attitudes. Further research might employ a more qualitative approach by using interviews or group discussion to generate data that could provide richer accounts of learners'

perspectives. Another limitation is that what is claimed in the questionnaire responses may not reflect actual classroom practice in universities in Vietnam. Future research could incorporate classroom observations to capture classroom teaching and learning practices. In addition, further research involving a larger and more representative sample of universities is needed before strong conclusions can be drawn.

CLT is often perceived as being inappropriate in Asian countries, and many of its underlying values are seen as conflicting with the values of non-western cultures. In the Vietnamese context, a broader way of defining CLT may indeed be needed (see Pham, 2004). The most important implication of this study is that, in order to redefine CLT to make it socially and culturally sensitive to the Vietnamese context, it is important to consider the views of teachers and learners. Li (2001) considered teachers as the end-users of innovations in teaching methodology. However, in regard to CLT's learner-centeredness, for learners to be truly the centre of the learning process, they must also be seen as a major stakeholder in educational innovation. The mismatches between teacher and learner attitudes concerning different aspects of CLT point to a need for better communication between teachers and learners. A common voice and mutual understanding between these major stakeholders are vital for successful language teaching and learning.

A match between teachers' and learners' views is possible only when teachers fulfil the following two roles. On the one hand, teachers need to be willing and able to listen to learners' voices so that any potential mismatches can be identified, and teachers can modify their teaching practice in accord with what learners need. This may be done in the form of informal discussions or of questionnaire-type surveys. On the other hand, teachers should also share their beliefs and perceptions about language learning with their learners. As learners only learn what they want to learn (Savignon, 1997), if learners' perceptions of what contributes to success in foreign language learning are incongruent with pedagogical practice and teacher beliefs, teachers should spend time explaining to learners what they are trying to do as teachers, and why teachers' expectations are not being met (Schulz, 1996). For example, if

teachers do not consistently provide error corrections, the reasons for this should be explained to learners.

Another implication of this study concerns the need for teachers, educators and policy makers to pay attention to changing values that may emerge due to the rapid development of countries through modernization and industrialization. Fast changes in developing economies may bring influences from Western societies, including values and ideology. The results of this study revealed that changes seem to have already occurred in the Vietnamese context. The learner participants appeared to be more open and showed more tolerant attitudes towards Western ideology, such as learner autonomy and learner-centeredness, than previous studies in non-western contexts might have led us to expect. The students in the current study largely welcomed and enjoyed the use of group and pair work and appeared to be relatively enthusiastic about their emerging role as the centre of the classroom. Teachers and education policy makers, therefore, should be aware of this change and encourage it. More importantly, Vietnamese teachers need to be aware of any changes in learners' attitudes and need to be willing to adjust their teaching practice accordingly.

Finally, it should be noted that teachers and learners should not be left alone to deal with the many obstacles to the implementation of CLT in EFL settings. The successful implementation of CLT depends on the interplay between teachers and learners, the educational system, and the social and cultural context (Chang, 2011). Successful implementation, therefore, requires efforts from administrators, parents and society as a whole (Kleinsasser, 1993). To facilitate this, some macro-changes need to take place, the most significant of which is to reform the testing system. Communicative teaching should be supported by communicative testing. Although, due to economic and technical difficulties, there is still a long way to go before this can all be fully realised in Vietnam, it is a goal towards which Vietnamese teachers and policy makers should aim.

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APPENDIX A: QUESTION SHEET FOR TEACHER (ENGLISH VERSION)

*Thank you for participating in this project. This questionnaire is designed for research purposes only, and all information will be kept confidential. Please read the instructions below carefully, and then write your responses on the **Answer Sheet**:*

- *For all items, except item 13, please tick (✓) the appropriate response (Strongly agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly disagree) to indicate how much you agree or disagree with each statement.*
- *For item 13, tick (✓) all the options you agree with.*
- *For items 4, 13, 14, 15, please use the space provided to give further information and to explain your choice.*

THE PLACE OF GRAMMAR

1. The most important part of learning English is learning English grammar.
2. Knowledge of the rules of English does not guarantee ability to use English.
3. Language is acquired most effectively when it is used as a vehicle for doing something else and not when it is studied in a direct or explicit way.
4. Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if learners are to learn to communicate effectively.

Please write briefly about how grammar should be taught:

THE QUALITY AND QUANTITY OF ERROR CORRECTION

5. Grammatical correctness is the most important criterion by which language performance should be judged.
6. For learners to become effective communicators in the foreign language, the teachers' feedback should focus on appropriateness and not on linguistic form of learners' language.

7. If learners are permitted to make errors in English, it will be difficult for them to speak correctly later on.
8. The teacher should not correct the learners' mistakes, unless they may cause communication breakdown.

THE USE OF GROUP WORK AND PAIR WORK

9. Learners do better when taught as a whole class by the teacher. Group work and pair work may occasionally be useful to vary the routine, but can never replace sound formal instruction by a competent teacher
10. Group work and pair work activities can help learners co-operate with their friends and help them acquire knowledge well.
11. Group work and pair work allow learners to explore problems for themselves and thus to have some control over their own learning.
12. Group work and pair work activities have little use, since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the learners' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue.
13. Among the kinds of activities mentioned below, which one(s) do you consider effective way(s) of teaching aural/oral skills in Vietnam:
 - A. The teacher gives lectures. There is no discussion between teacher and learners or among learners.
 - B. The teacher gives lectures. There is some discussion between teacher and learners and/or among learners.
 - C. The teacher raises questions. Learners answer the questions individually.
 - D. The teacher raises questions. Learners discuss the questions in group and give their ideas afterwards.
 - E. The teacher gives learners topics. Learners raise questions about the topics, discuss with their friends in groups, and give their ideas afterwards.

Why do you think that this/those kind(s) of activity(ies) is/are effective?

THE ROLE OF THE LANGUAGE TEACHER

14. Being a transmitter of knowledge is only one of many different roles a teacher needs to perform during the course of a lesson.

Please list the other role(s) the teacher should perform during the course of a lesson:

15. The most important role of the teacher in the language classroom is to impart knowledge through activities such as explanation, writing and giving examples.

Please explain why it is or why it is not the most important role?

16. One important role of the language teacher is to train learners to take initiative and responsibility for their own learning.

Thank you very much!