

Cover Page



Universiteit Leiden



The handle <http://hdl.handle.net/1887/26165> holds various files of this Leiden University dissertation.

Author: Edisherashvili, Natalia

Title: Communicative language teaching in Georgia : from theory to practice

Issue Date: 2014-06-03

CHAPTER 9: ENGLISH LANGUAGE LESSON OBSERVATIONS (STUDY 3)

9.1 INTRODUCTION

Chapter 7 investigated whether language teachers in Georgia were aware of and complied with the language policies suggested by the Ministry of Education of Georgia, as well as whether they had an accurate understanding of the recommended teaching methodology. That analysis revealed that the teachers have not fully internalized the conceptualizations of CLT, and that there is a very limited understanding of what the practical implications of the communicative approach to language teaching are (see Section 7.3.1). However, my exploration of English language teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching in Georgia revealed that evaluation of the efficiency and the acceptance rate of CLT on the teachers' part was very high (see Section 7.3.2). Learners' acceptance level of CLT was detected to be rather important as well (See Section 8.3). However, the ultimate success of the policy document can only be measured through how it is realized in practice and what outcomes it yields. The former area is explored in the present Chapter, through lesson observations, whereas the latter in Chapter 10, through learners' communicative proficiency assessment in English.

Chapter overview

Section 9.2 discusses the research methodology applied in this study: the research design and variables (9.2.1), participant characteristics (9.2.2), the research tools, the data collection procedure and the amount of research material obtained (9.2.3), data processing (9.2.4) as well as the statistical approaches adopted in this study (9.2.5). Section 9.3 reports the results of the analyses and Section 9.4 provides a summary and concluding comments on the study results.

9.1.1 The aim of the study

As Wada (2002:31) comments with regard to Japan, “without an understanding of the process of syllabus implementation, as opposed to syllabus design, it is impossible to appreciate fully the degree to which Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has spread in the English as a foreign language (EFL) context”. According to Allsopp and Doone (2006:19), “theory does not always inform practice”, and it is a very common thing to find considerable discrepancies between educators' awareness, understandings and attitudes, on the one hand, and their actual classroom practices, on the other (Karavas-Doukas, 1996:187). With regard to Communicative Language Teaching, Doukas further remarks

that quite often teachers hold misconceptions regarding the type of teaching methodology they follow (Karavas-Doukas, 1996:187). The same view was also voiced by Bal (2006), who reports the results of his study with primary school teachers and concludes that “even though teachers are aware of CLT in terms of theoretical aspects and hold positive attitudes towards CLT, they do not actually use important features of it” (cited in Coskun, 2011:6). According to Karakhanyan (2011:85), even though the importance of teachers’ attitudes towards a given teaching approach, and its effects on the actual implementation of a proposed educational policy, must not be underestimated, the genuine reflection of the state of affairs is manifested through teachers’ behaviour in the classroom. Karakhanyan (2011:199) considers the fact that she did not look into the teachers’ actual teaching practice while exploring their attitudes towards the novel teaching methodologies applied in Armenia as a limitation of her study, which, as she claims, seems as a result deprived of solid documentation of the complexities at actual practice level.

For the above-discussed reasons, it was deemed important to observe what practical understandings and frames of reference language teachers’ classroom performance draws upon in Georgia: how their CLT practices are attuned to their personal use of this method in their own unique contexts. Thus, in the study presented in this chapter, the actual language teaching practice is explored: what is attempted is to determine the real level of the communicative nature of language classes in Georgia, to identify the CLT-related challenges, to explore various independent factors which might have an effect on teachers’ classroom performance, as well as to measure the discrepancy level between the teachers’ thinking and their practical classroom undertakings.

9.1.2 The research questions

The research questions to which this study seeks to find answers are the following:

1. How CLT-oriented is the language teaching process at secondary schools in Tbilisi?
2. What are the practical challenges encountered on the way to CLT application in language classrooms in Georgia?
3. Does school type as well as certain teacher characteristics affect the communicative character of their classroom teaching?
4. Are there any discrepancies between teachers’ attitudes towards CLT and their actual teaching practice?

9.2 METHODOLOGY¹

9.2.1 Research design

The participants who were selected for lesson observations belonged to the group of teachers who were also interviewed, and who completed the questionnaires. This allowed a multi-directional comparison of the teacher-related data: juxtaposition of the teachers' attitudes towards and understanding of CLT underpinnings obtained through the questionnaires as well as through the interviews and the teachers' actual classroom practice. To achieve this effect, interviews, questionnaires as well as observation forms were intentionally designed in such a way that they referenced more or less the same constructs of language teaching and had roughly the same structural sequence and layout (compare Appendices 7.1, 7.3 and 9.1).

Even though the observations permitted collection of the data about the teachers as well as the learners in the course of this study, bearing in mind the more vital role of a teacher in relation to the implementation of methodological innovation, and in an attempt to make the study more focused and feasible, it was decided to observe mainly the teachers, rather than the learners, in action. The reported results, consequently, will be primarily concerned with the language teachers' classroom performance.

Research variables

The independent variables explored in the present study, as in the study presented in Chapter 7, are context-related variables, i.e. 'the school type' (for more discussion of this research variable selection criterion, see 7.2.1), as well as teacher-related variables: 'age', 'teaching experience' and 'the level of understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT'. The independent variables, such as 'teacher sex', 'academic degree', 'professional training', have been dropped in this study for reasons already discussed in 7.2.2.

9.2.2 Study participants

The participants of this study were 26 teachers of English from various types of secondary schools in Tbilisi (from peripherally as well as centrally located public and private sectors). The teachers' age-related information is presented in the Table 9.1 below.

¹ For the definitions of the statistical terms used in this as well as other chapters of this dissertation, see the Statistics Reference Page above.

Table 9.1: Participating teachers age statistics

Age Groups	Number	Percentage
Between 25-34	2	7.7
Between 35-44	9	34.6
Between 45-54	12	46.2
Between 55-65	3	11.5
Total	26	100

An ANOVA test revealed that the ‘school type’ does have a significant effect on the study outcomes [$F(3, 25)=3.76, p=.027$]: overall, private school staff tend to be younger than their public school colleagues. However, the difference proved statistically significant only between the Public Peripheral ($M=3.13$) and Private Central ($M=1.80$) school types. See the statistics reported in Table 9.2 below.²

Table 9.2: Teachers’ age statistics across the four school types

Four school types	Mean
Public Central	2.67
Public Peripheral	3.13
Private Central	1.80
Private Peripheral	2.50
Total	2.62

As for the participating teachers’ teaching experience, it ranged from under 5 to over 20 years. See Table 9.3 below.

Table 9.3: Observed teachers’ teaching experience

Teaching experience	Number	Percentage
Under five years	2	7.4
Over five years	9	33.3
Over ten years	2	44.4
Over twenty years	3	11.1
Total	26	96.3

Very similar difference patterns were revealed with regard to the teachers’ experience as in the case of their age, the effect size estimated at [$F(3, 25)=7.69, p=0.001$]; a statistically significant difference was again detected between Public

² The categories for ‘teacher age’ were given the following values: 1=25-34 (years old); 2=35-44; 3=45-54; 4=55-65.

Peripheral ($M=3.13$)³ and Private Central ($M=2.00$) school representatives' length of experience only, with the Public Peripheral school teachers tending to have longer experience than Private Central school ones.

As for the variable teachers' 'level of understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT'⁴, this surfaced as a research areas in the study presented in Chapter 7, and was analyzed in Section 7.3 (see Table 7.9). Since the teachers participating in the present study were also the ones who were interviewed and completed questionnaires in Study 1, measuring the direct effect of the level of understanding and knowledge of CLT theory on the teachers' classroom performance was possible and deemed a worthwhile exploration.

9.2.3 Research tools

To check whether a language teaching practice fits within the framework of CLT, one might look for the degree to which the main principles of CLT are substantiated in the classroom (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006:146). Thus, as in the case of the teacher and learner questionnaires (see Appendices 7.3 and 8.1), in conducting these observations, specially pre-designed forms were used which outlined the main principles of CLT derived from the literature, formulated as 39 statements on the observation checklist. The items on the observation form were also subdivided into seven thematic groups, each dealing with a distinct CLT-related thematic group (see Appendix 9.1).

9.2.4 Data collection procedure

The observation forms were completed during 45-minute lessons. Where allowed, some of the lessons were also digitally-recorded for later analysis and information recollection purposes. During the observations, I and a colleague observer⁵ marked each of the observation items 1-26 as True (3), Partly True (2) or Not True (1), depending on whether CLT features were present, partly present or not present at all in the lesson. The degree of CLT-related challenges observed was also evaluated during these observations: items 27-41 were marked as Not a challenge (1); a Partial challenge (2); or an Obvious challenge (3).

In order to gain an accurate idea of typical teaching practice and lesson dynamics, it was attempted, where possible, not to warn teachers beforehand

³ The categories for 'teacher experience' were given the following values: 1=under five years of experience; 2=over five; 3=over 10; 4=over twenty.

⁴ The categories for 'the level of understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT' were given the following values: 1=has no understanding; 2=has partial understanding; 3=has full understanding.

⁵ A 33-year-old Georgian female, with an extensive English language teaching experience and CELTA qualification.

that they would be observed, so that they would not be tempted to stage the lesson. The lesson was observed discreetly, from the back corner of the room, so that neither students nor teachers would feel intimidated.

Data amount

About two, 45-minute lessons for the same age group of learners (twelve-/thirteen-year-olds) were observed by two observers at twelve secondary schools in Tbilisi. About 20 hours of lesson observation data from 26 classes were collected.

9.2.5 Data analysis

Data Processing

All the data from the observation forms was entered into SPSS. All the independent variables ('school type', 'age', 'teaching experience', 'the level of understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT') were coded numerically according to the defined categories (see Section 9.2.2 above).

Recoding

To allow for a consistent and clear comparison of the teachers' attitude scores towards CLT (see Section 7.2.6) with the observation results, the differing measurement scales which had been applied in the cases of the Teacher Questionnaires (1-5) and Lesson Observation (1-3) had to be evened out: the observation scores originally presented on a scale from 1 to 3 were recoded into a comparable score on a scale of 1 to 5, using the *Recode* function in SPSS.

Composite scores

Composite scores for each thematic group on the observation form (41 observation items grouped into seven groups) were calculated through the *Transform* function in SPSS. This manipulation allowed the reporting of the analysis results in a more compact and feasible manner, and contributed to identifying broader language classroom practice patterns.

Validity and reliability

Before running any other tests to further explore the data obtained through the observations, the internal reliability of the observation form items was tested. There is not a generally agreed values for Cronbach's Alpha, and researchers' opinions vary with regard to what a respectable level of inter-item reliability should be (Huck, 2009; De Vellis, 2003; Nunnally, 1978). In the case of exploratory studies, Cronbach's Alpha values of ≥ 0.60 have been

considered acceptable (Hair et al., 1998). Thus, for the present study, the detected level of .666 inter-item reliability was considered acceptable.

Inter-rater reliability

To ensure the reliability of the assessments by myself and my co-observer, the English language lesson evaluation data provided by us were compared to verify their validity. No major discrepancies were found between the evaluation results. Minor variations were discussed and consensus was reached. An inter-rater reliability of .86 (Cohen's kappa) was found using SPSS.

Descriptive and inferential statistical analysis

In order to discover how CLT-oriented language teaching at the schools in Tbilisi is (RQ1), first, frequency counts and descriptive statistics tests were conducted on the original observation variables, which allowed a close observation of the raw data derived from language classroom observations and a calculation of the mean scores (see Appendices 9.2 and 9.3). Next, to obtain a more general picture and make the extensive data presentable to the reader, all further statistical analyses were conducted on the composite scores of multiple items grouped into the CLT-related thematic groups (see Section 9.2.4). The same procedure was followed with regard to the Challenges part of the observation (Research Question 2).

To check the effect of the independent variables – ‘school type’, ‘teacher age’ and ‘experience’, as well as the teachers’ ‘level of understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT’ – on teachers’ classroom performance (RQ3), an ANOVA test was conducted. As the assumptions that had been made of homogeneity of variance (checked with Levene's Test) and data distribution normality underlying ANOVA were not quite met, an adjusted F test: the Brown-Forsythe statistic, which is more tolerant of such violations, had to be used in SPSS. To detect where exactly the between-group difference lay, follow-up post-hoc analysis tests were applied. Again, as the assumption of homogeneity of variance was not quite satisfied (equal variances not assumed), the more robust Tamhane's T2 test was used instead of the commoner Bonferroni or Scheffe alternatives available in SPSS.

To analyze the inter-item relationship among the dependent variables (teachers' performance scores across different CLT thematic groups (RQ1) as well as between the independent variables and dependent variables (RQ3), a Pearson's Correlation test was conducted. The significance level for all statistical tests applied in this research was set at .05. For more information regarding the data analysis approach adopted in this study, see Section 7. 2.5.

9.3 STUDY RESULTS

In this section I will discuss the results of data analysis, focusing on each research question in turn.

Research question 1: *How CLT-oriented is the language teaching process at secondary schools in Tbilisi?*

While observing the classes, in the first place, it was attempted to determine what the ultimate goal of the lesson was: teaching about language forms or developing communicative skills in learners. Table 9.4 below presents the information obtained about the focus of the lessons observed and the nature of teaching method applied to achieve the study goals.

Table 9.4: The main focus of the 26 lessons observed at the twelve schools and the communicative nature of the lessons

Lesson focus	Frequency	Percentage	Method applied in the lesson
Form/Linguistic Knowledge	17	65.4%	Non-communicative
Skills/Communicative Competence	9	34.6%	6 quasi-communicative 3 genuinely communicative
Total	26	100%	

As the data in Table 9.4 shows, in the majority of cases, it is mostly language knowledge provision that was the focus of the language lesson, and there were nine cases when the focus of the lesson was on communicative skills development. Even though teaching of language form is one of the main aims of Communicative Language Teaching, the fact that the majority of lessons were grammar-driven, and very similar to the ones practised in Soviet times under the Grammar-Translation method, indicates that teachers have a strong tendency, for whatever reason, to focus on language form, largely ignoring the language areas which provide the abilities necessary for efficient communication. Also, besides what is focused on in the language lesson, it is equally important to determine which approach is used in the process of teaching. Language form/grammar can easily be taught using a communicative method; it is not only what but also how one teaches that matters, and a description of the latter follows below (see Table 9.6).

Besides the lesson focus, the main source of teaching material of the lessons observed was also investigated ('with what'). All of the teachers observed except two (T01: Pri. C.; T02: Pri. C.)⁶ demonstrated a sole reliance on the coursebooks adopted by their schools as their teaching material. The

⁶ A clarification of the coding system applied was provided in Section 7.2.5.

table below provides information about the coursebook titles, publishers and the place of publication:

Table 9.5: English coursebooks used at secondary schools in Tbilisi

Coursebook Title:	Publisher:	Country of Origin:
<i>Total English</i>	Macmillan	UK
<i>English World</i>	Macmillan	UK
<i>Laser</i>	Macmillan	UK
<i>Gate Way</i>	Macmillan	UK
<i>Success</i>	Pearson/Longman	UK
<i>Friends</i>	Oxford University Press	UK
<i>Top Score</i>	Oxford University Press	UK
<i>New English Plus</i>	Twenty-first Century	Georgia

As it can be observed in the table, the coursebooks used at secondary schools in Georgia, in almost all cases, except for one (Public Peripheral school), were British-published resources, and were on the list of teaching materials approved for classroom use by the Ministry of Education of Georgia (for more information regarding coursebook approval procedures in Georgia, see 5.4.2). This also suggests that it is mainly the British English that is practised at schools in Georgia; however, it should also be noted that little else besides the employment of British-published teaching materials is indicative of which norm of English is tried to be promoted in Georgia (for more discussion on the topic, see Section 5.4.4).

The methodology adopted in the coursebooks listed in the table above is clearly of a communicative character and follows the language teaching, learning and assessment standards outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), elaborated by the Council of Europe; however, this does not automatically mean that the lessons in which these materials are used are actually of a communicative nature. Thus, it was deemed interesting to look into whether the methodologies used in the English language lessons were compatible with the ones suggested by the coursebook authors.

The teachers' actual classroom performance and the closeness of their practices to CLT principles was explored by rating the communicative character of their practices according to the six thematic groups presented in the observation for (the seventh group – CLT-related challenges was analyzed separately). The detailed results of the frequency counts and mean score calculations for each observation item can be found in Appendices 9.2 and 9.3. The results obtained from the descriptive statistics tests run on the composite variables of the CLT-related thematic groups are provided in Table 9.6 below:

Table 9.6: Degree of CLT-orientation of teachers' teaching practice

Methodology thematic groups	Min.	Max.	Mean	SD
1. Language and Learning Theory	1	5	2.08	1.168
2. Course Design and Syllabus	1	4	1.82	1.055
3. Teacher's and Learner's Roles	1	5	2.62	1.359
4. Classroom Interaction	1	5	2.15	1.317
5. Error Correction	1	5	2.15	1.300
6. Teaching Materials and Activities	1	5	2.12	1.251
Mean:	1	5	2.16	1.152

Note: The mean scores for groups 1-6 are presented on a scale of 1-5 (1=not communicative at all; 5=highly communicative).

Note: Min.=Minimum; Max.=Maximum, SD=Standard Deviation.

The mean scores presented in Table 9.6 illustrate that, overall, the communicative nature of the lessons in Georgia are rated below average across all thematic groups, ranging from M=1.82 to M=2.62 on a 5 point scale. However, the large variability of the scores gives grounds to assume that certain factors might be affecting the analysis outcomes to a significant degree. Hence, further analysis in the direction of independent variable effect has been undertaken and the results are reported below in Figures 9.1 and 9.2 describing the effects of 'school type', 'teacher age', 'teacher experience' and 'level of understanding of CLT theory'.

To check the relationship between the observation groups, an inter-item correlation analysis was conducted. The test revealed a positive correlation between the thematic groups, which means that those teachers who demonstrate more CLT orientation in one area of teaching do so across all other categories: those who scored higher than others, for instance, with regard to Error Correction techniques also scored higher in the Classroom Interaction area. The details of the correlation analysis can be found in the Table below:

Table 9.7: Inter-item correlation analysis: observation scales 1–7

		1. Language and Learning Theory	2. Course Design and Syllabus	3. Teacher's and Learner's Roles	4. Classroom Interaction	5. Error Correction	6. Teaching Materials and Activities	7. CLT-related Challenges
1. Language and Learning Theory	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	1						
2. Course Design and Syllabus	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.775**	1					
3. Teacher's and Learner's Roles	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.895**	.796**	1				
4. Classroom Interaction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.918**	.807**	.895**	1			
5. Error Correction	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.800**	.552**	.812**	.803**	1		
6. Teaching Materials and Activities	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	.924**	.693**	.839**	.850**	.783**	1	
7. CLT-related Challenges	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed)	-.933**	-.814**	-.839**	-.869**	-.673**	-.900**	1

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

My observations with regard to the true nature of the language teaching methodology applied in the classrooms in Tbilisi are well illustrated by the qualitative assessments of an American teacher assistant, who had arrived in Georgia on a Teach & Learn with Georgia (TLG) program (for more information about the program, see Section 5.4.4), and whom I met in one of the lessons at one of the Public Central school in Tbilisi.

In his interview, the teacher emphasized the excessive focus on the forms of the language and on accuracy, and negligence regarding the meaning of the English language, by the Georgian teachers. The issue of the lack of understanding of the theoretical background to CLT, as well as the strong

prevalence of the old-fashioned way of language teaching, also surfaced in the interview. An excerpt from the interview follows below:

Grammar instruction takes up the most of the teaching time. I have been speaking English for ages and studied linguistics too, but this is the first time I have heard so many details about conditionals, passive voice and about so many other grammar structures. These are arbitrary constructions, which do not measure how one uses the language; sometimes pupils intuitively use the correct language forms, but teachers correct them if the structure they use does not fit the provided framework. This seems so awkward to me... as for the activities, there is nothing communicative or native-like about them; it is just a recitation and a bad recitation too (T21: Pub. C.)

The teacher also talked about the lack of authentic language exposure opportunities in language classrooms in Georgia, as the teachers having no contact with the natively-spoken language, and cannot offer a good language model to the students, nor are such experiences offered to the learners by exploiting the resources that modern technologies can offer nowadays and by doing so, provide certain solutions to the problem (T21: Pub. C.).

Research question 2: *What are the practical challenges encountered on the way to CLT application in language classrooms in Georgia?*

To reveal the level of challenge associated with CLT implementation in the language classrooms in Georgia, the observation items dealing with CLT-related issues (Group 7, items 27–41 on the observation form) were analyzed through frequency counts (Appendix 9.2) and descriptive statistics (Table 9.8). To make the source of a particular challenge clearer, the items in the Challenges section of the questionnaire were further subdivided into ‘Teacher-related challenges’, ‘Learner-related Challenges’ and ‘Other Challenges’ groups. Table 9.8 presents the analysis results:

Table 9.8: Mean scores of the challenges observed in the English language lessons

CLT-related challenges	Mean
Teacher-related challenges	Mean: 3.56
Teachers are not proficient in the target foreign language	3.62
Teachers do not seem to be aware of CLT principles	3.77
Teachers do not seem to be trained in using CLT	3.19
The influence of the grammar-driven way of teaching is felt in class	3.69
Learner-related challenges	Mean: 1.52
Learners do not seem willing to speak out and be active in the lesson	1.08
Learners seem uncomfortable speaking with each other in a foreign language	1.31
Dealing with learners of various language proficiencies	1.77
Learners are having difficulties learning in the medium of the foreign language	1.92
Other CLT-related Challenges	Mean: 3.3
The large group size of students seems to be complicating the study process	3.08
There are classroom management problems related to CLT practices	2.69
There are not enough classroom facilities and equipment to support CLT	4.00
The classroom is arranged in such a way that it does not support CLT	3.00
The non-CLT compatible assessment system	3.92
Mean	2.80

Note: The mean scores are presented on a scale of 1-5 (1=no challenge, 2=little challenge, 3=moderate challenge, 4=considerable challenge, 5=very big challenge).

The data presented in Table 9.8 indicate that the overall level of typical CLT-related challenges was above average ($M=2.80$). However, when observed in various categories, it is revealed that the degree of learner-related challenges are quite low (Composite Mean=1.52), whereas teacher-related (Composite Mean=3.56) and CLT-related (Composite Mean=3.3) issues were considerable; a low awareness of a theoretical background of CLT, low language proficiency, the prevalence of the grammar-driven way of language teaching, the need for teacher training, and together with the lack of teaching facilities, large classes, seem to be much more problematic than learner-related issues are. More statistical details of the challenges observed in the lessons (questionnaire items 27–39), can be found in Appendices 9.2.

Research question 3: *Do factors such as school type as well as certain teacher characteristics affect the communicative nature of their classroom practice?*

ANOVA and post-hoc analyses were conducted to check the effects of the independent variables on the communicative nature of teachers' classroom practice. The calculations were performed in SPSS on the composite scores of the observation results. The results of the analysis are provided in Table 9.9 below (more detailed statistics of the observation outcomes are presented in Appendix 9.4).

Table 9.9: Effects of the independent variables on the communicative nature of the teachers' classroom practice

Variables	Groups	Mean scores
School type	Public Central	1.59
	Public Peripheral	1.50
	Private Central	3.98
	Private Peripheral	2.46
Age	25-34	4.08
	35-44	2.60
	45-54	1.65
	54-65	1.56
Teaching experience	Over 5 years	2.98
	Over 10 years	1.68
	Over 20 years	1.38
Level of understanding of CLT underpinnings	Has no understanding	1.37
	Has partial understanding	2.46
	Has full understanding	3.92

The effect of the 'school type' variable turned out to be significant [$F(3, 22)=17.64$, $p=.000$]; the analysis revealed that the teachers at Private Central schools tend to be significantly more CLT-oriented than their Public Central ($p=.000$) and Public Peripheral ($p=.000$) school colleagues. As for the effect of 'age' [$F(3,22)=4.86$, $p=.010$], the youngest age group (25-35) performed in a significantly more communicative manner than their older colleagues belonging to the 45-55 ($p=.050$) and 55-65 age groups ($p=.018$) did. This fact confirms the tendency of younger teachers to be more CLT-oriented than their older colleagues. The analysis of the effects of 'experience' [$F(2, 23)=5.54$, $p=.009$] reveals an interesting pattern: the teachers with the least teaching experience tend to demonstrate practice closest to the CLT principles, and the teachers with the longest experience the least. In terms of the significance of the differences

detected across the groups, the 'over 5 years of experience' group demonstrated significantly more CLT-oriented classroom practices compared with the 'over 10 years of experience' ($p=.032$) and 'over 20 years of experience' ($p=.010$) groups. This finding, coupled with the results of an ANOVA test on the 'teacher age' variable, indicates that the older language teachers in Georgia are and the earlier they start teaching, the greater the chances that they will employ non-CLT method of teaching in the class.

It was also deemed important to cross-reference to the analysis results presented in Section 7.3.1 (also in Table 7.9) regarding the teachers' understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT, and explore the effect of this factor on the teachers' actual teaching performance; the effect size proved to be significant [$F(2, 23) = 34.33, p=.000$]. The results presented in Table 9.9 above indicate, as expected, the group with the highest level of understanding performed in the most CLT-oriented manner, whereas the group of teachers with the lowest understanding acted in the least CLT-compatible manner. Significant differences were found between the group with 'no understanding' on the one hand, and the groups with 'partial understanding' ($p=.046$) and 'full understanding' ($p=.010$), on the other, and the teachers with a highest awareness of the theory underlying CLT demonstrating a significantly more CLT-compatible teaching style than the other two groups.

How the above described independent variables affect the level of challenge attached to CLT implementation was also investigated. 'School type', as well as all the other teacher-related variables included in this study proved to have the similar effect on the challenge degree as on the communicative nature of the classroom practice. At private school teachers faced significantly fewer challenges than their public school counterparts ($F(2, 23) = 26.81, p=.000$; for more detailed statistics, see Appendix 9.5). The effect of the age was also significant [$F(2, 23) = 4.48, p=.013$] – the younger the teachers were, the greater the ease with which they applied CLT in their actual teaching, with the teachers belonging to the 25-35 age group being significantly more at ease with CLT application than the 45-55 ($p=.025$) and 55-65 ($p=.044$) age group representatives. It was also revealed that long teaching experience does not make teachers any more efficient at using CLT than their less experienced colleagues, on the contrary, the teachers with the least experience seemed to be facing the fewest challenges [$F(2, 23) = 7.12, p=.004$], with a significant difference between the 'over five years of experience' and 'over ten years of experience' teacher groups ($p=.003$). As for how accurate knowledge of the theory underlying a teaching method helps with overcoming the practical challenges, the analysis revealed that teachers with no understanding of the theoretical background of CLT tend to face significantly more problems while teaching than teachers with a full or at least a partial understanding of the theoretical principles.

Research question 4: *Are there any discrepancies between teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching, and their actual teaching practice?*

Even though the investigation of the teachers' attitudes towards CLT, described in Chapters 7, revealed a widely positive predisposition on the teachers' part (see Section 7.3.2, Table 7.11), it turned out that, in the vast majority of cases, their actual practice does not exactly reflect their degree of communicativeness: 23 out of the 26 classes observed were assessed as being non-communicative or only partly communicative, and oriented at teaching only the language form. Since the data in the present and Study 1 (Chapter 7) were generated in non-comparable ways, no statistical analysis was conducted here; however, for general comparison purposes, these data were juxtaposed and are presented in Figures 9.1 and 9.2 below.

Figure 9.1 below compares, across the range of CLT-related thematic groups, how teachers feel about CLT and to what extent they implement this method in their actual teaching practice. In summary, the comparison indicates that there is a notable discrepancy between the teachers' attitudes towards CLT and the communicative character of their actual teaching practice. The teachers are visibly more receptive and supportive of CLT at the theoretical than at the practical level: despite their highly positive attitude towards CLT principles, this is not usually reflected in their lessons, which are far from being genuinely communicative in nature.

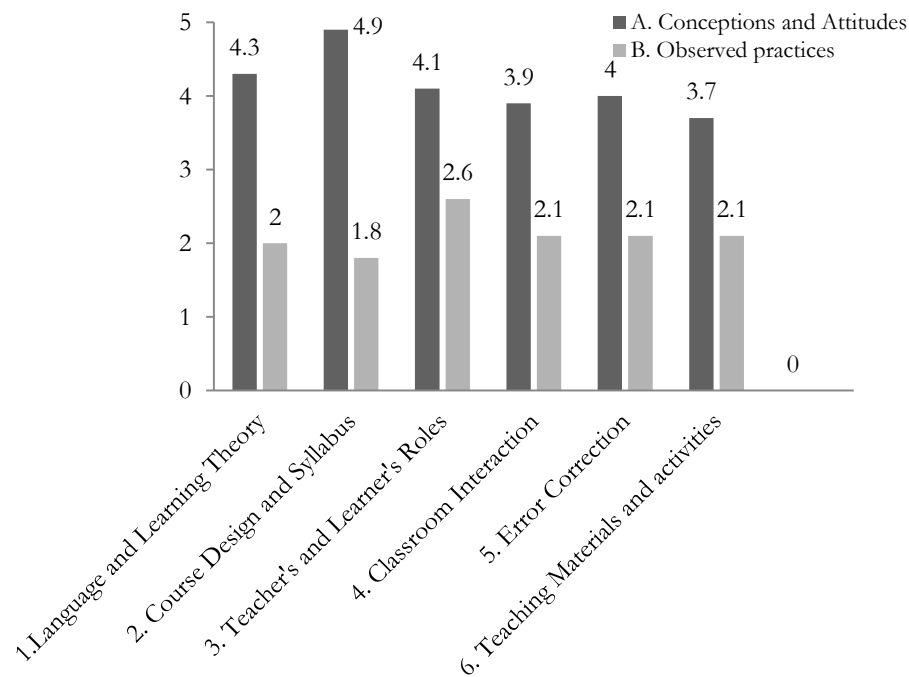


Figure 9.1: Discrepancy between the teachers' conceptions and attitudes towards CLT and the communicative nature of their actual teaching⁷

A look at how the level of the above discussed discrepancy would change when looked at across various school types was also considered interesting. As a result of comparing the data, visible differences were detected in this respect as well. The results are presented in Figure 9.2 below.

⁷ The mean scores are presented on a scale of 1–5.

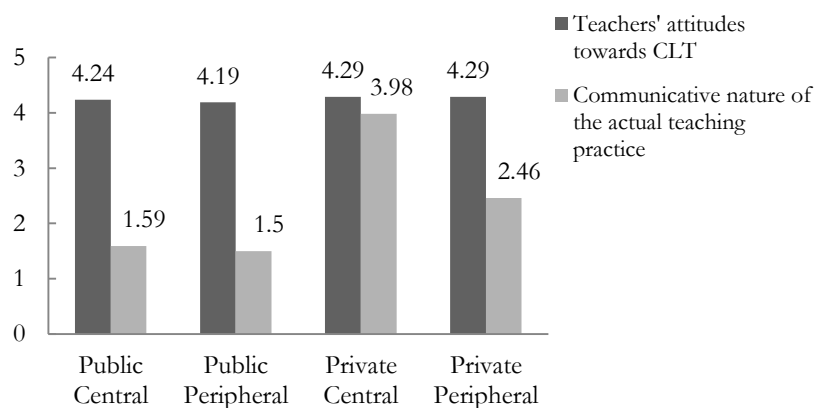


Figure 9.2: Comparison of teachers' attitudes towards CLT and their classroom practice across different school types

The level of discrepancy between the teachers' attitudes and their classroom practice looks dramatic in the case of public schools; the difference is also visible in Private Peripheral schools, but minimal in Private Central ones. Thus, the comparison reveals that private school teachers, and in particular Private Central ones, are better able to realize their teaching methodology preferences than their public school counterparts.

The discrepancy between declared and observed CLT-related challenges was also explored and the results of the analysis are provided in the Figure below:

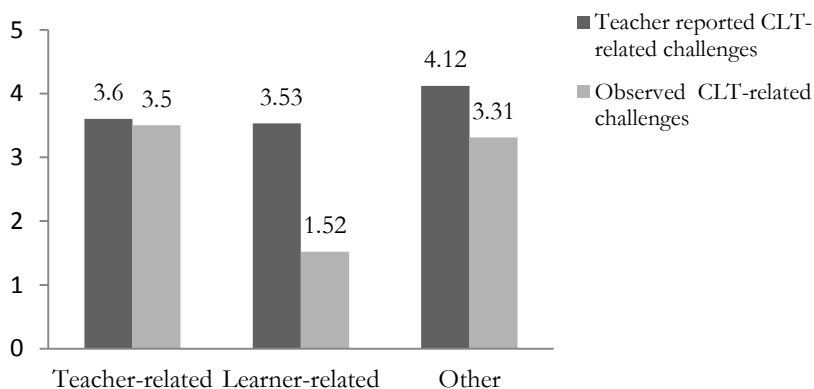


Figure 9.3: Comparison of reported and observed challenges

As the data reveals, only in the category 'learner-related difficulties' was the observed mismatch notable, which means that in that category teachers

attribute more problems to language learners in the process of CLT than was actually witnessed in the lessons, whereas about the same level of difficulty was attached to the categories of ‘teacher-related’ and ‘other challenges’ by the observers as well as the teachers themselves.

9.4 CONCLUSIONS

The current study was aimed at assessing the communicative nature of the teaching/learning process, at detecting discrepancies between how teachers feel about CLT and what they actually produce in their lessons, and at identifying the challenges that might be forming obstacles on the way to efficient implementation of CLT at secondary schools in Tbilisi. A total of 26 language classes were observed at both public and private secondary schools. The research questions posed at the beginning of the chapter will be addressed below.

1. Communicative nature of language classes in Tbilisi

In the CLT literature two aspects of CLT are focused upon: what to teach and how to teach (Littlewood, 1982; Harmer, 2001). As far as the issue of what to teach is concerned, as a result of the observations of the current study, it was detected that at all but one (Public Peripheral) type of secondary schools foreign-published, CLT-methodology-based coursebooks were used (see Table 9.5).

As far as the methodology of exploiting these materials is concerned (how to teach), the Georgian teachers of English revealed a tendency to adapt the resources to their personal teaching circumstances and competences, evidence of which is revealed in the fact that even though the coursebooks are highly communicative in nature, the majority of teachers observed (17 out of 26) focused on grammar, skipping listening and speaking activities altogether (see Table 9.4), as well as delivering the available communication-oriented material in a non-communicative manner. Here, it is also noteworthy to observe that it is precisely listening and speaking skills that are believed to be most essential for efficient communication purposes. Neither a sufficient level of focus on language functions, nor the natural use of the target language, nor a sufficient quantity of fluency and Communicative Competence-oriented work was observed in the lessons. CLT-compatible forms of error correction, classroom interaction patterns, teaching material that is authentic in nature – none of these were strongly evident in these classes. Only a few classes were partly communicative in nature (6 classes) – where some principles of CLT could be discerned in the lessons; however, the lessons still bore a quasi-communicative character, employing quasi-communicative activities, interaction patterns and techniques. Solely 3 classes (out of 26) were found to be genuinely communicative (see Table 9.4) – focusing not only on grammar and language

accuracy, but also language skills and the development of the communicative competence in the learners, as well as successfully employing truly communicative teaching patterns and principles.

The situation in language classes in Tbilisi described in the present study does not differ much from the one reported in a similar study by Tkemaladze et al. undertaken in 2001. The study by Tkemaladze indicates that, in spite of the claim of most of the teachers with regard to the communicative nature of their teaching practice, observations of 148 classes proved the opposite: “no instances of communicative activities were conducted. Priority was entirely given to language accuracy as opposed to students’ Communicative Competence,” Berulava reports (2001:29). Moreover, she adds that in a forty-minute lesson, only five minutes were devoted to fluency practice and 35 minutes to accuracy-oriented activities (Tkemaladze et al., 2001:112). So, it can be concluded that even though a few classes bearing a communicative character were observed in the present study, the situation overall in language teaching has not changed considerably since 2001 till today in Georgia.

2. Practical challenges encountered on the way to the application of CLT in language classes in Georgia

Most of the typical challenges associated with CLT application in EFL contexts, such as China or Japan, (Kavanagh, 2012; Li, 1998; Karavas-Doukas, 1996; Ellis, 1994), were also found at the secondary schools in Tbilisi. The most significant degree of challenge was related to teachers (Composite Mean=3.6),⁸ followed by other CLT-related difficulties (Composite Mean=3.4); the learners proved to be significantly less problematic agents (Composite Mean=1.5) of the communicative teaching/learning process (see Table 9.8).

3. Effects of ‘school type’ as well as certain teacher-related variables on the communicative character of their classroom teaching

Significant differences were detected across the various teaching contexts as well as across groups of teachers with varying characteristics.

School type

The degree of communicative character of language teaching in Georgia proved to be the highest at Private Central schools, the difference being significant between Private Central schools on the one hand, and Public Central and Public Peripheral types, on the other (see Table 9.9). These results concur with some other results of the studies conducted in other EFL-implementing countries (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006:162).

¹⁵The mean score is presented on a scale of 1–5.

Age and experience

As for the age and experience, younger teachers, with less teaching experience, performed in a significantly more CLT-compatible manner than their older colleagues. In regard to the challenges, here too, younger and less experienced teachers were observed to face significantly fewer problems in implementing CLT in the classroom than older teachers with a longer teaching background (see Figures 9.2 and 9.3).

Level of understanding of CLT underpinnings

How teachers understand the theoretical underpinnings of CLT is believed to be a very important factor for an efficient implementation of CLT in the classroom (Kavanagh, 2012; Sakui, 2004; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Mulligan, 2005). The present study revealed a strong correlation between teachers' understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT and their classroom performance, which implies that the more aware the teachers in Georgia are of the theory, the deeper and more accurate their understanding of the methodology is, and the more capable they are of acting in accordance with CLT principles (see Table 9.9). This finding is further confirmed by the fact that the group of teachers with the lowest level of such understanding demonstrated a significantly less CLT-oriented teaching manner and faced significantly more challenges in the process of CLT teaching than did teachers belonging to the group with less extensive understanding of the theories behind CLT (see Section 9.3).

4. Discrepancies between teachers' attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching and their actual teaching practice

A discrepancy was detected between the teachers' classroom practice and their attitudes towards CLT (see Figure 9.1). The impression that emerged from the comparison is that there is little evidence of a strong link between language policy, language teachers' attitudes and the language classroom reality at secondary schools in Georgia. As in other EFL contexts (Savignon, 2002; Mangubhai et al., 2004), in Georgia as well, neither the officially advocated strong orientation towards a more communicative approach to language teaching, nor the highly positive disposition that teachers have towards CLT, is necessarily reflected in the actual classroom practice, which, in Georgia's case, is still characterized by a largely form-focused orientation. This low correlation between what teachers state and their classroom practice is a further proof of the existence of a gap between theory and practice with respect to CLT in Georgia which needs to be bridged.

However, comparison of the level of discrepancy between teachers' attitudes to CLT and their actual performance across various school types

yielded notably distinct results: while the mismatch between the teachers' attitudes and classroom teaching at all public schools is considerable, at private schools the discrepancy level is quite low, or even minimal in the case of Private Central schools (see Figure 9.2). This can be explained by the fact that, as was revealed in the study, the teachers at private schools have a much more profound understanding of the theoretical underpinnings of CLT and face many fewer barriers for CLT implementation than public school teachers do. This makes the possibility of 'practicing' what the teachers preach' much more likely.

As for the mismatch between the challenges reported by the teachers and the challenges actually observed in the lessons, it was not significant except for the difficulty that was attached to the learners – in this respect, teachers tended to accuse learners of causing more problems in the CLT implementation process than they actually were (see Figure 9.3). The insignificant discrepancy reported in the cases of teacher-related challenges and administration/CLT-related challenges is illustrative of the fact that the teachers are well capable of perceiving self-related as well as other kinds of difficulties impeding the successful implementation of CLT.

To conclude, although the importance of having positive attitudes towards a modernized teaching methodology should not be underestimated, the practical aspect is of equal significance in the process of the implementation of change (Kavanagh, 2012; Thompson, 1996). The efforts made at the policy level are not always enough and do not guarantee successful or efficient teaching practice (Hamid & Baldauf, 2008; Thornbury, 2006); there is much literature on how, in many cases, pedagogical or methodological innovations and reforms often fail to be realized in actual classrooms (Coskun, 2011; Kurihara & Samimy, 2007). Thus, it is recommended that more account be taken of the practicalities related to CLT implementation in Georgia, as it is the practical side of things that seems to be causing most problems in the process. This finding is in line with similar results from a neighbouring country, Turkey (Coskun, 2011:6). Other factors, as revealed through various studies that are blamed for impeding a successful implementation of CLT include local educational theories, teachers' adherence to tradition, a cultural reluctance to challenge written words, as well as a focus on grammar-driven examination system (Coskun, 2011:8).

The following and the final analysis Chapter 10 also explores the practical side of things – the actual communicative proficiency of Georgian learners of English. This investigation is meant to measure the success level achieved so far by efforts undertaken by the Government of Georgia in the direction of transforming traditional, already-outdated methods and goals of language teaching into a modernized, communicative experience.