

# Assessing the Current Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching for English Language Teachers in Ethiopian Universities

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**Abstract:** This study has attempted to assess the current implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) approach in two Ethiopian universities to identify professional development (PD) needs of English language teachers. A cross-sectional study using teachers, students and management as sources of information was applied to conduct the study. Data were gathered through teachers' questionnaire, interview schemes, focus group discussion and classroom observation, and analyzed using both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study has found out that a good number of teachers of the universities lack appropriate professional preparations in CLT, particularly in-service training. Though most teachers make self-report that they have sufficient subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of CLT, data from department heads, student discussions and classroom observations tend to contradict with the report of most teachers. Moreover, the teachers seem to have positive beliefs about CLT, but their implementation of the approach has been challenged by several factors. Furthermore, the study suggests the management of the universities to be supportive of PD initiatives to improve CLT implementation of their respective universities. Finally, the study has concluded that in addition to strengthening the existing pre-service CLT training, it is essential for the universities to arrange in-service PD opportunities to sustainably support the teachers to improve their CLT implementation and ensure continuous and effective student learning.

**Keywords:** Communicative language teaching, English teaching in Ethiopia, assessment of English language teaching.

## Background and Purpose of the Study

The significant role that English language plays in various sectors of human life (social, economic and academic) has initiated a great need for good communication skills of this language around the globe (Harmer 2001). The need for good communication skills in English, in turn, has created an immense demand for quality English language teaching. Learners are interested in mastering English and many employers want their employees to have good English language skills (Richards, 2006). In Ethiopia, there is also a large demand for good English command as it gives a wide access to employment, opens doors for both local and international scholarship opportunities and provides access to most scientific materials. Moreover, as international lingua franca, it serves as a medium of communication with the international community. Although English serves as a medium of instruction at secondary and higher education levels in Ethiopia, the quality of its teaching has been challenged by various factors (MoE, 2005). One

principal factor is the rapid and wide educational expansion of higher education (see MoE, 2010). The number of public universities has risen from two in 1994 to twenty-two at present. This resulted in a dramatic increment in student enrolment while the number of academic staff at MA and PhD levels failed to grow proportionally. The situation has urged universities to recruit many under qualified teachers at bachelor level with little or no pre-service teacher training and prior teaching experiences. Most of them also lack in-service teacher training. Besides, English language proficiency of the university teachers is found to be inadequate (HERQA, 2007). The universities are further challenged by low English language command of students joining the institutions (AMU, 2008). Using English as the language of instruction exacerbates the challenges of teaching learning processes of the universities.

On-the-job professional learning could address the above mentioned challenges (Guskey, 2000; Fullan, 2007) particularly for English language teachers (Harmer, 2001; Olphen, 2008; Ur, 2003) for the following reasons. Firstly, in Ethiopian universities, English being a second language used as a medium of instruction requires the teachers to have good language skills in order to help students develop good proficiency of the language otherwise it becomes a barrier for student learning (Harmer, 2001; Ur, 2003). Secondly, the teachers offer common courses like *Communicative English Skills*, intended to improve students' communicative and academic skills, to majority of students of higher education. They serve greater number of students than teachers of other disciplines. Improving their English language competencies through professional development (PD) support is supposed to positively contribute to the improvement of students' communicative and academic skills. Thirdly, improving English language teachers' knowledge and skills will contribute to having better future English language teachers at secondary schools and teacher education colleges, thereby enhancing English language teaching and learning practices of all lower levels. A PD program that addresses these aspects could focus on communicative language teaching (CLT) (Gray & Klapper, 2009, Richards, 2006; Savignon, 2002).

In contrast to traditional grammar teaching, CLT has been viewed as an effective and widely accepted approach of language teaching (Richards, 2006; Gray & Klapper, 2009; Harmer 2001). CLT encourages interactive language learning through the process of real life communication in a meaningful way (Gray & Klapper, 2009; Richards, 2006). Its specific characteristics include: (a) involving students actively in teaching learning processes through purposeful real-life activities; (b) practicing and using an integrated-skills approach, combining listening, speaking, reading, and writing; (c) creating a conducive classroom environment for students' collaboration; (d) treating students' individual differences in language teaching learning process (e) integrating assessment with language teaching; (f) communicating language learning purposes to learners; (g) presenting grammar/vocabulary in contextualized texts and (h) tolerating students' language errors (i) using target language for communication in classroom. In addition to these main characteristics, the use of additional/enrichment materials or contents to supplement the teaching of various language items is recommended by the approach.

CLT has widely been accepted and applied in teaching languages in various parts of the world (Gray & Klapper, 2009; Richards, 2006). Similarly, in Ethiopia, it has been found to be a promising approach to improve English language teaching (AMU, 2008; Atkins, Hailom & Nuru, 1995; ICDR, 1994; Lakachew, 2003). However, CLT implementation at various educational levels in Ethiopia is impeded by several factors. For instance, limited teacher training on the concepts and principles of CLT, teachers' biased beliefs about the approach, their preference to use traditional grammar teaching, and large class size are mentioned as essential constraining factors at secondary schools (Atkins, Hailom & Nuru, 1995; Lakachew, 2003).

To understand the implementation of CLT in Ethiopian higher education, the teachers' professional preparation, their beliefs about CLT and their perceived content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills to use the approach, their implementation problems and their professional learning support needs are assessed. The ways management supports or can support the professional learning efforts of the teachers are also addressed. The main purpose of this study is, therefore, to examine the implementation of CLT and deduce teachers' learning needs in order to design an appropriate professional development program. The following general and specific research questions guided the study.

### **General question**

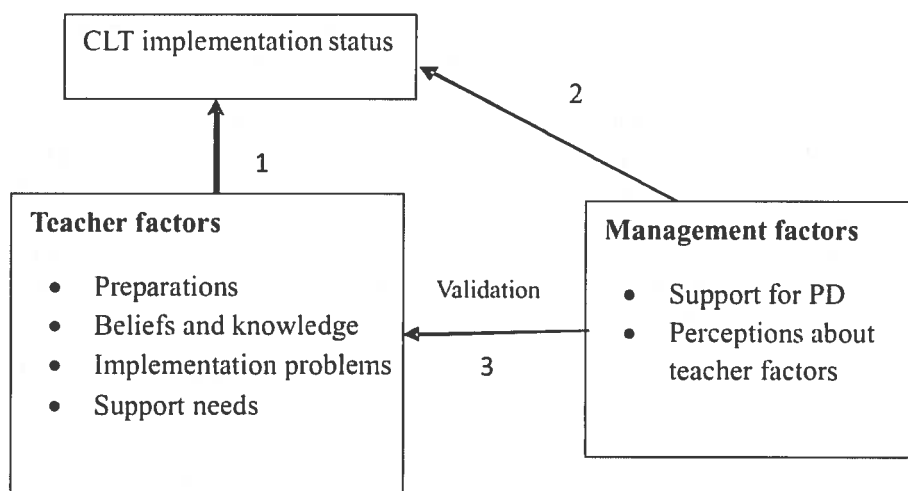
How is communicative language teaching (CLT) currently being implemented by Ethiopian universities' English language teachers and what PD learning needs do the teachers have to improve the implementation?

### **Specific questions**

1. What pre-service and in-service preparations do the teachers have to implement CLT?
2. What beliefs do teachers have about CLT?
3. What perceptions of their content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills to implement CLT do the teachers have?
4. What problems do the teachers encounter in implementing CLT?
5. What professional development support needs do the teachers have to implement CLT?
6. How does Ethiopian universities' management support PD activities of its English language teachers to implement CLT properly?

### **Theoretical framework**

The theoretical framework shown in Figure 1 below guided the study. To assess the status of CLT implementation, teachers were the primary source of data (bold arrow 1). Because CLT implementation is also dependent on the importance management attaches to CLT, universities' management also made part of the study (Arrow 2). In addition, department heads as part of management supplied information to validate data on teacher-related factors (Arrow 3).



**Figure 1:** *Conceptual framework of the study*

In the next sections, we will discuss the four teacher factors, followed by the management factors.

### Teacher preparation

Language teachers are professionally prepared through pre-service and in-service teacher education programs. These preparations allow the teachers to acquire subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills that enable them to properly accomplish their teaching duties (Harmer, 2001; Kreeft, 1997; Ur, 2003). Pre-service education prepares the teachers to enter the teaching profession with basic knowledge and skills. In order to help the teachers manage changes occurring in various areas of language teaching and enhance their professional competence and satisfaction after they have joined the profession, they need continuous professional learning through in-service learning opportunities (Gnawal, 2004). Putnam and Borko (2000) explain the potential of continuous professional knowledge development of teachers at their workplaces through collegial and collaborative efforts. They contend that the physical and social environment in which an activity takes place is an integral part of learning the activity. Kreeft (1997) contends that in order that foreign language teachers maintain proficiency in their target language and stay update on current issues of the language and its teaching approaches, the teachers should have rich learning opportunities at their workplace.

Diverse strategies can be used to realize in-service professional learning efforts at workplace. Some of the strategies applied in the context of language teaching include action research, reading professional literature and professional collaborations in the form of reflective discussion, peer teaching, peer observation, and teachers' study group. Reflection on their practices helps teachers to sort things out in mind and understand these well. In reflective discussion, collaborative development is encouraged through sympathetic but critical discourse among a group of teachers. During the discussion, teachers forward their ideas to be debated among their colleagues for deep scrutiny. The teachers clarify their views and expose their beliefs to the group members (Harmer, 2001).

### **Teacher beliefs and knowledge**

Exploring teachers' existing knowledge and beliefs with respect to an educational innovation should be the starting point of any PD program (Brown, 1993; Coenders, Terlouw & Dijkstra, 2008; Karavas, 1996; Loucks-Horsely et al., 2010; Putnam and Borko, 1997). Understanding such knowledge and beliefs has different advantages: i) setting realistic and meaningful goals for a PD program that assists the implementation of the proposed change, ii) taking actions that change teachers' knowledge and beliefs in accordance with the new approach, and iii) drawing implications for classroom teaching and learning. While knowledge can be seen as representation of facts and procedures, beliefs are based on judgment and evaluation. Teacher beliefs act like a filter through which new knowledge is interpreted and therefore plays an important role in the development of knowledge (Pajares, 1992). Understanding teachers' beliefs about what they do and why they do it gives a promising platform to access the teachers' theoretical understanding of second language learning and classroom practices (Karavas, 1996). If a mismatch exists between the philosophy of an approach and teachers' beliefs, teachers usually incline to construe the new information in the view of their own views, and work in a way that the innovative ideas fit the teachers' existing teaching approaches (Wagner, 1999, cited in Karavas, 1996). This also works in CLT (Karavas, 1996; Liao, 2003). Teachers' beliefs about CLT reflect the way they perceive it and guide their practical teaching actions (Liao, 2003).

For successful implementation of an educational innovation like CLT, understanding the existing knowledge of teachers is equally important as understanding their beliefs. Unlike beliefs, which represent teachers' opinions or thoughts about an object/issue (Liao, 2003); knowledge refers to facts, procedures and theories within a field of study. The existing knowledge of teachers affects the way they perceive and value the innovation. It also affects the actions the teachers take to practically use the ideas of the innovation (Watzke, 2007). As educational changes need teachers to act in new ways, demonstrate new skills, behaviors and activities and to think differently (Loucks-Horsely et al., 2010), exploring their existing knowledge is an important step to understand its current status and to take necessary measures that change it in line with the innovative way of teaching. Understanding knowledge is important to identify areas of focus of teacher learning in PD program for the proper implementation of the new approach (Putnam & Borko, 1997).

### **CLT implementation problems**

Studies conducted in African countries on CLT practices (Adejimola, 2007; Barkhuizen, 1998; Lakachew, 2003) indicated that teachers face lots of problems in implementing it in their classroom teaching. The studies showed that most teachers fail to put CLT features into actual teaching practices and attributed the failures to various factors. Adejimola, Barkhuizen and Lakachew found teachers' lack of knowledge and skills of CLT to be an important factor to impede CLT implementation respectively in Nigeria, South Africa and Ethiopia. They reported that most teachers participated in their studies lack adequate knowledge and skills to implement CLT that they were doubtful of communicative methods. The teachers refrained from using CLT and participating students in various communicative activities. They tended to emphasize teacher-dominated grammar-oriented

teaching methods in their teaching. Lakachew further explained that most teachers participated in study failed to implement CLT properly and attributed their failures to external constraints. However, some other teachers involved in the study ascribed their failures to own lack of adequate knowledge and skills originated from shortage of training on the approach.

Students' resistance to communicative activities is also indicated as a challenge of CLT class implementation (Barkhuizen, 1998; Lakachew, 2003). Barkhuizen, for instance, found that in the South African context, students preferred traditional language learning tasks to communicative-type of activities. In Ethiopian high schools, Lakachew realized that students do not even like teachers who make them do communicative activities every time. Students are afraid of committing errors speaking in front of their classmates while committing errors is considered part of learning in CLT.

Lack of enrichment materials such as newspapers, supplementary textbooks, tape-reorders, video tapes etc (Adejimola, 2007), lack of resources such as teaching materials, portable chairs; large class size, (Adejimola, 2007; Lakachew, 2003; Surafel, 2002), structure-oriented national exams (Barkhuizen, 1998; Lakachew, 2003; Surafel, 2002) are listed as other impediments of productive CLT implementation in Ethiopian and other African contexts.

### **Teachers' support needs**

To foster their learning and widen their opportunity to successfully implement innovative ways of teaching like CLT, teachers can be supported in diverse ways: teacher collaboration, support of teacher leaders and use of curriculum support materials. Teacher collaboration supports teachers by facilitating mutual help, sharing of experiences and reflective discussions on their professional works (Little 1990; Fiszer, 2004). It reduces teachers' isolation (Guskey, 2000; Little, 1990), improves their understanding of their works (Hord, 2004), and increases their confidence and sense of efficacy (Austin, 2002; Fullan, 2001). Teacher leaders are good sources of support for other teachers (Lieberman & Miller, 2004). They act as facilitators, coaches, mentors, team leaders and instructional specialists for their fellow teachers. They increase the teachers' expertise in teaching and learning; strengthen collaborative culture in schools, increase teachers' professionalism and empowerment. Teacher support materials also support teacher learning by enhancing professional growth of the teachers and assisting the teachers with curriculum implementation (Ottevanger, 2001; Thijs, 1999; Tilya, 2003; Van den Akker, 1988; Voogt, 2010). They raise teacher confidence to implement the innovative ways of teaching (Ball, Feiman-Nemser, 1988; Ottevanger, 2001); allow the teachers to develop better understanding of their subject matter knowledge and improve their practical teaching skills (Kitta, 2004; Van den Akker, 1988) and encourage collaboration with their peers (Thijs, 1999). In facilitating curriculum implementation, the materials enable teachers to clear up with such initial implementation barriers (Ottevanger, 2001; Van den Akker, 1988) and to prepare their lessons in a well-organized way and execute them successfully (Ottevanger, 2001). They also provide clear picture of the innovation and support teachers in vulnerable components of the innovation by offering procedural specifications and concrete how-to-do suggestions to curriculum implementation (Van den Akker, 1988; Voogt, 2010).

## Management support

To change teaching practice, management support is crucial (Eun and Heining-Boynton, 2007; Guskey, 2000; Loucks-Horsley et al., 2010). The school principal's positive view of an innovation accompanied by practical support actions is a crucial factor in encouraging his/her staff to experiment with new idea (Holland, 2009). The principal's support of the innovation can be realized in through protection from intrusion, recognition of success, allocation of resources including time to participate (Guskey, 2000).

## Research Design

A cross sectional study (Gray, 2009) using two public universities: Arba Minch University (AMU) and Hawassa University (HwU) was conducted. AMU was selected because it is the home university of the principal researcher. HwU was included in the study because of its different contextual setting, located in a bit more urbanized area. Since all Ethiopian public universities are currently undergoing more or less similar phenomena of educational expansion, assessing CLT implementation of the two universities is supposed to provide a good insight into the existing CLT implementation problems of most universities. Suggestions for intervention from the findings of this study could be adopted and adapted to contextual situations of other universities of the country to deal with similar problems of CLT implementation. As can be seen from the conceptual framework in Figure 1, factors related with teachers (primary ones) and management in relation with CLT implementation are addressed in the study.

## Participants

Forty-four English language teachers participated in the study. All available department teachers of AMU (N=22) and all except three of HwU (N=22) were involved. Representatives from management bodies such as academic vice presidents, academic development and resource centre coordinators, and English language department heads participated. Eight students from AMU and four students from HwU were selected in consultation with their teachers. The students were drawn from different departments in which the course *Communicative English Skills* had been taught during the semester before the time of data collection.

## Instruments

A teachers' questionnaire, class observations, a focus group discussion and an interview scheme were used to collect data (See Table 1). A *questionnaire* was administered to the teachers. Both close-ended (using Likert-scale) and open-ended questions were included. A Likert-scale with four levels (*1-poor, 2- average, 3-good, 4-very good status*) of rating is used. The questions elicited the teachers' professional preparation, beliefs and knowledge of CLT, problems of CLT implementation and their professional learning needs to better implement it. *Observation* of six teachers' lessons was used to gain general impression about the teachers' CLT implementation practices. The application of some of the general key characteristics of CLT described in introduction section was given due attention. The researcher had the list of the characteristics and ticked them when the teacher observed applying each characteristic. The observation was pre-

notified and conducted once with each teacher. From AMU, four teachers were observed: two (one has CLT training, the other does not) had more than five years teaching experience but the other two (one has CLT training, but the other does not) were less experienced. While teachers with similar teaching experience and training were sought to be observed from HwU, only two teachers (both with more than five years teaching experience and CLT training) were found to be voluntary and observed. *Focus group discussion* was employed to gather information from students on the teachers' practices of CLT implementation and the students' perceptions about the teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of the teachers. *Interview schemes were developed* to collect data from the various management bodies. They collected data from department heads about their perceptions of the teachers' content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of CLT, teachers' practices of CLT implementation, PD support needs of the teachers and the ways the heads need to support PD efforts of the teachers. Academic vice presidents were interviewed about the ways they offer and intend to offer PD supports to the teachers' PD initiatives. Academic development and resource centre coordinators were interviewed to confirm the supports reported to be offered by academic vice presidents.

**Table 1:** *Relationship between research questions and data collection instruments*

Specific research questions	Instruments			
	Teacher Questionnaire	Classroom observation	Focus group discussion (Students)	Interview Scheme (Management)
1. What pre-service and in-service preparations do the teachers have to implement CLT?	X			
2. What beliefs do teachers have about CLT?	X			
3. What perceptions of their content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills to implement CLT do the teachers have?	X		X	X
4. How do teachers practice CLT implementation in their classroom teaching?	X	X	X	X
5. What professional development support needs do the teachers have to implement CLT?	X			X
6. How does Ethiopian universities' management support PD activities of its respective English language teachers to implement CLT properly?				X



## Procedure

In undertaking the study the following steps were followed. First, the data collection instruments were developed. Then, the questionnaire was validated by experts through checking its contents and unity among items under different constructs. Next, pilot testing of the questionnaire was conducted with English language teachers of Walayta Soddo University. Then after, the questionnaire was revised and distributed to teachers at the target universities. While the questionnaires were being filled, parallelly, interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with the specified subjects. Lesson observations were also conducted before the questionnaires were dispatched just to protect the observed teachers' biases by some ideas of the questionnaire. Following the observations, interviews were conducted first with department heads followed with academic development and resource centre coordinators and eventually with academic vice presidents. This sequence contributed for addressing complaints of the lower management body with higher management body. Next, focus group discussions were held with students. The collected data were presented to the respective subjects of the interviews to check the accuracy of the information. After getting approval from the subjects, further analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data was preceded.

## Data analysis

A mixed approach employing both quantitative and qualitative techniques was used to analyze the data. The quantitative analysis was aided by SPSS application. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, percentiles, cross tabulation with *Kendall's tau-b test* were used to analyse the quantitative data obtained through questionnaire. *Cohen's d* was calculated to measure effect size. Cohen (1969) provided tentative benchmarks for the interpretation of effect sizes. He considers  $d=0.2$  a small,  $d=0.5$  a medium and  $d=0.8$  a large effect size. The data collected via other instruments than questionnaire were analyzed qualitatively and presented using detailed descriptions in plain paragraphs. The results of the two universities in most cases are merged and presented together.

## Limitations

As most data were obtained through teachers' self-report, other data sources such as students' discussion, management interview and classroom observations were used to verify the accuracy of the teachers' data. Using teachers of only two universities as a sample could also be a limitation of generalizing the findings of the study to CLT implementation situation of all universities of the country. However, since all universities of the country are generally undergoing similar experience of expansion enrolling a good number of new teachers, the suggestions of the study can apply to other universities with some adaptations to their respective contextual situations.

## Findings

Based on the issues articulated in the specific research questions, the findings of the study are presented as follows.

### Teachers' preparation

To understand the teachers' professional preparation, their qualifications and pedagogical training on CLT are considered. Regarding qualification (see Table 2), out of 22 teachers at each university, while 10 (45.5) and 12 (54.5%) are respectively bachelor and master's holders at AMU, 5 (22.7%) and 17 (77.3%) at HwU have the corresponding qualifications. As to their professional training on CLT, equal number of teachers from each university, 17 (77.3%) and 5 (22.7%), attended pre-service and in-service training respectively. The rest of teachers of the universities did not attend the corresponding pre-service and in-service training on the approach. At both the universities, all teachers with bachelor in education (BEd) and master's in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) have pre-service training on CLT. At both the universities, all teachers with BA qualification lack both pre-service and in-service training on CLT. Out of four teachers (two with MA in linguistics and two with MA in literature) at AMU, two teachers have pre-service training but the other two lack such training. Those who lack pre-service training have in-service training. Similarly, at HwU, out of four teachers (two with MA in linguistics and two with MA in literature), two teachers (one from each qualification) have pre-service training on CLT but the other two lack both pre-service and in-service training on CLT. Two teachers specialized in journalism (one from each university) attended pre-teaching training on CLT but did not attend any in-service training.

**Table 2:** *The relationship between the teachers' qualification/specialization and their pre-service and in-service training on CLT (N=44).*

Qualification	AMU					HwU				
	Pre-service CLT training		In-service CLT training			Pre-service CLT training		In-service CLT training		
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Total	Yes	No	Yes	No	Total
BA	-	3	-	3	3	-	3		3	3
BEd	7	-	-	7	7	2	-	1	1	2
MA (TEFL)	7	-	3	4	7	12	-	4	8	12
MA (Linguistics)	1	1	1	1	2	1	1		2	2
MA (Literature)	1	1	1	1	2	1	1		2	2
MA (Journalism)	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-	1	1
Total	17	5	5	17	22	17	5	5	17	22

Department heads were asked about the existence of any in-service program that supports the teachers with the implementation of CLT in their daily teaching learning processes. The heads explained that there are some short-term programs such as pedagogical training organized by academic development and resource centres; however, the programs are neither well-organized nor tailored to CLT

implementation. They expressed that the programs contribute little to support the teachers to properly implement CLT.

### Teachers' beliefs about CLT

According to their self-report, the teachers of both universities generally appear to hold positive beliefs about CLT, with overall mean of AMU (M= of 3.3, SD=0.3) and HwU (M=3.5, SD=0.2). The teachers showed their agreement or strong agreement to most of the statements reflecting the main ideas of CLT.

### Perceived subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of teachers

At both universities, the majority of the teachers express to have sufficient subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills. The composite mean value of the two variables of the teachers of each university is calculated to be 3.1 with standard deviation of 0.6.

**Table 3:** Teachers' perceived subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills of CLT: teachers with MA in TEFL compared against teachers with other qualifications (N=44)

Compared variable	MA in TEFL M(SD)	Other qualifica- tions M(SD)	Kendall's tau-b test (P-value) (P-value)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Subject matter knowledge	3.5(0.51)	3.0(0.35)	0.001	1.2
Pedagogical knowledge and skills	3.4(0.70)	2.9(0.71)	0.01	0.7

$P \leq 0.05$

As noticed from Table 3, according to teachers' self-report, teachers with MA in TEFL have better perceptions of their subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of CLT than teachers with other qualifications combined. *Kendall's tau-b test* has indicated that the difference is significant at  $p=0.001$  (Effect size = 1.2) for subject matter knowledge and at  $p=0.01$  (Effect size = 0.7) for pedagogical knowledge and skills.

**Table 4:** The comparison of perceived subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of teachers with and without pre-service training on CLT (N=44)

Compared variable	Teachers with pre- service training M(SD)	Teachers without pre-service training M(SD)	Kendall's tau-b test(P- value)	Effect Size (Cohen's d)
Subject matter knowledge	3.3(0.53)	3.0(0.00)	0.003	0.8
Pedagogical knowledge and skills	3.3(0.70)	2.6(0.70)	0.007	1.0

$P \leq 0.05$

From Table 4, teachers' self-report indicated that teachers with pre-service training on CLT have better subject matter knowledge than teachers without such training.

With large effect size (Cohen's  $d=0.8$ ), using *Kendall's tau-b test*, the difference is computed to be significant ( $P=0.003$ ). However, there is no difference between teachers with and without in-service training on CLT in relation with the variable considered. Similarly, with significant statistical difference ( $p=0.007$ ) and large effect size (Cohen's  $d=1.0$ ), teachers with pre-service training are found to have better pedagogical knowledge and skills than the teachers who lack such training. With regard to the variables, teachers with in-service training seem to be in a better status than the teachers who lack the training but the differences are not statistically significant.

The views of department heads are not supportive of the overall positive beliefs of the teachers about the adequacy of the teachers' subject matter knowledge and pedagogical skills to implement CLT properly. The heads see the issue from two angles. They believe that master's holders, particularly those with MA in TEFL, are good as they specialize in a specific area of study but bachelor holders have deficiencies. Concerning pedagogical knowledge and skills, the heads reported that teachers with pre-service CLT training implement it in better ways than their counter parts. For instance, department head of HwU says, "Frankly speaking, there are times students come to my office to complain against teaching of some bachelor teachers. They usually ask for change of teachers with master's qualifications. Bachelors are not adequately qualified to teach at university level. They need to specialize."

### **CLT implementation problems**

To get understanding of the problems teachers face in implementing CLT in their actual teaching learning processes, data were acquired through interview with department heads, focus group discussions with students and classroom observation of selected teachers.

Data from the interviews and discussions give an impression that most teachers (primarily bachelors) face a lot of challenges to implement CLT in their teaching practices. According to the department heads, teachers with bachelor degrees and teachers who lack proper training on CLT encounter important difficulties in implementing it. The heads justified their arguments that teachers with only bachelor degrees possess insufficient subject matter knowledge to teach at university level; and those who did not attend any professional training on the approach lack necessary pedagogical knowledge and skills to implement it in their teaching practices. The heads added lack of support material (teacher guide) for the course *Communicative English Skills* as a substantial factor intensifying the challenge of CLT implementation. Students participated in focus group discussions also explained that their teachers usually find difficult to implement CLT in teaching the course *Communicative English Skills*. They attributed the difficulty to the students' poor English language proficiency, students' shortage of experience with the approach, class size and teachers' lack of interest to properly implement the approach. They witnessed that the teachers usually prefer to use teacher-dominated methods to teach the stated course. The students suggested that the teachers should encourage, follow up and establish healthy interactions with the students to improve the implementation. The students reported that most teachers (especially bachelors) failed to demonstrate most of inherent features of CLT in their teaching learning activities. The majority of the participants explained that their teachers rarely relate lessons with the real-life experiences of the students, contextualize vocabulary or/

and grammar in authentic example sentences, let students practice language items taught, give students chance to work in group or pairs and use electronic equipment to teach the language skills etc when they teach the course *Communicative English Skills*. Only one teacher (with MA in TEFL) who taught the course to students of Sociology department at AMU was reported to properly apply CLT principles to teach the course but was criticised for giving scant attention to reading and writing skills in teaching the course. Some participants from both universities complained that their teachers totally ignore grammar parts of the course. Most participants from AMU blamed their teachers for actively engaging only outstanding students in the teaching learning process. They also complained about the teachers for leaving out listening skill. A few words of a student from department of History run as "Our teacher is fresh. In teaching Communicative English Skills, he always goes with outstanding students; he does not worry about medium and slow learners. He has never taught us listening skill."

Six teachers (4 from AMU and 2 from HwU) were each observed one lesson while teaching. The first two bachelors involved students in the teaching learning process for brief moments in small groups to give short answers to exercises in their teaching module. Being within their groups, voluntary students were asked to give answers to the questions. The third teacher, with linguistics qualification, in the same way made a little involvement of students in the teaching learning process. Even though all the three teachers seemed to be enthusiastic to teach and were moving around to check students' participation in small groups, their lessons were dominated by teacher-talks. They did not contextualize language items (real-life situations are rarely used), nor supplemented the lesson with enrichment materials and contents and did not allow students opportunities to practice the language items taught. They just asked simple verbal questions to assess students' understanding. Besides, the first and the third teachers were giving chances to only fast students to answer questions. They never made any attempt to initiate medium and slow students to ask or answer questions. The second teacher together with most of his students frequently used Amharic (local language) to speak in the classroom while they were expected to often communicate in target language to learn the language. The other teachers (1 from AMU and 2 from HwU) who have good professional preparation in CLT (with MA in TEFL) implemented it in a way most of the CLT features are realized in their teaching. The three teachers taught different topics requiring different procedures of CLT implementation. These teachers did revise previous lesson, involved students actively in the teaching learning process, enhanced students' collaborative work, related lessons with students' real life experiences, employed right steps in conducting their lessons, all in line with CLT teaching approaches. All of them are fluent and accurate speakers of English language. However, none of the teachers communicated lesson objectives (an important feature of CLT lesson). Among the three teachers, one teacher primarily taught speaking skill integrated with listening skill. He enriched his lesson with interactive PowerPoint presentation, facilitated peer-assessment and supplemented his lesson with listening task. The other two teachers taught reading comprehension and applied appropriate procedures of communicative approach. They carried out pre-reading, while-reading and post-reading activities during their teaching. The first teacher is naturally interactive and was able to motivate students and attract their attention to the lesson. On the contrary, the second teacher did neither motivate students nor show any smiling face in the classroom; consequently, she could not attract students' attention to the lesson.

Regarding the four language skills, 10 (45.5%) and 8 (36.4%) teachers respectively of AMU and HwU and department head of AMU identified listening skill to be the most difficult skill to teach in a communicative way. However, the department head of HwU indicated speaking skill to be the most difficult one. He attributed the difficulty to students' fear to speak in front of their mates.

### **Teachers' professional development support needs for effective implementation of CLT**

Teachers of both universities indicated that they need to be supported to improve their professional knowledge and skills to enhance CLT implementation. Twenty-two (50%) and 28 (64%) of the teachers indicated that they need to be supported with professional learning activities which respectively enable them to gain more understanding of CLT concepts and characteristics and to translate the concepts and characteristics into practice in teaching English language courses. Again, 22(50%) of the teachers reported that they need to be supported to practice collaboration with their colleagues to perform various teaching learning activities. Smaller proportion of teachers also indicated that they need support to develop their leadership skills and to design teacher support materials to improve CLT implementation. The department heads confirmed that teachers of their respective departments need to get professional support to undertake activities indicated by the teachers. Both the teachers and department heads indicated that they need the management support through facilitation of collaboration among colleagues, allocation of necessary resources and facilities, assignment of adequate time and provision of appropriate recognition for professional learning activities.

### **Management support**

The academic vice presidents of both universities reported that they support the PD initiatives of their respective universities' teachers by providing necessary financial supports to PD trainers and other training costs and by sending their staffs for further studies to upgrade their qualification and thereby their subject matter knowledge. The ideas of the vice presidents to large extent are supported by academic development and resource center coordinators of the universities. Despite his overall agreement with the ideas of the vice president, the coordinator of HwU criticizes the management of his university for the little priority it gives to PD issues of the teachers as the result of which the plans of the center usually face implementation difficulties.

As to future PD plans of the universities, the vice presidents indicated that their respective universities will continue to support the PD efforts of the teachers with financial, human and material resources and keep on sending the teachers for further studies. Regarding the latter plan, the vice president of AMU said, "In principle, no bachelor is expected to stay in the university more than one year. He/she should pursue further studies. Masters should also go for advanced studies as soon as possible."

The department heads, as part of management, expressed their readiness to support any initiative taken to support the growth of professional knowledge and skills of their respective departments' teachers. The head of AMU enthusiastically disclosed his readiness to support any professional learning opportunity to be arranged to

facilitate teachers' on-job learning as "I will make any possible arrangement, for instance, change schedules, reduce teaching load of teachers participating in various activities of the program for the proper implementation of the program."

## Conclusions and Discussion

This study has assessed the current CLT implementation situation of two Ethiopian public universities to identify professional learning needs of English language teachers to improve the implementation. In the next paragraphs, the findings of the study are discussed in relation with the existing literature, conclusions are drawn and suggestions for improvement are proposed.

Despite the strong advice of many scholars (Harmer, 2001; Hedge, 2000; Kreeft, 1997; Olphen, 2008) for language teachers to involve in both pre-service and in-service teacher education, this study shows that good proportion of English language teachers of each university lack pre-service and the majority of them lack in-service training on CLT. Our results further indicate that teachers with better professional preparations in CLT, especially pre-service training, MA holders in TEFL, perceive to have significantly better subject matter knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills than teachers who lack adequate preparations in the approach. However, in contrast with findings of several scholars (Harmer, 2001; Kreeft, 1997; Ur, 2003), in this study teachers who attended in-service training on CLT showed no significantly different perceived content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills than teachers who lacked such training. A reason for this could be the indigent culture and little attention given for in-service PD in Ethiopian universities. In-service PD arrangements usually practiced in the universities are in most cases one-shot workshops run at most for one week. Once the workshops are conducted, the teachers are left to implement the new ideas without having any support, follow up and monitoring for improvement. Thus, it is important to suggest the universities to arrange well-organized in-service PD programs to support English language teachers to learn about and implement CLT successfully. The program could help new teachers understand the important concepts and practical applications of CLT and use them in their actual teaching practices. The program could also assist experienced teachers who are already familiar with CLT to refresh their knowledge and skills of the approach.

This study shows that teachers of both universities have positive beliefs about CLT. However, these positive beliefs are not aligned with effective practical implementation in case of bachelor holders and of others who lack pre-service pedagogical training on CLT. Reports from department heads and students and evidence from classroom observations have confirmed limited CLT use by the specified groups of teachers. The positive beliefs of teachers with proper professional preparations tended to be consistent with good performances in CLT implementation. Teachers with MA in TEFL, for instance, were observed properly putting the core features of CLT into practice in their lessons. One main possible explanation for the mismatch between the teachers' acceptable beliefs and the limited practical enactment of CLT is that the teachers are aware of the fact that CLT has wide acceptance among professionals of language teaching but the teachers lack adequate preparation to properly implement the approach (Gray & Klapper, 2009; Richards, 2006). The positive beliefs of the teachers can create favourable conditions for arranging the support (Eun and Heining-Boynton, 2007; Karavas, 1996; Loucks-

Horsely et al., 1998; Putnam and Borko, 1997). The staff mix of English language teachers of the universities (some with good preparation in CLT but others with low, little or none at all) also can provide a fertile ground for collaborative professional development arrangement advocated by many scholars (Fullan, 2001; Harmer, 2001; Hord, 2004; Little 1990; Ur, 2003) and considered as one of the features of an effective modern PD programs (Loucks-Horsely et al., 2010). The teachers with little knowledge and skills of the CLT approach could be paired with the ones who have better knowledge and skills of the approach for mentoring and peer coaching (Guskey, 2000; Hord, 2004; Joyce and Showers, 2002) for sustainable collaborative learning among the teachers.

This study also shows that teachers' lack of motivation to teach in a communicative way, students' poor language background and proficiency (Surafel, 2002), large class size, and lack of teacher support materials for English courses (Adejimola, 2007; Lakachew, 2003; Surafel, 2002) hampered CLT implementation. In comparing the implementation challenges of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), most subjects of the study rated listening the most difficult skill to teach using CLT. To address these challenges, the teachers indicate that they primarily need support to acquire more CLT knowledge and apply it in their practical teaching, collaborate with colleagues, and obtain teacher support materials that assist CLT implementation. Thus, it seems essential to arrange the teachers' professional learning support emphasizing on clarification of the inherent CLT features, ways English language skills taught communicatively, and the creation of a collaborative learning environment facilitated through the design of teacher guides to support implementation of the course *Communicative English Skills*. The learning support should give special attention to listening skill.

This study further indicates that management claims to support and plan to support the PD of the teachers through the provision of necessary resources and sending their staff for further studies. However, the supportive claims of the management, particularly at HwU, are not endorsed by practical actions. PD agendas are not given priority and consequently are postponed or cancelled at the times of crowded timetables and budget cutoffs. The main plausible reason that the management gives scant attention to the actual implementation of PD intentions is that the management is not adequately convinced about the value of PD for the improvement of professional knowledge and skills of the teachers and thereby for the improvement of the implementation of innovative ways of teaching like CLT. In spite of the little priority given to PD activities by management, especially at HwU, management support is taken as an essential element for the successful implementation of any PD initiative by many authors (Eun and Heining-Boynton, 2007; Guskey, 2000; Loucks-Horsely et al., 1998 & 2010). Thus, for fruitful implementation of CLT, the management of the universities should render sufficient time, financial and material support to the establishment, implementation and follow up of PD efforts of English language teachers. The support of the management should not remain just at the level of accepting and approving PD plans but should go to the level of translating the plans into action so as to enhance the improvement of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge and skills of English language teachers. The improved knowledge and skills of the teachers are believed to improve their teaching performances, leading to the improvement of academic and communicative skills of all students of the universities.



As a way forward, in order to help English language teachers improve their content knowledge and practical skills of implementing CLT successfully in their teaching practices, we recommend the universities to arrange a collaborative in-service professional learning program having qualities of an effective professional development. The program should primarily assist the teachers to continuously improve their CLT knowledge and skills leading to promotion of student learning, engage the teachers in learning approaches they use with their students, encourage the teachers to collaborate with their colleagues and serve leadership roles, be grounded in classroom realities and continuously evaluated and improved (Loucks-Horsley, Hewson, Love, & Stiles, 2010). The program should also include activities of collaborative design of teacher guides to promote the teachers' learning from their joint sharing, discussions and reflections. The principal researcher is supposed to play a leading role in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the professional learning arrangement.

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