

To What Extent Can Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) be Applied as a Language Teaching Approach in Chinese Universities' English Classes

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Abstract: This essay mainly studies how to link CLT with the teaching practice of Chinese universities, so that CLT can perform its functions most efficiently. This study used the online questionnaire survey method to investigate 50 Chinese college students' attitudes towards the current state of Chinese college English teaching and their thoughts on the use of CLT in China. Through the analysis of the results of the questionnaire, it can be found that the application of CLT in Chinese university classrooms can improve student's English speaking ability and increase their participation in the classroom. However, it has no obvious help to improve students' English performance. In addition, some problems were exposed during the application of CLT, mainly due to inappropriate teaching methods of teachers, low participation of students in the classroom, and unreasonable design of classroom activities. Only by solving these problems can we promote the efficient application of CLT in university classrooms in China. Through analysis and inference, it can be concluded that improving the teaching methods of teachers can effectively solve the above difficulties.

Keywords: Chinese University English Classes; Communicative Language Learning (CLT); English Proficiency Improvement; Students' Participation.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is a theoretical model and a practical pedagogical approach for teaching languages with a wide application in western countries but its application in China's context has been problematic. CLT theoretical framework was founded in 1966 (Littlewood, 2000). However, it is only within the last 20 years that it has attracted attention from scholars in China (Huang, 2016). CLT is gaining influence on contemporary English language teaching classes in the universities in China. The CLT approach aims at cultivating learners' communicative competence in languages. A critical construct of the CLT theoretical framework is advocating that communicative teaching tasks be advanced in an integrated environment. Thus, the pedagogy used is not only teaching how to use a language but also its application into real-life situations. The objective is to teach students how to communicate with others. The application of CLT in the Chinese context thus seeks to promote an interactive approach to teaching the English language in universities in China (Liu, 2015). Thus, the dominant pedagogical approach used emphasizes more practical functions of language, which means that English classes should be set up as activities that meet the needs of students in the universities in China.

In class, if teachers want to use the CLT teaching method, they must create real-life scenarios (Littlewood, 2000). Teachers design classroom activities that include as many communication activities as possible to promote students to speak English in classes and also outside classroom scenarios. The notion that CLT focuses on is to emphasize the interaction between teachers and students. There are authors who advocate for CLT argue it is a basic teaching philosophy that emphasizes applying what has been learned in practice (Wei

and Su, 2012). Thus, CLT promotes the internalization of foreign language abilities more efficiently. CLT advocates that language learners should have Linguistic competence and Communicative competence (Berns, 2013). Huang (2016) provides examples of CLT teaching activities. These include completing tasks using the language being learned in communication entirely, active interactions, context, background and situation learning, authentic language and materials use, meaningful activities, purpose/intent of communication, negotiation of meaning, the extension of discourse among others. The use of "objects" as teaching materials or teaching tools is to enhance the authenticity of activities (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Materials such as newspapers, magazines, advertising articles, pictures, maps, charts, objects or actions are used.

1.2. Problem Statement

China has a long history that has bred a unique culture that is seen to be competing with the dominant western culture (Wen, 2018). Among the well-established Chinese cultural orientations studied on a global scale is the Confucianism ideology (Wang, 2015). Confucius sets an educational model with unique Chinese social characteristics of strict hierarchy and obedience to the elders (Huang, 2016). In the learning context, Confucianism envisages a scenario where disciples sit on the ground and listen carefully to their teacher's teachings. Teachers are seen as authoritative figures and are revered as such (Liu, 2015). Students are not allowed to question the teacher's content. Nonetheless, students must study hard the knowledge given by the teacher. Although the teaching lacks innovation and independence, it can lay a solid foundation for students in imparting basic knowledge (Littlewood, 2000). Such a pedagogical approach provides a unified system of interactions and social structure with unique Chinese characteristics.

The education system in China employs unified teaching materials, unified curriculum arrangements and a unified examination system (Huang, 2016). Since the 1980s China has used the CET-4 and CET-6 in the whole country examination system to test students' mastery and teaching of basic English knowledge at the university level (Wen, 2018). These tests examine the basic knowledge of language comprehension. Thus, teachers' lecture-style teaching of language is often deemed sufficient in instructing English learning. This traditional translation teaching method does have its unique advantages in imparting basic knowledge. It enables teachers to explain knowledge in detail and systematically (Wen and Su, 2012). However, this approach is only limited to classroom time and space. Students are expected to master the basic knowledge of English comprehensively and accurately mostly through their memory (Wen and Su, 2008). This learning of English can only help students to get ideal scores for the national CET-4 and CET-6. Practical English language development is thus impaired and limited to students' efforts.

This challenge is accentuated by the fact that China borrowed the teaching methods of the former Soviet Union (Littlewood, 2000). These methods have been applied as references to carry out foreign language teaching and train foreign language teachers for decades (Xu and Brown, 2017). Chinese English teachers who have been developed under these teaching methods are also accustomed to imparting knowledge using the traditional Chinese teaching methods founded on the Confucianism ideology (Xu and Brown, 2017).

As long as these teachers do not change their pedagogical approaches, it will be difficult for Chinese students to be exposed to new teaching experiences. As it is, the traditional Chinese teaching methods have remained to be the dominant approaches. Being of oriental background, Chinese students do not engage in the critical analysis of Chinese traditional teaching methods. In the process of studying Asian students, Littlewood (2000) found that East Asian students always regard teachers as the authorities in the education sector. Teachers' knowledge and control over the classroom are beyond doubt. Knowledge is transmitted to students by teachers, not discovered by students themselves. Students generally believe that the teacher-centred teaching method is the only one that can be adopted within the classroom setting. The social-political situation in China determines that the traditional English teaching method will still exist (Xu and Brown, 2017).

Yet another problem according to Rao (2002) is that educators using traditional Chinese English teaching methods only focus on the learning of vocabulary and grammar. These teachers ignore the communicative function of English as a language. At the beginning of the 1980s, Chinese English teachers started to focus on the application of CLT in both young learners and higher education (Wen, 2018). However, in China, there is an official institution used to formulate education policies called The State Education Development Commission (SEDC). The challenge with SEDC is that it represents a highly centralized education management system in China (Wen, 2018). Education policies set by SEDC are largely unquestioned. In 1992, SEDC asked middle school English teachers to pay attention to the communicative function of English teaching and introduced it into the syllabus (Liao, 2000). However, when CLT was applied to the Chinese English teaching classroom, the effect of this new teaching method was not obvious because SEDC failed to set

supportive infrastructure (Wei, 2018).

Students and teachers have become two factors that also limited the application of CLT. From the perspective of students, they have long been accustomed to traditional English teaching methods and homework exercises (Wei and Su, 2008). They have a very negative attitude towards communicative teaching tasks and are unwilling to communicate in English in class. From the perspective of teachers, teachers lack systematic training in communicative oral English (Huang, 2016). Their English proficiency has not improved. Further, the negative learning attitude of students makes teachers feel confused in teaching activities. Therefore, the initial stage of the application of the CLT teaching method to China does not exhibit its effect well (Rao, 2002). Chinese educational scholars have found that the traditional English teaching methods can no longer meet the needs of Chinese students for English language communication (Rao, 2002). Therefore, there is a need for teachers to begin to encourage students to take more communicative activities to improve their English communicative skills in their daily life. However, the process of applying CLT methods to English teaching classes in Chinese universities will still face a series of problems. Examples include class size as observed by Fang (2010) and teachers' competencies and the lack of teaching materials as Wei et al. (2018) observed.

1.3. Research Aim

As China continues to integrate itself within the global economy there is a need for the country to adopt global languages. English plays an important role in the world as a global language that facilitates global communication (Wei et al., 2018). Thus, to be competitive, there is a need to strengthen Chinese students' English learning particularly as they exit universities and enter into the real world. Thus, given the context established so far, this research aims to understand how much CLT can be integrated into Chinese universities to assist in English learning.

1.4. Research Objectives

Several objectives will be pursued to operationalize the research topic and research aim. The research objectives are as follows:

RO1: To establish the state of the art of English learning in Chinese universities with an emphasis on pedagogical approaches.

RO2: To establish the challenges in applying the CLT pedagogical approaches in Chinese university English classrooms.

RO3: Analyse how CLT pedagogical approaches can be applied within the Chinese universities context to yield maximum and efficient learning of the English language.

2. Methodology

This research aims to study the application of CLT in Chinese universities in comprehensive English classes. Thus, this chapter introduces the research approach and research design used to analyse the research topic. The chapter describes the background of the research, the information about participants, the method of collecting data, and the method of analyzing the data. Further, the study describes the ethical considerations adhered to in the study. To collect data, an online questionnaire was designed to survey students of various universities in China. The main research question is how and to what extent can CLT pedagogical approaches be

applied in Chinese university English classrooms. Thus, the study examines the effectiveness of CLT in promoting the comprehension of English in Chinese universities and the students' attitudes towards it. A quantitative approach was used to collect and analyze the data. After the participants completed the questionnaire, descriptive statistics analysis was conducted on the collected data. The study randomly selected 50 students from six universities using the CLT teaching method. Potential ethical issues were also established and given due consideration. In particular, the questionnaire design and data handling did not involve handling of sensitive and private data that could violate personal privacy and confidentiality. The participants are all adults who voluntarily participated in the survey and signed an informed consent form.

As alluded to in the introductory section, this study used a quantitative design approach to answer the research questions (Quick and Hall, 2015). In general, quantitative research mainly focuses on answering questions about the overall area of interest. The approach is macroscopic, relatively general, and looks for objective facts, especially the relationship between variables (Apuke, 2017). In this sense, the study used quantitative research methods to obtain relatively universal and objective facts about how and to what extent CLT can be applied within English classes in Chinese universities. Thus, the study collected data from the students in the form of questionnaires and performed descriptive statistics as the data analysis and interpretation method. The descriptive statistics on the collected data were used to make conclusions that are in line with the objective facts of a quantitative research approach.

Using quantitative research methods has several advantages and justifications. It can facilitate large-scale surveys of participants (Pinto, 2010). Conducting large scale surveys using other approaches such as qualitative methods can be costly and time-consuming. For quantitative research approaches, the methods used facilitate relatively quick and cost-effective ways of collecting data. Further, quantitative methods feature improved ways of standardization of data collections and analysis. Thus, a researcher can attain precision in the research through the use of statistics and mathematical analysis. In this study, the quantitative approaches enabled the construction of questionnaires that facilitate accurate data collection to reflect students' attitudes towards the use of CLT in English classes in Chinese universities. The observations, results, interpretations, and conclusions derived were based on the questionnaire filled out by the students (Pinto, 2010). Therefore, the assumption is that the conclusions reached are more accurate, scientific, and logical. In this case, quantitative research was used to collect convincing data for the research to reach the objective, authentic and credible conclusions.

However, the use of quantitative analysis has certain limitations particularly in the selection of samples and the design of questionnaires. To study the application of CLT in comprehensive English classes in Chinese universities, the questionnaire must have a sufficient sample size so that the statistical results have sufficient authority. Further, the selection process of participants should result in a large sample population that reflects the social makeup of the society being studied. Obtaining such statistically significant large samples is often challenging and costly. Further, while quantitative approaches claim to be more objective, the degree of objectiveness is relative to several factors (Muijs,

2004). For instance, researcher bias in question construction can inadvertently affect how respondents answer questions. These objective facts also only answer part of the question (Pinto, 2010). Often, quantitative methods answer observable and quantifiable questions. As such, underlying explanations will often remain unaccounted for.

3. Research Findings

The purpose of this study was to explore to what extent teachers in China use the CLT approach in university English classes in China. To obtain research results, a questionnaire was designed and 50 students were invited to fill it. Before the students completed the questionnaire, they had to have been in an English class in their universities for at least one semester. The English class should have used the CLT teaching method in the university. Thus, the objective of the study in this regard was to collect the students' attitudes and perceptions on how and to what extent CLT English teaching was being used. The attitudes and perceptions of the students were meant to answer the following research questions.

Main RQ: How and to what extent can CLT pedagogical approaches be applied in Chinese university English classrooms?

Sub RQ1: What is the current state of pedagogical approaches to English language teaching and learning in China's universities?

Sub RQ2: What are some of the challenges in applying the CLT approach in Chinese university English classrooms?

Sub RQ3: How can CLT pedagogical approaches be applied within the Chinese universities context to yield maximum and efficient learning of the English language?

The first part of the questionnaire, the first three questions, asked students basic information, including gender, major and English learning status. The purpose is to find out whether university students were actively learning English at the time the questionnaire was administered. Detailed data are listed in Tables 1 to 3. The 50 participants were 22 males and 28 females obtained through simple random sampling. 28% of the 50 participants are from English majors, and the other 72% are from other majors. Therefore, the data obtained by the survey also represents students of various professional levels in the Chinese university. 36% of the students study English for between 1-3 hours a day. 54% of students study English for less than an hour. Only 10% of the 50 students study English 4 to 6 hours a day. Therefore, it can be seen that Chinese university students only spend a small amount of time learning English every day.

Table 1. Gender of the participants

What is your gender?

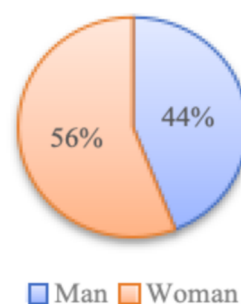
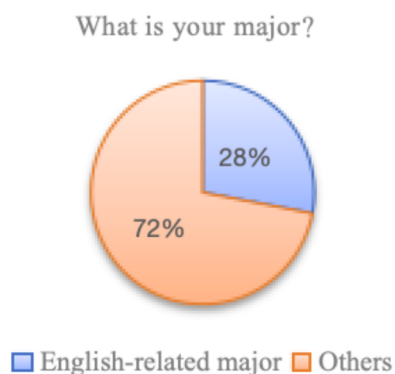
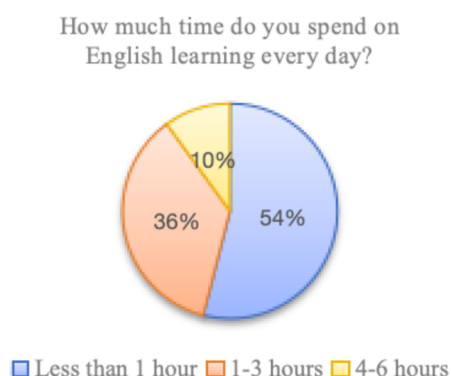


Table 2. Type of major undertaken**Table 3.** Time spent in an English class each day

The second part of the questionnaire is about students' views on role-playing, a CLT teaching activity, which can be shown in Table 4. Most of the students think that the role-playing activities in the comprehensive English class will help improve the students' oral English. Among them, 12% strongly agreed with this view, 80% agreed, 6% of the participants felt uncertain, and only 2% of the students disagreed with this view. This shows that students have a positive attitude towards role-playing teaching methods. When asked whether the topic of role-playing stems from the real-life scenes of the students, 6% of the students strongly agreed and 62% agreed. However, 18% of the students said they were not sure, and the remaining 14% did not agree with this view. Therefore, not all the topics of role-playing activities selected by teachers are derived from real-life scenarios of students, and some students may feel unfamiliar with such topics. In addition, only 24% of students think they can use topics they have practised in role-playing activities in real life out of which 4% strongly agreed with this view. 46% of students chose not sure, and 20% disagreed while 10% strongly disagreed. Most students did not make it clear that role-playing exercises can be used in real life but just stay in the classroom.

The next part of the questionnaire is about simulation exercises. The three questions are similar to the question about role-playing in the previous part. The collected data can also be shown in Table 5. Except for 2% of the participants who chose not sure and 2% of the people who chose to disagree, the other 86% of the students believed that simulation exercises in the comprehensive English class could improve their oral English ability, and 10% of the students strongly agreed with this statement. Judging from this set of data, the scene simulation exercises have received

a good response from the students and achieved good results. Then, 6% of the participants strongly agreed, and 56% of the participants agreed that most of the scenes simulated in the simulation exercises were derived from the real lives of the students. 24% of students were not sure, 14% of students disagree with this view. So not all simulation exercises come from the real-life of students. However, when asked whether the students can remember some examples of simulation exercises in the comprehensive English classroom and apply them to real-life situations, only 26% of the students agreed with this statement with 4% strongly agreeing. 40% chose not sure and 30% of students disagree with this view. Therefore, although simulation exercises can improve students' English-speaking level, few students can apply the practised scenes to real life.

Table 4. Accessibility. Part of role-play activities. Percentage of students who strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with Likert scale items.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Role-playing activities are often carried out in comprehensive English classes, which is conducive to improving students' spoken English.	12%	80%	6%	2%	0%
The topic of role-playing basically originates from real-life scenes.	6%	62%	18%	14%	0%
The topic of role-playing is very new, we will use it in our lives.	4%	20%	46%	20%	10%

Table 5. Accessibility. Part of simulation activities. Percentage of students who strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with Likert scale items

	SA	A	N	D	SD
I think that frequent simulation exercises in comprehensive English classes help us improve our spoken English.	10%	86%	2%	2%	0%
The scenes simulated in the scene simulation exercises are derived from real life.	6%	56%	24%	14%	0%
I still remember some examples in the scene simulation and can be applied to real-life communication.	4%	26%	40%	30%	0%

Next is the question about the group discussion activities in the comprehensive English class. Detailed data are listed in Table 6. The first question in this part was also asked about the impact of group discussion activities on students' oral English. 4% of the students strongly agreed, and 76% of the students agreed with this view. They believed that group discussions can improve their English speaking ability. The other 14% were not sure, and 6% of students disagreed with this opinion. However, faced with the argument that most of the topics discussed in the group are interesting to students, only 14% of the participants agreed with this point of view, most students chose not sure (60%), and 26% of the students disagreed with this argument. In addition, when asked about the students' attitudes that most of the questions discussed in the group were of practical significance and can be used to solve problems in real life, only a very small number of students agreed with this statement (12%), and 48% of the students chose not sure, 40% of students disagreed. It can be seen that group discussions are rarely enjoyed by students in a comprehensive English class, and students are not very

interested in this CLT activity, and the results achieved are not obvious.

Table 6. Accessibility. Part of group discussion activities. Percentage of students who strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with Likert scale items.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
Comprehensive English classes often hold group discussions, which helps to improve our spoken English.	4%	76%	14%	6%	0%
The topics in the group discussion are mostly topics of interest to students.	0%	14%	60%	26%	0%
Most of the issues discussed have practical significance and can be used to solve real-life problems.	0%	12%	48%	40%	0%

After investigating students' attitudes towards the above three CLT teaching activities, the four questions in Table 7 explore the effectiveness of the application of CLT in Chinese university comprehensive English classes. 6% of students strongly agreed, 90% agreed that students should be the centre of the comprehensive English classroom, and the teacher played a role in assisting students in learning. Only 4% of participants expressed not being sure about this view. So almost all of the students recognized the centrality of students in the CLT classroom. From the data obtained, only 10% of students have agreed that there is sufficient time to carry out similar CLT teaching activities in comprehensive English classes. The other 40% chose not sure, and 50% disagreed with this view. It seems that there is not enough time for these CLT activities to be carried out in the comprehensive English class. In the next question, 4% of the participants strongly agreed and 48% agreed that these CLT activities are novel and meaningful. But 42% of students said they were not sure, and 6% disagreed. Only half of the students think this kind of activity is meaningful and the topic is novel and attractive. When asked about the four aspects of English listening, speaking, reading and writing included in these CLT activities. Almost all students agreed with this statement (8% strongly agreed, 84% agreed), only 4% of the students chose not sure, and 4% disagreed. This phenomenon shows that these CLT activities can exercise students' English proficiency in many aspects, such as listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

Table 7. Accessibility. Part of CLT effectiveness. Percentage of students who strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with Likert scale items.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
I think that the above three activities are all student-centred, and the teacher only guides, observes, advises and answers questions.	6%	90%	4%	0%	0%
I think there is plenty of time for the Comprehensive English Class to carry out similar activities.	0%	10%	40%	50%	0%
I think the topics in the comprehensive English textbook and the above activities are very novel, and such activities are very meaningful.	4%	48%	42%	6%	0%
I think that the above activities have integrated the four aspects of listening, speaking, reading and writing exercises.	8%	84%	4%	4%	0%

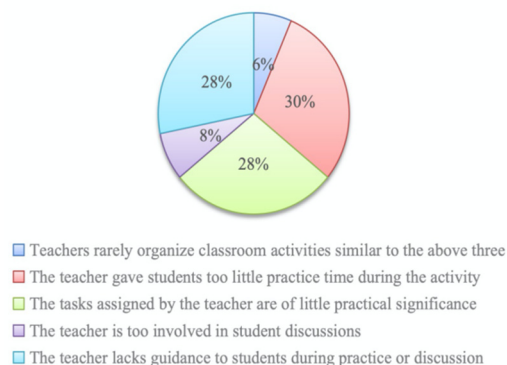
The next few questions are about the problems that arise when CLT is used in the Chinese university comprehensive English class. Ask the students whether these questions come from the teacher, the students themselves, or the design of the classroom activities. The detailed data is shown in Table 8. First, when asked whether the students think that the main problem with CLT in the application of CLT is the teacher, a total of 52% of students agreed with this view and 4% strongly agreed. The other 38% of students were not sure and 6% disagreed. The students were assigned a multiple-choice question to select which aspect of the teacher's teaching they thought the problem was mainly related to. 30% of the students believe that the teacher leaves too little time for students to practice, the tasks assigned by the teacher are of little practical significance (28%), and the teacher lacks guidance to the students during exercises and discussions (28%). 6% of students think that teachers rarely organize these CLT activities, and teachers participate too much in discussions with students (8%). In addition, 10% of the students strongly agree and 78% agree that there are still problems with the use of communicative English teaching methods in comprehensive English classes, mainly because the students' participation is not high. The remaining 10% of students choose not sure and 2% disagree. What's more, 6% of the participants strongly agree and 68% agree that there are still problems with the use of communicative English teaching methods in comprehensive English classes, mainly due to the unreasonable design of classroom activities. The remaining 14% of students choose not sure and 10% disagree.

Table 8. Accessibility. Part of problems. Percentage of students who strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with Likert scale items.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
I think there are still problems in the use of CLT in comprehensive English classes, mainly due to teachers.	4%	52%	38%	6%	0%
I think there are still problems in the use of CLT in comprehensive English classes, mainly because the students' participation is not high.	10%	78%	10%	2%	0%
I think there are still problems in the use of CLT in comprehensive English classes, mainly due to the unreasonable design of classroom activities.	8%	68%	14%	10%	0%

Table 9. Perceptions about teachers

What are the main aspects of the teacher?



The last part of the question explores what kind of progress the students have brought to their English proficiency after

these three CLT teaching activities. The specific data is shown in Table 10. 10% of students strongly agreed and 80% agreed that the above three classroom activities stimulated their interest in learning and increased their participation in the comprehensive English classroom. Only 2% chose not sure, and 8% disagreed with this statement. In addition, 4% of students strongly agreed and 40% agreed that by participating in the above three classroom activities, their comprehensive English scores have improved. However, 46% of students were not sure, 8% disagreed, and 2% strongly disagreed. Besides, 10% of the students strongly agree and 82% agree that the above three classroom activities have improved their ability to use English comprehensively in life. In this question, only 4% of students chose not sure, and 4% disagreed. Therefore, it can be seen from the data that although this kind of CLT activity can improve students' participation in comprehensive English classes and their ability to use English in daily life, it is not very helpful for students' English test scores.

Table 10. Accessibility. Percentage of students who strongly agree (SA), Agree (A), not sure (N), disagree (D), and strongly disagree (SD) with Likert scale items.

	SA	A	N	D	SD
The above three classroom activities stimulated my interest in learning and increased my participation in the comprehensive English class.	10%	80%	2%	8%	0%
By participating in the above three classroom activities, my comprehensive English score has improved.	4%	40%	46%	8%	2%
The above three classroom activities have improved my ability to use English comprehensively in my life.	10%	82%	4%	4%	0%

Given the above results, the next section offers analysis and discussions of the findings.

4. Discussion

4.1. Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to reflect upon the findings of the study, locate their meanings and possibly contextualize them within theoretical constructs and practical application established in the literature review. Regarding the research objectives and research questions, this chapter revisits parts of the literature review, combining some of the previous sources and findings of the data analysis to explore the results of the research questions. It begins with discussions of the results of role-playing, simulation exercises and group discussions achieved in the English classes in the universities in China. This will be followed by an analysis of the CLT approach to the English classes in the universities in China with the view of establishing how far its constructs can be applied. There will also be a discussion on the difficulties of applying CLT in English classes in the universities in China through an analysis of the collected research data. Finally, the discussion analyzes and discusses students' attitudes towards CLT and explores how to implement CLT teaching methods in the English education environment of Chinese universities.

4.2. The Current State of CLT Application in English Classes in China (RQ1)

The results indicate that CLT activities such as role-playing,

simulation exercises, and group discussions in Chinese university comprehensive English classes can improve students' English speaking skills. However, the topics of these activities are not very interesting to students. Yu et al. (2019) alluded to a lack of innovativeness in applying CLT and generally teaching English in Chinese universities. Thus, it is difficult to apply what they have learned in real life. In addition, the improper teaching methods of teachers, the low participation of students in the classroom, and the inappropriate design of classroom activities have become the three reasons that adversely affect the CLT teaching activities to achieve better results in the Chinese university comprehensive English classroom. These results mirror some of the recurring themes from the literature review as argued by Rao (2002) and Wang (2015).

According to students' feedback, these CLT activities can stimulate their interest in learning English, increase their participation in comprehensive English classes, and improve their ability to use English comprehensively in life. Liao (2000) canvassed these observations noting that given the cultural construct of the Chinese society, it is the teachers' role to facilitate these stimulating CLT activities. However, with the current CLT model being applied in China, it can be deduced that many students' English scores do not improve in English exams and worse still they do not get competent and confident enough to use English in their social and career lives.

Thus, in answering research question one, it is apparent from the literature review and the findings of data analysis that while CLT is being applied as one of the pedagogical approaches, its shape and form does not reflect and respect the envisaged theoretical constructs. CLT in English classes in Chinese universities is significantly influenced by traditional Chinese teaching methods. Indeed, many scholars such as Wang (2015) and Cai (2012) talk about how ingrained traditional Chinese pedagogical practices are in teaching methods. Traditional Chinese pedagogical practices fall under Confucianism and thus teachers have unfettered authority in deciding what is taught and how it is taught (Qi, 2018). Wang (2015) provide that the role of the student in this equation is to keep quiet and listen.

4.3. The Application of CLT Activities in China (RQ1, RQ2, and RQ3)

This part of the discussion has answers to all the research questions. As indicated by the answers to the second part of the questionnaire, most students believe that the three CLT activities, role-playing, scene simulation and group practice, can improve students' English speaking skills. Even in the survey of each activity, a small number of students held neutral or opposed opinions. It seems that these CLT methods can indeed improve students' English speaking level. According to research conducted by Wei and Su (2012) in the traditional Chinese university English teaching method, the teacher is the centre of classroom activities and compared to the comprehensive ability of English, the teacher only values the teaching of students' grammar and vocabulary. In this environment, students' English communication skills remain poor (Wen, 2018). When students are exposed to the CLT teaching method, they change the previous learning mode and can improve their English speaking ability and communication level (Fang, 2015).

However, when asked about the topics of these activities, the attitude of the students was not optimistic. Many students

think that the themes of these CLT activities are not new and interesting enough, nor close enough to their real-life situations. This finding mirrors Wen's (2018) observation that the CLT approach in teaching English in Chinese universities is defective. More than half of the students believe that the topics in role-playing and simulation exercises come from their real lives, but less than 30% of students believe that these exercises can be used in real-life environments. It reflects the notion established by various scholars in the literature that Chinese students learn English only to pass exams and tests (Wei and Su, 2008). A large part of the students holds neutral and opposed opinions.

It can be seen that although some CLT activities can indeed improve students' English speaking ability, the effect on students using English for communication in real-life situations is not obvious, and for students to apply what they practised in class to real-life the value is not great. Students opine that the group discussion activities are relatively boring. They point to minimal role-playing and scene simulation. Thus, the attitude towards the group discussion is not positive enough. When asked whether the problems discussed in the group discussion are practical and solve real-life problems, only a handful of the students agreed with this statement. This shows that the problems of group discussion cannot create a real communicative environment for students, although it is an effective learning activity for improving students' oral English ability.

Jeyasala (2014) believes that in the teaching process, teachers should encourage students to communicate in English and provide them with a real communicative environment to improve their ability to communicate in English. Qi (2018) expresses the same sentiment and calls on the application of innovativeness. However, data and literature indicate that some teachers do not consider creating a real communication environment for students in the process of designing CLT activities. The designed activities are not derived from the real-life of the students, so it is difficult for the students to have a sense of substitution, and therefore they cannot apply the learned knowledge to real-life scenarios (Fang, 2015). The communicative teaching method believes that a language is a tool for human communication, and social communication is the most basic function of language (Rao, 2002). Foreign language teaching should aim at cultivating students' ability to communicate. Teachers should choose appropriate content and teaching methods to enable students to master social communication abilities (Chan, 2014). The principle of the communicative English teaching method is student-centred and teacher-led. The core of the development of communicative English teaching is that teachers should teach students per their aptitude, and arrange teaching activities suitable for students' practical application in social communication, to cultivate students' communicative ability. The core of the communicative English teaching method is to organize interesting and practical teaching activities to cultivate the basic skills of students to communicate in English. It emphasizes the authenticity of the language (Liu, 2015). Teachers should create a real language environment for students so that students can be in a real environment. In, the actual use of language. In this process, teachers have to have a lot of interaction with students, rather than simply teaching knowledge, teachers are the guides, organizers and participants of the entire activity (Hu, 2002).

4.4. Problems Exposed in the Application of CLT (RQ2)

According to the research data collected, the students who participated in the survey agree that in the Chinese university, three main reasons affect the use of CLT in the comprehensive English classroom. They are the inappropriate teaching method of the teacher, the low level of student participation and the unreasonable design of classroom activities.

It can be seen from the data in findings that improper teaching methods of teachers will cause difficulties in the application of CLT methods. More than half of the students agreed with this view. In addition, there are a small number of students who think that teachers rarely organize these CLT activities and that teachers are too involved in students' discussions and exercises. Because very few students choose these two options, this section only discusses three reasons for the larger number of choices. This part of the students believed that the teacher's improper practices mainly included three aspects. The first one is that the teacher reserved too little practice time for students during CLT activities. The second is that the teaching tasks assigned by the teacher did not bring great practical significance to the students. The last aspect is the lack of guidance from teachers to students during practise or discussion.

The first is that the teacher leaves very little time for students to practice. In a class, the teacher may occupy too much time in the class, which makes it impossible to reserve enough time for the students to complete the CLT practice. However, as established numerous times before, teacher domination fits into the Chinese cultural orientation (Wei and Su, 2008). Therefore, the students have too little communication practice to meet the learning expectations they want to complete. The second is that the tasks assigned by the teacher to the students do not have much practical meaning. This can also be inferred from the results of the questionnaire in the second part of the students. In the second part of the content, many students think that the themes of role-playing, scene simulation, and group discussions cannot attract their interest and cannot be applied to real life. So based on this data, it can be inferred that when choosing the theme of CLT activities, many teachers did not consider whether it is in line with the students' learning interests and whether they can create a real situation, which is conducive to the improvement of students' communication skills. Finally, teachers lack guidance for students when they practice or discuss.

This result of my research is similar to that stated by Rao (2002). He believes that in China's English classrooms, due to the lack of domestic monographs on communicative English teaching, teachers tend to use their understanding in the application process. Conduct the so-called communicative approach to English teaching. Many teachers do not have a thorough understanding of the connotation of Communicative approach and mistake the cultivation of communicative competence as the cultivation of oral competence (Xu and Brown, 2017). In the classroom, they only attach importance to the training of oral competence, thinking that teachers should speak less and students should practice more. Communicative competence should include the following five aspects: language, function, context, the relationship between communicators and social and cultural knowledge. From the results of the questionnaire, it can be seen that many students think that there are problems in the application of

communicative teaching methods in Chinese universities because the teachers lack guidance in their practice (Fang, 2015). Therefore, teachers should not only teach students English speaking in a comprehensive English class. At the same time as the training of oral English ability, the cultivation of English listening, reading and writing ability should not be ignored. The four abilities to listen, speaking, reading and writing are complementary and mutually reinforcing. For example, the importance of speaking ability does not mean that writing ability is unimportant. This can also be reflected in the results of my questionnaire, which is, most students believe that these CLT activities include four aspects of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But there are some shortcomings in my questionnaire, that is, there is no question about whether the content of these four aspects is evenly distributed in the teacher's teaching. Although the teacher includes listening, speaking, reading and writing in the class, speaking may account for the largest proportion of a class thus may also bring some difficulties to CLT (Littlewood, 2000).

In addition to the influence of teachers, students' low participation in comprehensive English classes is also one of the factors affecting the application of CLT in Chinese universities. According to the questions in the last part of the questionnaire, students believe that the problem with the application of CLT in Chinese universities is due to the low level of student participation. In addition, during the investigation of the three CLT activities of role-playing, simulation exercises and group discussions, it was found that most students believed that the themes of these activities could not attract them, and some activities were out of the students' actual life situations. It is for these reasons that students do not actively participate in these CLT activities in the classroom, and the interaction with teachers and classmates is not high. These factors all complement each other. Because the teaching tasks assigned by the teacher are not interesting enough, it does not attract the interest of the students, so the students cannot actively interact with the teachers and classmates in the classroom. These all constitute the factors that affect the difficulty of the application of CLT in Chinese university comprehensive English classes.

These results build on existing evidence as Richards and Rodgers (2014), in communicative activities, the activities students are exposed to must be meaningful and valuable to improve their classroom participation. This is the same as the result of my research. However, my questionnaire has some limitations in this part. Students' participation in the classroom is low from the survey data and did not investigate the reasons for the low participation of students in the classroom. The meaningless discussions, the conclusions reached may not represent the views of most students, so there are some limitations. But in the process of referring to the literature of other scholars, some reasons can be found to explain this problem.

From the perspective of students, the promotion of communicative teaching methods should be based on the students' English learning level as the premise and foundation, and emphasize the cultivation of students' classroom subject status. However, in university English teaching, the English proficiency of students in the class often differs greatly, and their language communication skills are also very different. This makes the promotion of communicative teaching methods face great difficulties. Some students with poor English foundations cannot integrate into English teaching in

a short time, and this has a greater impact on the teaching progress (Bao and Sun, 2010). This is also related to my work experience at the university. In the process of giving lessons to students, it is difficult for these students with poor English foundation to keep up with the teacher's teaching progress in class, so they have a negative attitude towards the class, so they don't want too much communication and interaction with teachers and classmates.

The last reason is the inappropriate design of classroom activities. From the results of the questionnaire, it can also be related to the two previous difficulties. Teachers design the CLT activities in the comprehensive English class, but due to the teacher's wrong teaching methods, the design of the CLT activities was unreasonable. For example, when the teacher-designed classroom activities, he did not consider the actual communication situation of the students, so the topics used were outdated content for the students to discuss (He, 2013). However, there is another situation that my questionnaire did not consider. That is due to the influence of traditional Chinese teaching methods. For example, the class size is relatively large, there are too many students in a class, and the teacher is unable to take care of every student in CLT activities, failing to obtain good teaching results. This situation is the same as the argument He (2013).

According to Hu (2002), In terms of teaching conditions, the problems faced are mainly concentrated in teaching facilities and teaching environments. Although the current English teaching conditions have been greatly improved compared with the past, it is still difficult to create and establish a real situation in the classroom to develop student's language skills (Liu, 2015). The lack of qualified English teachers, the imbalance between teachers and students, and large classes in the same class violate the principles of English communicative law, making it impossible to carry out related teaching activities smoothly. Our country is a poor country that runs large education, so the facilities are insufficient, and it cannot provide every teacher and student with a good external environment. In addition, the communicative teaching method is to cultivate the students' communicative ability, not only to communicate in English between teachers and students, students and students in the classroom but also to communicate in English with others in life. However, in a large environment where Chinese is the mother tongue, the only time and place to communicate in English are one or two English classes in the school every day. After class, it is back to Chinese. Such conditions are far from enough.

4.4.1. Student's Attitude Towards CLT Activities

According to the content of the last part of the questionnaire, most students think that carrying out CLT activities in comprehensive English classes stimulated their interest in learning English, and can improve their English expression ability and the ability to use English comprehensively in life. However, more than half of the students believe that these CLT activities are not very helpful in improving their English performance. According to Wei & Su's (2008) and Yu's (2019) studies, in traditional Chinese English teaching, to improve students' English performance, teachers do not pay attention to the cultivation of students' English communication skills, but only teach students some English Knowledge of grammar and vocabulary to quickly improve students' scores in Chinese English exams.

This is also related to China's examination system. Although in recent years there has been a constant debate about whether to cancel the CET-4 and CET-6 English exams,

this kind of test will affect the teaching of university English in universities for a long time (Huang, 2016). Such an eager learning attitude has also affected the university English teaching environment so that the school and teachers have tilted in actual teaching and further neglected the cultivation of English language skills and language literacy. This situation is very obvious in many universities. Of course, the current situation in university English classroom education is not only these, but also other problems such as insufficient school hardware facilities, unreasonable evaluation system, and poor communication between teachers and students. These are all parts of education that cannot be ignored.

From the survey results, it can be seen that almost all students believe that when CLT activities are carried out in the CLT class, students should be the centre of classroom activities, and teachers only play a role in assisting students in learning. Teachers should guide students in the learning process, and answer questions and make suggestions during the teaching process. It can be seen from this that teachers should not participate too much in the learning process of students, even in traditional Chinese education concepts, the classroom is controlled by the teacher. When teachers teach to students, students only need to sit in the classroom to take notes, and complete the exercises and recite knowledge after class. There is no communicative class in traditional teaching methods (Rao, 2002). However, with the continuous development of globalization, many university students now realize that learning English cannot be done in the traditional Chinese way, and changes must be made to adapt to the application of communicative teaching methods in China.

In addition, only a small percentage of students believe that teachers in the CIE class have enough time for CLT activities. This result shows that although teachers abandoned the traditional teaching methods and used some CLT activities for teaching in the Chinese university comprehensive English classes, the time left for students to practice communicative activities was insufficient. It may be affected by traditional teaching methods. Teachers always explain the knowledge at the beginning of a class, and the time that many teachers do not control the explanation will take up too much class time. The result is that students have too little time for communicative activities (Qi, 2018). Besides, I think this is also affected by the traditional Chinese way of evaluating students. Based on the findings of Fang (2010), due to the huge population base in China, the students are under great test pressure.

To adapt to the development trend, English education in schools has become a kind of exam-oriented education. In this educational environment, students only pay attention to the learning of English grammar and vocabulary, so they don't have to use English for communication activities. The English knowledge that many students learn in class can only be used to complete exercises and cope with exams. When they are in a real communicative environment, they often do not know how to communicate with others in English. Many students think that English vocabulary and grammar are difficult to master because they have only learned this knowledge, but have not learned how to use it, which makes it difficult to remember this knowledge (Wei and Su, 2012).

This vicious circle makes students feel confused and gradually lose interest in learning English. In the context of exam-oriented education in China, even students with high scores in exams cannot communicate fluently with foreigners in situations where they need to communicate with foreigners.

This is largely due to the imbalance of the current test design that makes classroom teaching pay attention to these two abilities. The current English test in China, whether it is the high school entrance examination, university entrance examination or the fourth or sixth level examination after entering university, the proportion of the scores in listening and reading is far greater than that in writing, and the examination of speaking is even negligible (Butler, 2015). This design is largely determined by the overall number of students in China-facing such a large number of candidates, to ensure efficiency in the process of scoring, the evaluation of subjective output such as writing and speaking is far inferior to listening, reading this can be judged by multiple-choice questions and fill-in-the-blank questions. Due to the pressure of various examinations, students and teachers often pay more attention to the test-taking part in English learning and classroom teaching. In English education, the reading and listening skills that Chinese students are good at are more about training in test-taking skills. In classroom teaching, teachers pay attention to the explanation of grammar and will have special problem-solving skills and methods for different types of questions. However, many students have mastered these skills and methods through a lot of practice, but they cannot master the application of these language knowledge points (Liu and Jiang, 2015).

It can be seen from the research conclusions that half of the students think that the CLT activities are meaningful, but a portion of the students gave neutral opinions. They may not be sure that the topic of this teaching activity is novel, and therefore they cannot completely agree with this view. This conclusion can also be inferred that the teacher should choose topics that students are interested in and related to their actual lives, and create a real communicative situation in CLT activities, which is more conducive to students to improve their English communication skills, Not just English speaking ability. After all, learning a language is about using it to communicate with other people. Students think that the CLT activities carried out in the comprehensive English class integrate the four aspects of English listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, regarding this point, the questionnaire has some limitations. Because the questionnaire only asked students whether they included English listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom, it did not ask students whether the proportions of these four aspects in teaching activities are balanced. This leaves a gap for follow-up further research. In future further research, researchers need to ask students whether these aspects are carried out in a balanced manner in the CLT class. Only when the contents of these four aspects are fully developed can students effectively improve their ability to communicate in English and their ability to use integrated English.

4.4.2. Pedagogical Implications

The main pedagogical implication of this study is that the application of the CLT teaching method in Chinese university English classrooms can change the current situation of Chinese students learning English for examination. But the premise is that teachers and students must work together to overcome difficulties. Therefore, teachers should add more activities in the classroom to promote students' communication in English and reduce the class size to provide more opportunities for students to communicate. Students should change their previous learning concepts and actively communicate in English in class instead of passively waiting for the teacher to input knowledge to them. Only by

overcoming these obstacles, CLT can play its unique effect in the Chinese university English classroom and improve the English communication skills of university students. In this way, the student's English ability can be comprehensively improved, and through continuous practise of spoken English, their pronunciation and pronunciation and intonation ability can be improved, thereby increasing students' confidence in speaking English. In addition, through some communicative activities such as role-playing, not only can students practice their oral English skills, but also encourage them to understand some foreign customs and habits, and broaden students' horizons.

4.4.3. Limitations of the Study and Further Research

This research explores the application of CLT in the Chinese Comprehensive English Classroom, collects data through questionnaires, and conducts statistical analysis on the collected data to find solutions to the problems exposed during the application of CLT in Chinese universities. In this study, there are still some limitations. First of all, the sample of the study is only 50 students, the sample has a certain age and gender differences, so there will be some limitations to the overall conclusion of the study. Second, the questionnaire is very efficient in collecting data, but it is impossible to understand the participants' thinking, motivation and intentions. For example, in the process of investigating students' attitudes towards CLT, it can only be understood that students believe that CLT activities cannot effectively improve their English scores, but they cannot understand the specific reasons.

However, because only 50 students' opinions are collected, there are still some limitations in the research on this issue, especially the students' understanding of the CLT teaching method. Some students may not fully understand the CLT teaching method, so they may be a bit one-sided when expressing their views. If more participants participate in the questionnaire survey, they may have different views on the CLT teaching method. In addition, in this traditional English teaching environment, many students may not have had access to some English communication activities before, so they cannot feel the function of the CLT teaching method. For future research, it can include a process of further exploring how to design communicative activities in the classroom. It is necessary to research in this field by designing a specific communicative communication activity used in the classroom. To be able to provide Chinese university English teachers with a feasible plan that fits the Chinese education situation.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this research is to explore to what extent CLT can be used in the university in China by studying the application of CLT in the university in China. In the process of research, a questionnaire survey method was used, and the collected data were statistically analyzed and the survey conclusion was reached.

The subjects of this study consisted of 50 Chinese university students, from different majors and different genders. Therefore, it is assumed this sample is very representative and can represent the current situation of Chinese university students more comprehensively and objectively. Online questionnaire research methods to collect data. The researcher added these students to a common WeChat group and sent the questionnaire to the group. After the students filled in, the research results were analyzed.

Findings show that Some CLT activities such as role-playing, simulation exercises, and group discussions can improve students' English-speaking ability to a certain extent, but because some of the activity topics chosen by teachers are not novel and interesting enough to attract students' interest, students' classrooms participation is not high, and they cannot apply the content they have practised to real life. In addition, students believe that the difficulties encountered in the application of CLT in Chinese universities are mainly due to the improper teaching methods of teachers, the low participation of students in the classroom and the unreasonable design of classroom activities. Through analysis, we can find that as long as the teacher's problems in the teaching process are solved, other factors can be improved. Therefore, the teacher should create a real communicative situation for students, and integrate the four aspects of listening, speaking, reading, and writing in the classroom, teaching in a real situation, and cannot be separated from the English cultural background.

The focus of this study is to explore to what extent CLT can be applied to Chinese universities. From the results of my questionnaire, it can be found that to solve this problem, it is necessary to solve the difficulty of applying CLT in the comprehensive English class. However, the study has some limitations. The questionnaire method cannot explore the students' motivation and intention when choosing this option, but can only show the students' attitudes. Therefore, the questionnaire and interview can be combined in the next research to explore students' attitudes towards the application of CLT more comprehensively.

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