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# Bridging the divide between ideal and actual Communicative Language Teaching

## Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) comes recommended as an ideal teaching method in Zimbabwe because of its ability to assist learners to become communicatively competent. Most studies on CLT in Zimbabwe focus on secondary schools, neglecting the primary school where all learning begins. This article describes the activities used by teachers when implementing CLT and ascertains the difference between the ideal and actual in CLT. The study was framed within the interpretivist paradigm, using a qualitative single case study. A conceptual framework based on Socio-cultural Theory (SCT), Experiential Learning or Teaching Theory, Instructional Communication, Communicative Competence Theory and the Seven Areas of Policy Development for Language-in-Education Policy Implementation, was used. Vygotsky's SCT was used to guarantee interaction with the More Knowledgeable Others (teachers or peers) and mediation tools (teaching methods). Instructional Communication and Communicative Competence were utilised to explore language in the classroom. The Seven

Areas of Policy Development for Language-in-Education Policy Implementation and the Experiential Learning or Teaching Theory were used to ensure the use of CLT methods, and whether teachers reflect to improve on them. Non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to collect data, which were analysed using inductive and thematic analysis. Findings show that teachers still use traditional methods of teaching and also affirm that activities indicated in participants' scheme-cum-plans were not implemented. Findings suggest the theorisation of CLT only. The study recommends teacher educators to equip student teachers with adequate skills to deal with CLT classes beginning in the formative stages of the education system.

**Keywords:** Accuracy, activities, Audio-lingual Method, Communicative Language Teaching, English Second Language, fluency, Grammar-translation Method, interaction, methodological beliefs, pedagogical beliefs

## 1. Introduction

Existing literature shows that English language learning and teaching are important components of most curricula (Kobo, 2013:1). Similarly, in Southern African countries like Zimbabwe, South Africa and Botswana English forms part of the curriculum. This is because English is used as a language of wider communication in research, work and commerce. English remains the language of power and prestige and there is a need for speakers to be competent in English to climb the social ladder. For learners to become communicatively competent, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is recommended as one of the best approaches to the teaching of English. However, throughout the world, teachers struggle with the effective implementation of CLT. The purpose of this article is to examine the divide between the ideal and the actual implementation of CLT in Zimbabwean primary schools. Over the years the Zimbabwean curriculum, as in other countries in the world, prescribed the use of the Grammar-translation Method (GTM), Audio-lingual Method (ALM) and, lately, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This saw a shift from the old language teaching methods of linguistic structures to a focus on the CLT approach through which learner's communicative competence is developed. Mareva and Nyota (2012:103) define the CLT approach as an approach that uses communication as a way for learners to learn a language that they can use in different situations after leaving school. El-Dakhs (2015:1125) understands CLT as communicative approaches whereby learners interact and communicate in the target language. Farsia (2016:119) views CLT as an approach that maybe used by teachers to teach learners to communicate through the target language. It is clear that the CLT approach was adopted in Zimbabwe as it is regarded as one through which learners' communicative competence may be developed. The Ministry of Education Sport Arts and Culture Primary School Syllabus Grade 1–7 (1984) recommends the CLT approach to assist teachers to equip learners with communication skills suitable for the different roles and contexts, which learners are likely to encounter after school. The teachers are thus expected to make the learning of English language more functional and purposeful. This is achieved by using a variety of interactive activities suggested and recommended in the primary school English syllabus, such as role-play, discussion, project work, technology, pair and group work. Ounis and Ounis (2017:191-192) support the above by stating that activities done in CLT include pair and group work, role-play and others, which are applied with communicative intent. These activities promote the use and practice of functions and forms that assist learners to become autonomous and accountable during the learning process. Teachers are required to make classroom learning communicative by using interactive activities that will assist learners in becoming communicatively competent. In a communicative class teachers should be able to assist learners to sustain a discussion and negotiate meaning during the learning process.

Although the focus on learning English in Zimbabwe is now communicative, and emphasises communicative competence, most primary school learners still exhibit inadequate proficiency in English. We noted that student teachers carried this problem of inadequate proficiency from primary school up to tertiary level. They later pass their own inadequate proficiency on to the learners, perpetuating the cycle (Nel &

Müller, 2010:635). To understand the problem, this study sought to understand the gap between ideal and actual communicative language teaching by exploring how it is implemented. A few studies have focused on the CLT approach in Zimbabwe, but most of these studies concentrated on methods of teaching English language at secondary school level, neglecting the primary school level, which is the foundation of all learning. Nevertheless, findings from studies done in Zimbabwe have shown that secondary school teachers have positive attitudes towards CLT, but face challenges in implementing it (Al Magid, 2006:107; Mareva & Nyota, 2012:9, Mutekwa, 2013:540).

Given this background, this study sought to examine the divide between the ideal and actual CLT by answering the following research questions:

Main research question (MRQ): *How do English language teachers in primary schools implement the CLT approach adopted by the Ministry of Education Sport Arts and Culture Primary School syllabus (1984)?*

Secondary research question: **What activities do primary school teachers employ in implementing CLT?**

## 2. Second language learning

The traditional methods of teaching languages used in Zimbabwe until the 1980s, namely the Grammar-translation Method (GTM) and the Audio-lingual method (ALM) were replaced by CLT. The first two methods are founded on the behaviourist/structuralist ideologies which treat L2 learning mainly as a process whereby learners repeat or regurgitate what has been said by the teacher. In contrast, CLT can be viewed as an approach based on activity theory, which is founded on the social constructivist ideology whereby learners socially construct and develop knowledge (Barabadi & Razmjoo, 2015:129). The GTM and ALM embrace the philosophy that it is the teacher who has and owns all the knowledge that is passed on to the class, while CLT postulates that both the teacher and the learners have room to interact (Ounis & Ounis, 2017). Despite extensive literature discouraging the use of traditional methods in English second language (ESL) contexts, these methods of teaching continue to maintain considerable influence on the teaching methods used by ESL teachers in Zimbabwe (Mareva & Nyota, 2012:109).

The traditional methods of teaching mainly emphasise knowledge about language rather than how language is used (Brown, 2000:15, Al-Hadithy 2015:182). The teacher devotes much time to giving instructions on how to master grammatical rules and structures. Traditional methods neither enable language for understanding nor enable the learner to speak but emphasise that learners should use grammatical structures accurately (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:15). This means that the process of learning and teaching is focused on grammatical structures. The teacher also corrects learner errors openly before they are internalised (Larsen-Freeman, 2000:16). The weaknesses in

this lies in that learners may not construct their own knowledge because, once learners have memorised the vocabulary, they may not apply it in different contexts outside the classroom. Traditional methods of teaching English rely on drill and pattern repetition (Ellis, Loewen & Erlam, 2006:345). Studies have shown that traditional methods have demonstrated their inadequacy to advance learners' capability to use language to carry meaning (Asl, 2015:21), hence the adoption of CLT by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe. For this study, we contend that if primary school teachers in Zimbabwe use traditional methods in their classrooms, this may be a contributory factor to low proficiency in English in some learners.

Furthermore, we hold the view that if Grade 7 teachers in Zimbabwe use CLT as prescribed by the current Grade 7 primary school English syllabus, they should subscribe to the understanding that interaction among learners builds and helps them to be communicatively competent. From our experiential knowledge we have observed and concluded that there is an element of communicative deficiency among learners. It was imperative, therefore, to determine whether teachers are implementing CLT or using traditional methods of teaching; and to establish whether there is a gap between the actual CLT being implemented and the ideal CLT according to the primary school syllabus. To establish this gap, it was necessary to determine the classroom activities used during English lessons. This is discussed in the next section.

## 2.1 Activities used in implementing CLT

Diverse views and arguments on how teachers implement CLT in the teaching of (ESL), as well as the activities that are used to achieve communicative competence (CC) in these contexts, are evident from the literature. In this study, we define an activity as the implementation of a plan that a teacher may use to achieve communication in a classroom situation. It is, therefore, necessary for teachers to present activities that may assist learners to interact in order to become communicatively competent.

The primary school English syllabus suggests that teachers of English as a second language should employ diverse activities that motivate and sustain the interest of learners in the classroom. Scholars of CLT also embrace the view that teachers should expose their learners to activities that assist them to achieve the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) (Tajan, 2016:32); and that motivate learners to achieve CC. Learners are motivated by activities that are authentic as these stimulate their interest in learning a language. Asl (2015:23), Parvin (2016:399) and Richards (2006:14-21) identify functional activities that may be used by the teacher to improve learners' CC. Some of the activities are discussion and role-play. Teachers may assist their learners to use the discussion method during role-play activities. This often provides learners with opportunities of conversing, which enhance language presentation and practice; and often an intimate atmosphere of discussion occurs in the classroom (Sarfraz, Mansoor, & Tariq, 2015:733). More importantly, role-play may also be used by the teacher as an activity that promotes language fluency in

learners. Pair and group-work may be used in the implementation of CLT. Studies have found that pair and group-work give learners an opportunity to interact among themselves in a natural setting assisting them to negotiate, cooperate and develop their confidence (Ounis & Ounis, 2017:191). In this study we assumed that learners learn L2 successfully if the teachers expose them to opportunities that allow them to interact and acquire communicative competence through the use of real-life or meaningful language that they may use in their day-to-day lives. It is important to highlight that the primary school English syllabus encourages teachers to use activities that use technology during their teaching. Technology may be in the form of video and audio recordings or the use of computers. Computer-assisted learning (CAL) helps in the implementation of CLT. This is supported by Sarfraz, Mansoor, and Tariq (2015:735), who found that computer-assisted language learning reflected positive performance in learners. Project-work activity may also be used by teachers to implement CLT. This activity provides learners with natural learning contexts which offer learners opportunities to explore their world and enhance meaningful learning. Moreover, the use of project-work or discovery learning motivates learners to be inquisitive and develop investigative skills. Project-work activities assist learners to interact among themselves during the learning process, thus, providing them with opportunities to interact with materials, peers and teachers; helping them to develop self-esteem and social skills (Rotumoi & Too, 2012:6). Rahman, Yassin and Yassin (2012:110) found that teachers did not have the confidence to implement project-work activities effectively, thus they avoided them. Dialogue may be used to implement CLT effectively. O'Connor and Michaels (2007:275) define a dialogue as a mediation tool that may be used to create new knowledge through discourse that is culturally related. This definition is supported by Hossen (2008:15) who states that a dialogue is an activity that is used as a tool for learning and therefore assists learners to become communicative using language from their context and is not memorised. In a dialogue, learners acquire new language skills through social interaction among themselves and with the teacher as an expert. Sari (2014:2) found that dialogues help learners to communicate using the language in real-life situations. It may thus be concluded that the use of dialogues when implementing CLT at primary school level leads to successful development of speaking skills. Our aim in this study is to explore the gap that exists between the ideal and actual CLT. We used observations of classroom practice to establish the kind of activities that teachers used and how they used them.

### **3. Conceptual framework adopted for this study**

In this study we were greatly influenced by the Socio-cultural Theory of Vygotsky (1978), which we used as the main analytical tool together with elements from the Instructional Communication Theory by McCroskey, Valencic and Richmond (2004). We also borrowed concepts from the Experiential Learning or Teaching Theory by Kolb (1984), Cummins' Second Language Acquisition Theory (1981), the Communication Theory by Canale and Swain (1980) and the Seven Areas of Policy Development for Language-

in-Education Policy Implementation by Kaplan and Baldauf (2003) to enhance our analytical approaches. All theories mentioned advocate for the implementation of CLT and guided the study as elucidated below.

The key theme of Vygotsky's (1978:2) theory was used because during the teaching-learning processes, social interaction plays a central role in the development of thought processes or cognition. The theory by Vygotsky (1978) is considered as one of the first attempts to explain learning or consciousness as the outcome or product of the socialisation processes. Vygotsky (1978) advocates for CLT implementation in that interaction is a key tenet in the approach. This is supported by Farsia (2016:125) who proffers that, from a socio-cultural theory perspective, interactive activities may be used by the teacher in the implementation of CLT to assist learners in reaching the highest level of their Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The More Knowledgeable Other (MKO), in the form of the teacher or other learners, should assist learners to gain new knowledge. The research findings of Vygotsky (1978) on how human beings create new knowledge, or how learning takes place, has since become the basis for underpinning new research or the practice of education in relation to cognitive development over the past decades, particularly to what has now become known as social development theory (SDT). In this study, the theories that we used together with the SCT were used as lenses to explore the gap between the actual and the ideal CLT.

The Socio-cultural Theory, as the main tool, is supported by Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984). Experiential learning encourages teachers to reflect on their experience on practice and to expose learners to interactive activities that may, in turn, assist them to learn on their own (Reid, 1993:305). Cummins (1981) also supports how CLT is implemented through the explanation that learners have the potential to develop two types of language proficiency, namely Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS) and Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). In this study, Cummins' view assisted us to observe how learners acquire language proficiency through interactions they make in the classroom with their peers. This implies that effective CLT teachers should implement CLT by exposing their learners to activities that may give them opportunities to interact among themselves in a relaxed but realistic context. This approach may help learners to internalise the vocabulary they learn and aid general understanding of the target language. This will encourage the use of the language terms that suit the context in class and at play. Therefore, vocabulary development will occur in the context of a purposefully created situation.

Cummins (1979) also postulates the Developmental Interdependence Hypothesis (DIH) whereby the learner's first language has an impact in the learning of the second language. From the Instructional Communication Theory perspective (McCloskey et al. 2004:199), teachers may use methods they desire to implement CLT, but their choice may be influenced by the use of verbal and non-verbal cues. From this view, it is evident that when teachers practise this approach, they focus on the importance of interaction in their teaching. Guided by the research problem, we assumed that for learners to develop communicative competence, they needed to participate in

interactive activities like pair and group work, dialogues, role-play and discussions, as these may assist them to use language in meaningful ways. During interactions, both the teacher and learners may be compelled to use verbal and non-verbal cues that may come in handy to enhance the quality of language during interaction. According to Allen, Swain, Harley and Cummins (1990:40), a communicatively competent teacher should have four competences to teach effectively: strategic, sociolinguistic, grammatical, and discourse competence. This means that the teachers' knowledge of a language and how they express themselves in that language may have an influence on the quality of their teaching-learning outcomes. We also embraced elements from the Seven Areas of Policy Development for Language-in-Education Policy Implementation by Kaplan and Baldauf (2003) namely, personnel policy, methods and materials policy. The personnel policy deals with the human resources and how competent they are to implement CLT. Methods and material policy refers to the policy on teaching materials and methods that are to be used in the teaching of a language. Good teaching and learning materials are essential for CLT to be implemented effectively. These elements influence how CLT is implemented at primary school level in that for successful implementation of CLT teachers should be competent in the language they teach and they should be able to use the CLT approach and the learning materials (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003). These have a bearing on CLT implementation since the Zimbabwean Ministry of Education requires that teachers should use materials that enhance interaction among learners during the learning process. This can be achieved if teachers use authentic materials (realia), for example magazines, pictures or objects. This will assist learners in their speaking and it makes learning more meaningful as it links classroom language to real-life communication, thus emphasizing communication through interaction (Ounis & Ounis, 2017:192).

Using the conceptual framework, we hypothesised that if primary school teachers apply elements from the five theories and implement CLT as depicted in the conceptual framework they will fulfil the demands of the primary school syllabus that aims to assist learners become communicatively competent.

## **4. Methodology**

We approached the study from an interpretivist perspective to research, using a qualitative approach and a single case study design. This perspective assisted us to interpret participants' views and activities within their lived experiences in their context (Henning, Rensburg & Smit, 2011:20; Marshall & Rossman, 2011:19; Creswell, 2013:48) and allowed us to understand the phenomenon under study by providing rich descriptions of how participants implemented CLT in their classroom situations. In this study, the interpretivist paradigm also assisted us to interpret social reality through ontological and epistemological assumptions. According to Thomas (2013:120), ontological assumptions of interpretivism imply that social reality is interpreted differently by different people from different cultural contexts. We took a social

constructivist ontological stance because it aligns with an interpretivist paradigm. We also put into cognisance the epistemological belief of interpretivism, that is, participants and the researcher are co-constructors of new knowledge, therefore, we ensured that we created a relationship with the respondents in order to understand their context during field work (Karnieli-Miller, Strier & Pessach, 2009:279). We embraced the view that participants were individuals with feelings, understandings and prior knowledge of CLT; all informed by their acting within the teaching environment that they had full control over.

#### 4.1. Sampling and sites

The sample of this study was five purposively selected participants from five selected schools in Harare, Zimbabwe. The five primary school teachers were selected using the following criteria: holders of a primary school teacher's Diploma in Education from any teachers' college in Zimbabwe, who were trained to teach all subjects offered at primary school. In this regard, the five teachers met the criteria we set for the selection of participants.

#### 4.2. Data collection

We used non-participant observations, semi-structured interviews and document analysis as methods of data collection. We observed the five participants three times each, totalling fifteen observations. We sought permission from the participants to arrive at their classes without making appointments. This assisted us to get a true picture of what was taking place in the classroom situation. For document analysis we reviewed the primary school English syllabus of the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (MoPSE), and the teachers' scheme-cum-plans. Reviewing the content of the scheme-cum-plans helped us to ascertain the activities that the teachers planned to use, and whether the teachers were following the syllabus guidelines. The documents provided valuable information needed to understand the central phenomenon under investigation (Creswell, 2012). The documents were reviewed each time we observed the participants' teaching. Although research interviews were not the main method of data collection, we used semi-structured interviews to ascertain each of the participants' perceptions on CLT and information on the activities they used in CLT implementation. The triangulation of the foregoing assisted us to cross-check the findings of one instrument with the other, thereby enhancing validity of the data.

#### 4.3. Data analysis

Through the data analysis we intended to understand the gap between the ideal and actual CLT. In this study inductive thematic analysis was used for its rigour as a method. Inductive thematic analysis allowed research findings to materialise from common

themes obtained from raw data. Collected data were first coded, then categorised and later developed into themes (Creswell, 2012:261). We compared these themes to participants' activities as well as to existing literature to establish the gap between the actual CLT and the ideal CLT expected by the primary school English syllabus. We examined CLT activities and verified whether teachers used any other methods of teaching English as a second language, apart from CLT.

## **5. Ethical considerations**

We adhered to all ethical stipulations for social studies research. Before collecting data we obtained approval from the Ethics Committee of the university and obtained informed consent from the Provincial Director, the heads of schools as well as from participants. We ensured that we protected participants from harm before and after data collection by maintaining their confidentiality and anonymity using pseudonyms. We explained to the participants that they were free to withdraw from taking part at any stage of the study. We indicated to the participants that we expected to find their scheme-cum-plans and Grade 7 Primary School English Syllabus each time we came to observe them. We agreed with the participants that we would also visit them without making appointments in order to observe them in a natural setting. Measures of trustworthiness that comprised credibility and dependability were applied.

## **6. Findings**

The findings from interviews, observations and document analysis are presented and discussed based on the themes that emerged from the data analysis. Findings indicated that CLT implementation in this sample was ineffective and affected by the teachers' methodological beliefs.

### **6.1. Teachers' methodological beliefs regarding CLT approach**

One of the themes that emerged was "teachers' methodological beliefs regarding CLT approach". In this study, teachers' methodological beliefs signify the teachers' knowing (metacognitive) and how it influences their understanding of how they should implement CLT in their classroom. This theme shows the activities used in implementing CLT by Zimbabwean primary school English teachers, and the extent of their use during the lessons. Thus, teachers' methodological beliefs for a CLT approach as a theme contained two sub-themes namely interactive activities and traditional activities.

### 6.1.1 Interactive activities

In this study, interactive activities are those activities that allow learners to communicate meaningfully. In interactive activities, there is learner-to-learner communication and learner-to-teacher communication, thereby making lessons learner centred. Interactive activities include pair work where learners work in twos and group work where they work in threes and more. From the 15 observations that were conducted, all participants used pair and group work in their lessons although, ineffectively. The following excerpts show the participants' thoughts on the activities:

Participant Red: *It is very crucial and, ah, because pupils will be helping each other.*

Participant Pink: *Pair and group work are discovery methods they help learners discover on their own and they also, I think, it helps learners to share ideas.*

Participant Purple: *I think group and pair work can be effective in some cases as pupils are given the opportunity to share or to discuss the information that they have, with their peers.*

Participant White: *Yes. That's another way of enhancing communication language. It's very good. Because when they are in their groups, they express themselves freely and they can even interact with each other, sharing ideas. But the groups have to be limited now to smaller numbers.*

The participants knew the importance of pair work, which the Ministry required of them to use in communicative language teaching (CLT). Although participants used pair and group work and knew its importance, it was not effectively used in that there was no meaningful interaction among learners or between learners and the teacher. During this activity learners depended heavily on their teachers or their peers to provide answers, without attempting to think critically or discuss the issue at hand among the group members. Participants might have cultivated this dependence since they highlighted that it was one of their strategies to pair or group fast learners with slow learners. During Participant Pink's observation 01, the teacher used pair work. As she moved around the classroom, she emphasised to learners that working in pairs means they should work in twos. We deduced that participant Pink was using pair work for the first time since learners did not understand what pair work entailed. Learners did not understand the instruction since they usually did individual work instead of pair work. In addition, the use of pair work was not indicated in the scheme-cum-plans of the other participants. However, the participants used it when we observed their lessons.

Participants claimed that they used role-play during interviews, but their scheme-cum-plan did not attest to this as illustrated by their documents. This failure to utilise role-play denies learners an opportunity to interact and an opportunity to develop language they could use outside the classroom. We attributed the failure by participants to use role-play to a lack of creativity. However, we also took into consideration the difficulties that participants would go through in preparation of activities, considering the big

classes that they had.

From all the scheme-cum-plans, participants indicated the use of discussions and mentioned them in interviews. Participants believed discussions are helpful to the learner because they may understand their peers better. Participants said the following:

*Participant Green: But I also, I have also found out that discussions are very helpful. They are helpful because they will help each other. For example, if a child has failed to understand what I have just delivered, ah, the child will get it better from his or her peer. And that naturally is also helpful.*

*Participant Purple: I think it is very important because when children are given opportunity to say things, you can correct them because you will be hearing their discussions. Then you can correct them.*

Although participants indicated that they understood the importance of discussions, from the observations we noted that they were not using them effectively. When participants required of learners to discuss work, they expected them to either construct sentences or answer the given questions, thus no real discussion took place. Reasons for participants' failure to engage learners in a discussion could be caused by their unwillingness to abandon control of the classroom to situations where learners converse (and make noise) and construct new knowledge. This resulted in the inability of learners to interact meaningfully.

These findings confirmed to us that teachers were anxious about time constraints. Participants wanted to achieve the number of exercises that they are required to produce and at the same time give learners factual information for examination preparation. Most of the time participants were drilling their learners instead of teaching and they were not committed to teaching communicatively.

From the observations made in Observation 2, participant Pink used dialogue in a lesson on prepositions. From analysing the scheme-cum-plan, we observed that participant Pink did not have dialogue as an activity for that week. Since participant Pink denied us permission to observe her without an appointment, we assumed that she deliberately looked for an interactive activity to do. This gave the impression that, although some of the participants knew the requirements of the syllabus, they chose not to use interactive activities during their teaching, implying they did not implement what they had planned.

Project-work assists learners to develop problem-solving and communication skills. Participant White noted that:

*Right. At times I do, ah, project-work with them and maybe just do small tasks.*

Similar to findings on all other interactive activities we found that none of the

participants indicated any use of the discovery/project activity although they spoke highly of it. We noted that, while project work nurtures and motivates learners to become communicatively competent, participants did not use it because it demands their commitment. Project work, if properly used, can be some form of scaffolding in that the teacher can provide assistance by supervising learners' projects.

### **6.1.2 Traditional activities**

The second sub-theme indicates the main characteristics of observed lessons. From the collected data, this sub-theme encompassed three categories, namely fluency and accuracy activities, drill or rote learning method and the question and answer activity. As we observed participants' activities in their lesson presentations, we found that there were some activities that did not allow learners to interact among themselves. For example, activities like the question and answer activity, and drill and rote learning were very dominant in the classrooms. These activities did not allow learner-to-learner interaction and were characteristic of all the observed lessons in each classroom situation. The way in which participants delivered their lessons highlighted the discrepancy that exists between ideal CLT and actual CLT in these classrooms.

During classroom observations, we wanted to check and confirm the presence of specific activities related to fluency and accuracy that participants used. Participants gave the following responses:

*Participant Purple: Accuracy is very important but also they should learn to be fluent. Because they will help them to express them clearly. Yes.*

*Participant White: Fluency and accuracy. Especially fluency when reading. As you have noticed, some of them, they cannot pronounce words well. So, I always emphasise that if they come across a difficult word, ah, they ask or they consult. Ah, they have their own dictionaries.*

*Participant Green: Umm. Also, fluency yes. Pronunciation, word attack. All those are wanted.*

During observations, we noticed that participants taught both accuracy and fluency simultaneously. There was consistency in what the three teachers did during their teaching and what they said concerning fluency and accuracy during interviews. We observed that all participants were more concerned about accuracy. The reason could be that participants wanted their learners to provide accurate answers to confirm whether what they have taught had been understood and could be reproduced during examinations.

Drilling and rote learning refer to participants' use of repetition for memorisation and chorus answers. Participants used drilling or rote learning extensively during their

lesson presentations. Learners were asked to repeat words and correct answers after those of their classmates who had given correct answers. Learners were not availed opportunities to generate conversations, not even with the teacher. Participants acknowledged that they used repetition for children to grasp concepts and put them to memory.

Participants dominated their classes during all lessons observed, resulting in extended teacher talk. The following excerpt is an example from participant Green's Observation 3.

### **Observation 3: Participant Green**

Learners: (As a class.) *Mustn't.*

Participant Green: *These words are the ones that we want to use in our sentences. The word 'must' (as she points to and touches it on the chalkboard) means that is something you are obliged to do. When you are told, eh, for example, I said to Susan, Susan, you must stop writing. So, we use 'must' usually on orders. You have to do that and there is no compromise. That's when we use the word 'must'. The word have to, it means you are supposed to do something. You have to stop writing and pack your books. You are supposed to do something. Then the word 'mustn't' here. Mustn't, it's a short form for 'must not'. It means you must not do something or you are not allowed, ah, to do whatever you are doing when you use the word 'must not'. Needn't. Again, ah, it's also in the negative form. You must not do something. Then we have the word 'may'. 'May' gives you an option to do it or to leave it. Do you get me?*

Learners: (as a class) *Yes.*

In addition, it would seem as though the use of drill and rote learning in this study was influenced by teachers' methodological beliefs, which were driven by examination preparation and a grammar-based curriculum. Teachers, therefore, preferred using drill and rote learning so that their learners would do well in examinations. Teachers were not effectively implementing CLT to enhance communicative competence in learners. Effective CLT required participants to present activities that allowed learners to use grammatical structures communicatively and in extended conversations.

The only opportunity learners had to speak was when they were expected to answer questions asked by the teacher. Particularly, teachers did not ask learners questions that allowed them to interact with them and sustain a conversation. The questions they asked elicited one-word answers and chorus answers. Once the answer had been given, participants were satisfied and there was no room for learners to interact and come up with additional new information. This approach does not fit in with the working definition of communicative learning where learners negotiate meaning. Participants mostly asked recall questions that required of learners to display whether they knew the answer. Using

findings from the interviews we concluded that teachers preferred using the ALM and GTM, which they felt were not time consuming and easy to implement so as to achieve the number of exercises required by the Ministry.

## **7. Discussion of findings**

While the primary school English syllabus requires of teachers to use interactive activities such as role-play, pair and group-work project work and technology in their teaching, the key finding in this study showed that teachers only used pair and group work, and ineffectively at that. It was used as a teaching activity that is easy to use. The way in which pair and group work was used did not meet the requirements of the syllabus, which is to make learners learn through communication. We observed that through pair and group work one or two learners participated while others were idle. Learners could not sustain a conversation in English and they gave one-word answers, defeating the purpose of pair and group work. From the findings, it is evident that although teachers indicated various interactive activities (role-play, dialogue, discussion, and project work) in their scheme-cum-plans, and spoke positively about them in the interviews, they did not make use of them in their lessons. This finding is similar to Parvin's (2016:404) who found that while teachers were familiar with CLT activities, most of them did not implement them effectively. What this suggests is that participants theorise about CLT instead of practising the use of interactive activities. This finding also indicates that participants did not get adequate training on using all the other interactive activities: role-play, drama, project work, dialogue, and discussion. As a result, they find it difficult to implement them in their teaching. This suggests that there is a divide between actual CLT and the ideal. This finding suggests that teachers have difficulty converting the theory in the syllabus into classroom practice.

Although it was clear from the observations that participants concentrated on accuracy, this study established through interviews that teachers were aware that both fluency and accuracy were important. This view is in accordance with Al-Magid (2006:81) who found that the majority of teachers in his study agreed that fluency and accuracy were complimentary and were both important for learners to achieve CC. Although the participants in our study indicated the importance of accuracy and fluency they were more concerned with accuracy, which was an indication they did not fully understand the demands of the CLT approach. Participants corrected learners' errors as soon as they were made. This was because of teachers' methodological beliefs that it would be difficult to 'un-teach' something once learners had mastered them incorrectly. The reason for this could be that participants required their learners to provide accurate answers to confirm whether the learners understood what they were taught and could reproduce the content during the examinations.

The present study also established that the teachers' methods of teaching were still hinged to the traditional methods. Teachers did not teach the grammatical structures communicatively. Instead they taught them through drill and rote learning. This shows

that teachers are still holding on to their own old methodological and pedagogical beliefs that the traditional methods of teaching are the best. This, as a result, influences their practices. Participants spoke for a long time during lessons and acted as the experts giving information to learners. Participants did not ask learners questions that allowed them to carry out a conversation with the teacher. The questions asked by the teachers elicited one-word or chorus answers. This made their lessons teacher centred instead of learner centred and, consequently, learners did not get an opportunity to interact among themselves. This finding is similar to those of Al-Magid (2006:94), Mareva and Nyota (2012:110) who found that teachers preferred using the structural approach of teaching, which allowed them to dominate the classroom discourse. This finding indicated the divide that exists between the ideal and actual CLT, as participants were inconsistent in implementing lessons that reveal the tenets of the CLT approach. We came to the conclusion that participants employed more traditional methods of teaching and that they were not conversant with the CLT approach. We concluded that there is a gap between what they are actually doing in class and what is expected of them from the syllabus. As we looked at how participants implemented CLT, we discovered that none of them implemented it fully.

## **8. Conclusion**

This study explored the gap between the ideal and actualised CLT in the five selected schools. The main conclusion drawn from this study is that there is a gap between the ideal and actualised CLT. The ideal CLT is not fully implemented because teachers do not use a variety of activities such as role-play, dialogue, project work and discussion, which may assist learners to become communicatively competent. In addition, teachers do not follow the requirement of the syllabus, which is to teach communicatively. This study also found that although there were some elements of CLT practices, for example pair and group work, these were implemented unsuccessfully. We contend that there is a gap between the ideal and actualised CLT. For the gap to be closed, the researchers suggest that teachers should be assisted to change their methodological and pedagogical beliefs about effective teaching of languages to achieve a real communicative classroom. This can only be achieved if teachers are equipped with adequate knowledge and skills to deal with a CLT class. In addition, it is recommended that heads of schools create platforms where teachers from the same district share information on using CLT activities such as pair and group work. Head teachers should carry out staff development to assist teachers to get more skills of handling communicative classes as required by the primary school syllabus.

Although the scope of this study was limited to one district, the paper contributes significantly to growing scholarly interest on the pertinent phenomenon of CLT implementation at primary school level. Notwithstanding its limitations, it is evident that teachers appreciate the CLT approach but need adequate knowledge to implement it effectively. Further research may include the views and perceptions of college educators

so that they understand the need to equip student teachers with adequate knowledge of the CLT approach.

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- Mpofu, N & De Jager, L.J. 2018. Exploring beginner teachers' sources of knowledge for teaching literature in ESL classrooms. *English Teaching and Learning*, 42 (1): 1-17. (DOI/org/10.1007/s42321-018-0003-7).
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