THE APPLICABILITY OF ELLIS’ PRINCIPLES FOR INSTRUCTED L2 LEARNING: AN INDONESIAN PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract: Communicative language teaching (CLT) approaches in second language (L2) education have been central to recent curricula innovations in a number of EFL contexts. The research conducted by Jocelyn Howard and Susan Miller tried to examine South Korean teachers’ perceptions of the applicability to their contexts of the general principles for effective instructed second language learning proposed by Ellis (2005). The findings of that research indicated that teachers might face challenges in implementing these approaches and feel frustrated by the barrier that would hamper their efforts to apply a number of Ellis’ principles in Korean school. Three barriers were mentioned by the teacher: the emphasis on preparation for predominantly grammar-based examinations, teachers’ lack of L2 proficiency, and large multi-level classes. In line with that, the writer needs to conduct a replication study with larger, more diverse groups from a range of EFL backgrounds in Indonesian contexts. It is hoped by conducting the research allows for confirmation of the previous study.

KeyWords: Communicative Language Teaching, curricula, second language education, and EFL.

INTRODUCTION

CLT is a “learner-centered and experience-based view of teaching which promotes learner independence and requires classroom cultures with more equal relationship between teachers and learners than those in many EFL contexts. In a CLT approach, the teacher functions as a facilitator or guide, supporting learners as they try out new language and giving feedback on errors as a necessary step in the language learning process. Using an integrated skills approach, many CLT activities are done in pairs or small groups, so learners have opportunities to use the target language in a variety of roles and contexts that aim to approximate authentic situations to develop learners’ situationally appropriate use of the L2.
People confirm that Ellis has 10 principles instructions are successful for teaching second language learning classrooms. But the specific questions in this study races: Which of Ellis’s principles for instructed second language learning do Indonesian EFL consider to be the most important to try out in their classrooms? and what constraints do Indonesian EFL teachers perceive are likely to impede attempts to implement Ellis’s principles for successful instructed second language learning in Indonesian classrooms?. Meanwhile,

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which is sometimes called communicative syllabus or communicative approach, has spread widely and has become fashionable in the second/foreign language area in the last quarter of twentieth century. A great number of educational institutions have embraced and invested in it their hopes for the success of their language teaching. The power of CLT is so great that it gives an impression that many teachers around the world feel that they ought to adopt it to be up-to-date. Holliday also claims that CLT can be applied to all proficiency levels of students (Holliday cited in Fachrrurrazy, 2011 : 29).Meanwhile, Brown (2007 : 45) stated that Communicative Language teaching (CLT) has become a norm in the field of second language learning. However, there are some criticisms towards CLT as summarized by Li, (cited in Fachrrurrazy, 2011 : 37 - 38) as follows:

1. Sano, Takahashi, and Yoneyama (1984) point out that the Japanese students they studied generally did not feel a pressing need to use English, so that the goal of communicative competence seemed too distant for them.
2. Burnaby and Sun (1989) report that teachers in China found it difficult to use CLT. The constraints cited include the context of the wider curriculum, traditional teaching methods, class sizes and schedules, resources and equipment, the low status of teachers who teach communicative rather than analytical skills, and English teachers’ deficiencies in oral English and sociolinguistic and strategic competence.

3. Based on a study that assessed the attitudes of Hongkong educators toward using CLT in the local context, Chau and Chung (1987) report that teachers used CLT only sparingly because it required too much preparation time.

Li, (1998) himself studied the difficulties of the implementation of CLT in South Korea. He found the sources of difficulties, namely: (a) the teacher, which included deficiency in spoken English, deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence, lack of training in CLT, few opportunities for retraining in CLT, misconception about CLT, and little time for developing materials for communicative classes; (b) the students, which includes low English proficiency, lack of motivation for developing communicative competence, and resistance to class participation; (c) the educational system, which includes large classes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding, and lack of support; and (d) CLT itself, which includes inadequate account of EFL teaching, and lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments.
Following the same path, Jocelyn Howard and Susan Millar carried out a study to examine South Korean teachers’ perception of the applicability of Ellis’s principles to their contexts of the general principles for effective instructed second learning proposed by Ellis, (2005). In their research entitled “The Applicability of Principles for Instructed Second Language Learning: A South Korean Perspective”, they reported that implementation of CLT in South Korea faced some challenges as it is applied inside the classroom, and these challenges are also widely reported in EFL literature.

Jocelyn Howard is a senior lecturer in the School of Maori, Social and Cultural Studies in education at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Her research interests include EFL and ESL teacher education, EFL and ESL curriculum innovation, the use of multimedia in language education, and ethnic diversity in the education sector. Meanwhile, Susan Millar is an English language teacher at the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. She taught English since 1985 in Japan and New Zealand, and has also worked as a teacher trainer on professional development program for teacher from EFL countries. Her research interests are L2 teacher education and managing innovation in educational contexts.

Result of Howard and Millar study (2009) report that three barriers, in particular are mentioned repeatedly; the emphasis on preparation for predominantly grammar-based examinations, teachers’ lack of oral L2 proficiency and large, multi-level classes. It is also reported that participants regarded the following four principles as the most important principles to try to implement: developing students’ implicit knowledge of the L2 (Principle 4),
taking account of individual differences (Principle 9), providing opportunities for extensive L2 input (Principle 6), and providing opportunities for interaction (Principle 8). Additionally, participants in this study reported that their lack of understanding of language acquisition theories, and their lack of training for managing group work and catering for individual differences also constrained their ability to successfully apply all of Ellis’s principles.

Moreover, Howard and Millar state that participants of the study indicates that the goal of communicative competence and teaching approaches required for this remain incompatible with the deep-rooted-socio-cultural values that contextualize contemporary teaching practices in South Korea, and counter the current expectations of many students, parents, and school administrators. They highlighted that the tensions reported by participants in this study, as they navigate what Ellis refers to as “the gap between the curriculum-on-paper and the curriculum-in-action, will continue to frustrate and hamper L2 teachers in south Korea and similar EFL settings, until the relationship between what is assessed and what is taught is recognized by language curricula developers, and at least some of the reported constraints are acknowledged and addressed.

Proposed solution to reported challenges which include moves towards L2 teaching approaches that are context-specific, and which align more closely to existing practices as well as to the needs and realities of specific EFL settings. They also mentioned that framework for second language teaching along with general principles underpinning language teaching and learning have also been proposed as guidelines for teachers to apply as appropriate to their specific settings.
Therefore, to explore whether Ellis’s principles may provide useful guidelines for English language teachers in Indonesia as they fit to implement CLT, this replication study also investigate teachers’ perceptions of the applicability of these principles in their individual EFL contexts. The specific questions are:

a. Which of Ellis’s principles for instructed second language learning do Indonesian EFL consider to be the most important to try out in their classrooms?

b. What constraints do Indonesian EFL teachers perceive are likely to impede attempts to implement Ellis’s principles for successful instructed second language learning in Indonesian classrooms?

Howard and Millar reviewed some related literature dealing with Ellis’s principles (2005) which address the nature of L2 competence and the focus of instruction, and are offered to language curricula developers and L2 teachers as a guide for learning-centered pedagogy. It is important to note, however, that Ellis draws attention to inconclusive and sometimes conflicting results of L2 acquisition studies to date, and stresses that L2 researcher does not yet provide “a definitive account of how to ensure that instructed language learning is successful”. Table 1 presents outline of Ellis’s principles.

**Table 1 Summary of Ellis’s, (2005) General Principle for Successful Instructed Learning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No of Principle:</th>
<th>Ellis’s Principle</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principle 1</td>
<td>Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 2</td>
<td>Instruction needs to ensure that learners focus predominantly on meaning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No of Principle:</td>
<td>Ellis’s Principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------</td>
<td>-------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 3</td>
<td>Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 4</td>
<td>Instruction needs to be predominantly directed at developing implicit knowledge of the L2 while not neglecting explicit knowledge</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 5</td>
<td>Instruction needs to take into account learners “built-in syllabus”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 6</td>
<td>Successful instructed language learning requires extensive L2 input</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 7</td>
<td>Successful instructed language learning also requires opportunities for output</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principle 8</td>
<td>The opportunity to interact in the L2 is central to developing L2 proficiency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Principle 9     | Instruction needs to take account of individual differences in learners:  
|                 | a. Teachers need to cater to students’ different learning styles  
|                 | b. Teachers are responsible for students’ intrinsic motivation |
| Principle 10    | In assessing learners’ L2 proficiency, it is important to examine free as well as controlled production |

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

In Howard and Millar’s study, the result of questionnaire indicates which of Ellis’s principles of instructed L2 learning they were currently implementing in their English teaching (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1: Participants’ Reports of Which Ellis’s Principles They Were Applying in Their Teaching**
From that figure, we can conclude that Principle 1 (Instruction needs to ensure that learners develop both a rich repertoire of formulaic expressions and a rule-based competence), Principle 9b (Instruction needs to take an account of individual differences in learners: teachers are responsible for students’ intrinsic motivation), and Principle 3 (Instruction needs to ensure that learners also focus on form) are the most common principles implemented in South Korean EFL context.

As a result of interview, when participants were first asked to expand on their questionnaire responses, and then to identify and rank the three principles they believed were most important to try to apply in their own classes, there were four principles as the most principles to try to implement. Those principles are: developing students’ implicit knowledge of the L2 (Principle 4), taking account of individual differences (Principle 9), providing opportunities for extensive L2 input (Principle 6), and providing opportunities to interaction (Principle 8). Furthermore, respondents in this study reported that their lack of understanding of language acquisition theories, and their lack of training for managing group work and catering for individual differences constrained their ability to successfully apply all of Ellis’s principles.
The intent of Howard and Millar’s study was to explore EFL teachers’ perceptions of the applicability of Ellis’s (2005) research-informed general principles for effective instructed second language learning, and to identify constraints that may impede the implementation of these principles in specific EFL context.

The results present a complex picture, indicating that, overall, the South Korean teacher-participants felt well supported by existing systems and resources in applying some of the principles, but constrained in their ability to operationalize and implement other principles by a number of personal, pedagogy, and systemic barriers perceived to be beyond their individual logical control.

The result of Howard and Millar’s study suggest that what and how the participants teach is not determined by goals of the South Korean communicative curriculum, or by findings of language acquisition research. Rather, it appears that classroom practice is driven primarily by the washback effect of the high school and university placement examinations, and by what teachers consider manageable given perceived personal and contextual constraints. Participants indicated that the goal of communicative competence and the teaching approaches required for this remain incompatible with the deep-rooted socio-cultural values in South Korea, and counter the current expectations of many students, parents, and school administrators.

However, the findings of Howard and Millar’s study might be regarded as indicative rather than definitive, as the study has a number of limitations.
namely: the size and demographics of the participants’ group, the possible impact of an interviewer effect and researcher subjectivity on the process and findings of the study as researchers operating in the dual role of researcher and lecturer, and reliability of self-reported data.

This study then was conducted as replication study, obviously the researcher applies the same design as Howard and Millar’s previous study. Burns, (2000:460) states that the value of such an approach for this type of investigation into “a contemporary phenomenon within a real life context”. McKay, (2006:71) points out that in essence, a case study is a single instance of some bound system, which can range from one individual to a class, a school, or an entire community.

**Participants**

The participants enroll in Howard and Millar’s study were an intact class of 15 South Korean English language teachers (seven male, eight female teachers) undertaking a four-week professional development program in New Zealand. The ages of participants ranged from 25 to 52, and their teaching experience ranged from 25 to 27 years. All participants were teaching in urban middle or high school in South Korea at the time of the study.

Meanwhile, the participants in this replication study are twenty Indonesian English language teachers (five male, fifteen female) attending magister program in English Language Teaching, in State University of Malang, Indonesia. They come from different parts of Indonesia’s area which considered as the representation of various backgrounds of EFL contexts around Indonesia. The ages of participants ranged from 23 to 38. Five among them have been
teaching experience more than 5 years while the rest have been teaching experience less than 5 years.

**Data Collection and Analysis**

A questionnaire was used for collecting the data in this replication study due to the limited time. The questionnaire elicited information about the participants’ age, sex, preferred subject they are teaching now, Ellis’s principles which are applicable for their classroom setting, and difficulties they faced when they implemented such principles to their classroom. The questionnaire also confirmed whether the participants have ever participated in-service training program. The questionnaire was administered and completed in English.

After the data had been gathered, the data was analysed qualitatively. Qualitative component of the questionnaire was analyzed using constant comparative approach, with similarities and dissonances noted as themes were identified and categorized (Merriam, 1998). This goes the same to the replication study.

**Research Findings and Discussion**

The result of replication study in Indonesian EFL classroom setting showed that participants mention Principle 3 (ensuring that learners focus on form) as the most common principles they were applying in their classroom contexts, followed by Principle 2 (developing students' implicit knowledge of the L2), Principle 4(developing students’ implicit knowledge of the L2), Principle 8(providing opportunities to interaction), and Principle 9 (taking account of individual differences) in the last. Result of questionnaire also
showed that Principle 8 (providing opportunities to interaction) and Principle 4 (developing students’ implicit knowledge of the L2) as the most important principles to try to be implemented in their Indonesian EFL classroom context. Moreover, respondents of this replication study mentioned some constraints in relation to applying Ellis’s principle namely: students’ reluctance to communicate in L2, learners’ individual differences, level of anxiety, lack of support in term of insufficient resourcing, and classroom condition. All those make CLT more challenging to be implemented in Indonesian perspective.

CONCLUSION

Considering what had been discussed in Howard and Millar’s study, the replication study conducted by the writer then, investigated such phenomenon in Indonesian EFL classroom contexts. The replication study employed more participants than the previous one. The study resulted in some perception of the applicability of Ellis’s principles similar to the result of Howard and Millar’s study as those conducted into Indonesian EFL classroom setting. Indeed, the result of this replication study provided a confirmation to the findings of previous study conducted by Howard and Millar.

In other words, inapplying CLT in Indonesia, Indonesian teachers are facing quite similar problems as South Korea teachers experienced. Thus, an understanding of research-based principles, such as those central to this study, can serve as a useful guide to effective classroom practices as these decisions are made, and a platform from which teachers’ can critically evaluate their own
language teaching. In addition, it can contribute to teachers’ development of a cohesive approach while drawing on strategies from a range of methodologies.

As suggestions for further research, it is a need to conduct follow-up studies to explore the influence on participants’ classroom practices of teachers’ awareness of Ellis’s principle. It is also suggested to carry out future studies to explore the relative significance of the barriers identified in both of studies that already reported in this paper. Future studies will also useful to examine EFL teachers’ views on appropriate professional development to assist them in their implementation of current curriculum innovations.

REFERENCES


