Despite the widespread adoption of communicative language teaching (CLT) in ESL countries, research suggests that curricular innovations prompted by the adoption of CLT in EFL countries have generally been difficult. The literature on curriculum innovation suggests that teachers' understanding of an innovation is central to its success. A study of a group of South Korean secondary school English teachers' perceived difficulties in adopting CLT reveals that the difficulties have their source in the differences between the underlying educational theories of South Korea and those of Western countries. The results suggest that, to adopt CLT, EFL countries like South Korea will need to change their fundamental approach to education and that implementation should be gradual and grounded in the countries' own EFL situations. In the long run, EFL countries should establish their own contingent of language researchers in order to develop English teaching theories more suitable for their EFL contexts. Change agents must study teachers' perceptions of an innovation to ensure its success.

Recently, educational innovations in L2 education have received considerable attention (Bailey, 1992; Freeman & Cazden, 1990; Kennedy, 1988; Markee, 1997; White, 1987). The literature on this topic includes studies of language curriculum development, language teaching methodology, and the process of innovation that occurs in teacher development contexts (Bailey, 1992).

Attempts to introduce communicative language teaching (CLT) into EFL contexts on EFL countries' own initiatives and through international aid projects have prompted many innovations in L2 education. In general, such innovations have had a low rate of success (Brindley & Hood, 1990), and implementing CLT worldwide has often proved
difficult (Anderson, 1993; Chick, 1996; Ellis, 1994, 1996; Gonzalez, 1985; Kirkpatrick, 1984; Sano, Takahashi, & Yoneyama, 1984; Shamin, 1996; Ting, 1987; Valdes & Jhones, 1991). Difficult as it is, many EFL countries are still striving to introduce CLT in the hope that it will improve English teaching there.

Why has CLT been so difficult to implement in EFL classrooms? How appropriate is CLT for EFL contexts? I believe teachers' perceptions of the feasibility of a CLT innovation in a particular context are crucial in determining the ultimate success or failure of that innovation (Kelly, 1980; Markee, 1997). For this reason I undertook a case study of South Korean secondary school English teachers' understanding of the uptake of CLT in South Korea. As many EFL countries share some of the characteristics of English teaching in South Korea, for example, traditional teaching methods and large classes, this study has widespread implications.

**CLT: ONE DEFINITION**

Since its initial appearance in Europe in early 1970s and subsequent development in ESL countries (e.g., Britain, the U.S., and Canada) over the past 20 years, CLT has expanded in scope and has been used by different educators in different ways. It has no monolithic identity, and no single model of CLT is universally accepted as authoritative (Markee, 1997; McGroarty, 1984; Savignon, 1983; Savignon & Berns, 1984). However, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners' communicative competence. Canale and Swain's (1980) definition of communicative competence is probably the best known. They identified four dimensions: grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. This definition has undergone some modifications over the years, perhaps best captured in Bachman's (1990) schematization of what he calls *language competence*. The most significant difference between the two models is that Bachman takes a far broader view of the role of strategies than Canale and Swain do and separates strategic competence completely from what he calls *language competencies* (Bachman, 1990; North, 1997).

In CLT, meaning is paramount. Wilkins (1972) classifies meaning into notional and functional categories and views learning an L2 as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions. According to Larsen-Freeman (1986), the most obvious characteristic of CLT is that "almost everything that is done is done with a communicative intent" (p. 132). Students use the language a great deal through communicative activities (e.g., games, role plays, and problem-solving tasks).
Another characteristic of CLT is the introduction of authentic materials (Dubin, 1995; Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Long & Crookes, 1992; Nunan, 1991; Reid, 1995; Widdowson, 1996). In CLT, it is considered desirable to give learners the opportunity to respond to genuine communicative needs in realistic L2 situations so that they develop strategies for understanding language as actually used by native speakers (Canale & Swain, 1980). Also, “activities in the Communicative Approach are often carried out by students in small groups” (Larsen-Freeman, 1986, p. 132). Students are expected to interact with one another, either through pair and group work or in their writings (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983). CLT favors interaction among small numbers of students in order to maximize the time each student has to learn to negotiate meaning. Teachers therefore select learning activities according to how well they engage the students in meaningful and authentic language use rather than in the merely mechanical practice of language patterns.

Another dimension of CLT is “its learner-centered and experience-based view of second language teaching” (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, p. 69). According to CLT theory, individual learners possess unique interests, styles, needs, and goals that should be reflected in the design of instructional methods (Savignon, 1991). Teachers are to develop materials based on the demonstrated needs of a particular class. Students must be made to feel secure, unthreatened, and nondefensive in a CLT classroom, so teachers using CLT should avoid adopting a teacher-centered, authoritarian posture (Taylor, 1983).

Thus, CLT is characterized by

1. a focus on communicative functions;
2. a focus on meaningful tasks rather than on language per se (e.g., grammar or vocabulary study);
3. efforts to make tasks and language relevant to a target group of learners through an analysis of genuine, realistic situations;
4. the use of authentic, from-life materials;
5. the use of group activities; and
6. the attempt to create a secure, nonthreatening atmosphere.

I stress that the description above reflects just one definition of CLT, what Holliday (1994) terms the weak version of CLT. According to Holliday, the strong version is actually quite different: The focus is not on language practice but on learning about how language works in discourse. The lesson input is language data in the form of text, and communicative relates more to the way in which the student communicates with the text. Also, students collaborate for the purpose of helping each other solve language problems rather than for the purpose of communicating with each other. Because the aim is not to practice
language forms, teachers do not need to monitor group and pair work closely, and in fact activities do not have to be carried out in groups or pairs. As long as students are communicating with rich text and producing useful hypotheses about the language, what they are doing is communicative, according to Holliday (pp. 171–172).

CLT IN EFL CONTEXTS

A number of reports in the literature deal with CLT innovations in EFL contexts. Whereas some accounts have emphasized the local needs and the particular English teaching conditions in the EFL countries and the importance and success of traditional language teaching methods (Bhargava, 1986; Sampson, 1984, 1990), others have strongly advocated the adoption of CLT in EFL countries (Li, 1984; Prabhu, 1987). However, the majority of accounts have recognized the difficulties EFL countries face in adopting CLT.

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. Anderson’s (1993) study of CLT in China reported such obstacles as a lack of properly trained teachers, a lack of appropriate texts and materials, students’ not being accustomed to CLT, and difficulties in evaluating students taught via CLT. Based on a study that assessed the attitudes of Hong Kong 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.

Sano et al. (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. A study conducted in Vietnam identified class size, grammar-based examinations, and lack of exposure to authentic language as constraints on using CLT (Ellis, 1994). Shamin (1996) identifies learners’ resistance, among other problems, as a barrier to her attempt to introduce innovative CLT methodology in her Pakistan English classroom.

The grammar-based English language syllabus makes the English teaching situation complex and the local use of CLT challenging, according to Kirkpatrick’s (1984) study of CLT in secondary schools in Singapore. Gonzalez (1985), who studied CLT in Philippine rural areas, found that English instruction there was irrelevant to the population’s needs, as people there seldom used English.
In studies of CLT outside Asia, Valdes and Jhones (1991) report difficulties such as teachers’ lack of proficiency in English, their traditional attitudes toward language teaching, the lack of authentic materials in a non-English-speaking environment, the need to redesign the evaluation system, and the need to adapt textbooks to meet the needs of communicative classes. Efforts to foster a communicative approach to the teaching of English in KwaZulu, South Africa, met with pervasive reluctance on the part of teachers and students to adopt the more egalitarian, decentralized ways of interacting associated with CLT (Chick, 1996).

Although these studies highlight many of the principal problems in instituting curricular innovations prompted by CLT, many of the studies take the researcher’s perspective. Teachers’ perceptions of innovations related to CLT remain largely unexplored.

THE STUDY

The study reported here used a case study approach to investigate Korean teachers’ perceptions of the implementation of CLT.

Background: CLT in South Korea

The South Korean government has placed English learning and teaching high on its agenda to ensure that South Korea will play an active and important role in world political and economic activities. Rather than wait for speakers of other languages to learn Korean, the government wants its people prepared to communicate in English with those who do not speak their language. To that effect, the South Korean Ministry of Education recently published a series of new policies regarding English learning and teaching. First, early in 1994 the government decided that English teaching would begin at a younger age (Grade 3 in elementary schools) starting in 1997 and began to train prospective elementary EFL teachers.

In addition, realizing that “the grammatical syllabus does not help much to develop learners’ communicative competence” (Development Committee, 1992, p. 66), the government decided to introduce CLT into English teaching at the secondary school level. Early in 1992, the South Korean Ministry of Education published The Sixth National Curriculum for Middle Schools (Grades 7–9) and The Sixth National Curriculum for High Schools (Grades 10–12), known among practitioners as the Communicative Curriculums. The new curricula, which are to guide Korean English teaching from 1995 to 2010, clearly state that CLT should replace the
dominant audiolingual method in middle schools and the grammar-translation method in high schools in South Korea (Choi, Park, & Kim, 1986; Lee, 1990).

In the new curricula, the goal of English teaching is “to develop the learners' communicative competence in English through meaningful drills and communicative activities, such as games, with the aid of audio-visual equipment” (Development Committee, 1992, p. 180). Students are to learn by means of authentic materials, such as newspapers, magazines, English news on the radio, and English TV programs. The curricula reflect the belief that “CLT is characterized by learner-centredness” (p. 181), and teachers are encouraged to organize materials based on students’ needs.

Accompanying the release of the new curricula was the publication of a series of new textbooks. Over 10 sets of English textbooks are now available to secondary school English teachers, who are free to choose any set provided that the whole school adopts it. The new textbooks incorporate a communicative perspective and more listening and speaking materials and activities relative to the older ones.

Will the shift in the government’s policy result in an improvement in students’ communicative competence? Is Korea prepared to implement CLT in English instruction? To answer these questions, I investigated Korean teachers’ perceptions of the difficulties in using CLT.

Design

The analysis consisted of a pilot study, a written questionnaire, and interviews. To develop an appropriate survey instrument for this study, in summer 1994 I administered a pilot survey to 21 South Korean EFL teachers studying in a teacher education program at a Canadian university. The final questionnaire included both open-ended questions and questions with fixed alternatives generated from the data collected in the pilot study (see the Appendix).

In summer 1995, the questionnaire was administered to 18 South Korean secondary school EFL teachers studying at the same Canadian university. To ensure that the participants fully understood the questions, I distributed the questionnaires at the end of a class. The participants were urged to read the questionnaire, and they asked questions for clarification. All 18 questionnaires distributed were handed back. Following the survey, I conducted in-depth interviews with 10 of the participants to explore further the teachers’ background, their understanding of English teaching in South Korea, and their difficulties in using CLT.

The interviews were semistructured, conducted in a systematic and
consistent order but allowing me as the interviewer sufficient freedom to
digress and probe far beyond the answers to the prepared and standard-
ized questions (Berg, 1989, p. 17). The interviews were conducted in
English. Although I was well aware that the teachers' imperfect English
might limit the information they provided, I made certain that they were
able to express their ideas fully by preparing and sending a number of
questions to them ahead of time.

While formulating interview questions, I made sure that the questions
were clear, precise, and motivating (Denzin, 1989). All the interviews,
which lasted 1–2 hours each, were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim
as soon as possible afterwards. I used the earlier interviews to generate
new interview questions and provide direction for subsequent ones. Transcripts of the interviews were later given to the participants for
verification.

Participants

Survey Participants

The participants in the formal questionnaire survey were 18 South
Korean secondary school English teachers who were studying in the
Korean Teacher Education Program (KTEP) at a Canadian university in
the summer of 1995. KTEP was a 1-month program designed especially
for Korean secondary school English teachers and cofunded by the
Canadian and South Korean governments. It had existed for over 10
years. Each summer about 20 Korean English teachers were chosen to
participate in the program, based mainly on their years of service and to
a much lesser extent on their communicative competence in English.
Conversations with the Korean supervisors and teachers over several
programs showed that the KTEP teachers were representative of the
English teaching force that would serve in South Korean secondary
schools for the next 20 years or so.

The 9 male and 9 female participants ranged from 30 to 50 years in
age, with the majority in their 30s; the average age was 36.5 (see Table 1).
Their experience in teaching English varied from 5 to 25 years, with an
average of over 11 years. At the time of the study, 8 participants were
teaching in middle schools, and 10 were teaching in high schools. Many
had taught at both middle and high schools, as secondary school
teachers in South Korea must transfer schools every 5 years; high school
teachers quite commonly transfer to middle schools and vice versa. Half
of the participants were teaching in rural secondary schools and half in
urban settings.
TABLE 1
Background of Survey Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>14.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>7, 8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10, 11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interview Informants**

Ten of the 18 survey participants were chosen for interviews. In selecting interview informants, following Patton's "maximum variation sampling" (in Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 200), I allowed for maximum variation in participants' age, sex, teaching experience, teaching setting, and grades taught. For this purpose, I tabulated the background information on the survey informants based on the completed questionnaires. I first decided that teachers of all grades (7-12) must be represented in the group of interview informants and that middle and high school teachers should be equally represented. Second, I decided to include an equal number of male and female teachers and of teachers in rural and urban schools. I then added the other two parameters, informants' age and years of teaching, which I wanted to be as varied as possible. The result was a group that was representative of the 18 surveyed teachers (see Table 2).1

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1 All names are pseudonyms.
### Table 2
Background of Interview Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Type of school</th>
<th>Grades</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Na-Yun</td>
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<td>9.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eom-Mi</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tack-Soo</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>9.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In-Ran</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Myong-Sook</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>8.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dong-Soon</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>25.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mi-Ju</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>18.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young-Cheol</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joon-Suk</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>15.0</td>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jin-Kyu</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Data Analysis

Data analysis is not a simple description of the data collected but a process by which the researcher can bring interpretation to the data (Powney & Watts, 1987). The themes and coding categories in this study emerged from an examination of the data rather than being determined beforehand and imposed on the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). Following the strategy of analytic induction (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992; Goetz & LeCompte, 1984), I repeatedly read through the completed questionnaires and the interview transcripts during and after the study. In this process, I identified and noted recurrent themes and salient comments in regard to the constraints that the South Korean EFL teachers had encountered and might have encountered in applying CLT in their classrooms. These themes were then subsumed under four main categories.

### Results

The South Korean teachers were interested in the methods they used in teaching English. Fourteen of the 18 participants reported that they were very concerned, and the other 4 reported that they were fairly concerned. All reported that the grammar-translation method, the audiolingual method, or a combination of the two characterized their teaching. However, 12 reported having tried CLT before attending the teacher education program in Canada and having encountered difficulties in such attempts.
The difficulties reported by the Korean teachers fall into four categories: those caused (a) by the teacher, (b) by the students, (c) by the educational system, and (d) by CLT itself. Among them, difficulties falling into the first category were mentioned most often, almost twice or three times as much as those in the other three categories (see Table 3).

**Difficulties Caused by the Teacher**

The Korean teachers were quick to point out that some of their own problems had stopped them from using CLT. Six major constraints caused by the teacher were reported: (a) deficiency in spoken English, (b) deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English, (c) lack of training in CLT, (d) few opportunities for retraining in CLT, (e) misconceptions about CLT, and (f) little time and expertise for developing communicative materials (see Table 3).

**Deficiency in spoken English.** All 18 participants considered that their own deficiency in spoken English constrained them in applying CLT in their classrooms. As reported by the Korean teachers, the South Korean government wanted CLT implemented because of disappointment about students' oral proficiency in English. The government as well as the teachers hoped that CLT would help students develop better oral English. Although the teachers generally felt that they were highly proficient in English grammar, reading, and writing, they all reported that their abilities in English speaking and listening were not adequate to conduct the communicative classes necessarily involved in CLT. The following comment was typical.

1. I am good at English grammar, reading, and writing. But my oral English is very poor. Since I can't speak English well, how can I teach it to my students? (Dong-Soon, July 31, 1995)

Surprisingly, even respondents who spoke English fluently and communicated well thought their English was "too poor to use communicative language teachings" (Jin-Kyu, July 17, 1995). Deficiency in spoken English apparently prevented some teachers from applying CLT, but for others lack of confidence was more likely to have been the reason.

**Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence.** All 18 participants reported that their low strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English would limit their use of CLT. As teachers' sociolinguistic and strategic competence must be much greater in a communicative classroom than in a traditional grammar-focused classroom, the participants generally felt incompetent to conduct a communicative class.
TABLE 3
Reported Difficulties in Implementing CLT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source and difficulty</th>
<th>No. of mentionsa</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in spoken English</td>
<td>99</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of training in CLT</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few opportunities for retraining in CLT</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Misconceptions about CLT</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Little time for developing materials for communicative classes</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low English proficiency</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of motivation for developing communicative competence</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance to class participation</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational system</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large classes</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar-based examinations</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insufficient funding</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of support</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inadequate account of EFL teaching</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The number of times the research subjects referred to a theme in either the questionnaire or the interview as a constraint in using CLT in their own context. The maximum number of mentions possible for each of the themes included within the four major categories is 18.

2. Students asked more questions in the class. I was happy when they asked me questions related to the English grammar. But those questions that are related to the sociolinguistic aspects of English are really hard for me. . . . In Korea, when you can’t answer all of the students' questions right away, you can’t be a teacher. (Young-Cheol, July 26, 1995)

The teacher’s ability to answer all questions promptly is highly valued in South Korea. The fear of losing face because of not being able to answer students’ questions all the time discouraged teachers from using CLT.

3. I once tried communicative activities with my Grade 10 kids. The kids enjoyed it. In fact I enjoyed it too, except they asked so many questions related to the English culture. They were interesting questions. Some of them I could answer, and some of them I could not. That made me very much embarrassed. . . . If your kids find that you cannot always answer their questions very confidently, you are going to lose their respect and finally lose them. In our culture, teachers are supposed to know everything and be always correct. (Jin-Kyu, July 17, 1995)
Because of their deficiency in sociolinguistic competence in English and fear of losing the respect of their students for being unable to give prompt answers in class, teachers "chose to stick to the traditional grammar-centred, text-centred and teacher-centred methods so that [they] always had a good idea about what was going to happen in every class and made adequate preparations for it" (Dong-Soon, July 31, 1995).

**Lack of training in CLT.** All 18 participants named lack of training as one of the main obstacles they faced in applying CLT. As reported by the teachers, they had learned about CLT in different ways—in university methods courses, English teaching conferences, and English teaching journals—but they all agreed that they had not practiced it much.

4. Like many of us, I learned CLT when I was studying at university. But it was taught as a piece of knowledge for us to remember, not to use. I did not practice using it while at university, though I did try it a few times later when I became a teacher. (Eom-Mi, July 25, 1995)

5. I learned the term CLT at a teachers' conference. To be honest, I did not quite understand how it works. (Myong-Sook, July 30, 1995)

This lack of systematic training led to a sketchy and usually fragmented understanding of CLT and made it difficult for the teachers "to leave the security of the traditional methods and take the risk of trying new unfamiliar methods" (Tack-Soo, July 20, 1995).

**Few opportunities for retraining in CLT.** Sixteen teachers reported that few in-service opportunities for retraining in CLT were available. Of the 18 respondents, only 4 had had opportunities for in-service education in their last 7 or 8 years of teaching. One of the 4 had attended two in-service teacher-training programs, and the other 3 had attended only one each. Most of the respondents had not had such opportunities before the teacher education program they were attending at that time. Mi-Ju expressed her frustration when asked about her in-service education.

6. This is the first time I participate in an in-service teacher education program. It took me 18 years to get such an opportunity. (Mi-Ju, July 28, 1995)

Even after the publication of the government's new communicative curricula, few in-service teacher education programs offered training in CLT. Without proper retraining, teachers will inevitably misunderstand some elements of CLT.
Misconceptions about CLT. Fifteen respondents referred to teachers’ misconceptions about CLT as one of the principal obstacles. A typical misconception was that by concentrating on appropriateness and fluency, CLT does not teach form at all and thus totally neglects accuracy.

7. Before attending this teacher education program, I thought that communicative language teaching does not teach grammar and only teaches speaking. I did not think that was a good way to teach our kids English. I think grammar should be part of it, at least for our kids. After all, they have to pass a lot of exams and there is a lot of grammar in them. (Myong-Sook, July 30, 1995)

Such misunderstandings led the teachers to believe that CLT contradicted their beliefs about language learning and did not allow them to prepare students for the various exams that are critical to their future careers. For that reason, the teachers refused to accept CLT.

Little time for and expertise in material development. Fourteen teachers reported that lack of time for and lack of expertise in developing communicative materials had been constraints for them. All the English textbooks available (before the publication of the new series of textbooks accompanying the publication of the communicative curricula) had been developed under the influence of the grammar-translation and audiolingual methods, so teachers had had to write their own materials and design their own activities if they wanted to use CLT. Because most of the teachers were already overloaded, any additional work was a burden for them. This problem was particularly serious for female teachers because they also had to deal with housework.

8. I teach in a high school. I have to be at school from 8:00 in the morning to 6:30 in the afternoon. When I go home, I have to take care of my two kids. Because my husband teaches away from our home in Seoul, I have to take my kids there at weekends to see him. I really do not have time for any extra work. (In-Ran, July 24, 1995)

Lack of expertise in designing communicative activities was also a concern among the teachers.

9. Even if I have enough time for material writing, I do not think I can write good communicative materials. First, I have never been taught how to do it myself. Secondly, there are few authentic English materials around me. That means I have to create everything. That’s beyond me. It also means I have to spend more time than I can afford. (Young-Cheol, July 26, 1995)

As a result, the teachers either had given up CLT after a brief try or simply had not ventured to try it.
**Difficulties Caused by the Students**

The second main group of constraints came from the students. These constraints included the students' generally low English proficiency, lack of motivation for communicative competence, and resistance to participating in class (see Table 3).

*Low English proficiency.* All 18 respondents reported that one important difficulty preventing them from using CLT was their students' low English proficiency. Korean students do not start to learn English until after they enter middle school (Grade 7), and they have only four 1-hour English classes each week, making progress slow. They usually have a small English vocabulary and a limited command of English structures. Because students did not have the necessary proficiency in English, the teachers found it hard to do any oral communicative activities with them.

10. The average secondary school students have a very small English vocabulary. They know limited number of English structures. So they have great difficulty to express themselves in English when they are assigned to do communicative activities. Gradually they lose interest in trying to speak English and become too discouraged to speak English any more. (In-Ran, July 24, 1995)

As pointed out earlier, the Korean teachers believed that CLT necessarily involved speaking activities. Therefore, when oral activities were not possible or appeared to be difficult, the teachers became frustrated with CLT and in most cases gave it up.

11. In such activities, I often see the kids struggling to express themselves in English, only to make each other more confused. . . . I do not know whether I am doing the right thing with the kids. To be safe, I prefer to use the method I am familiar with to help the kids learn. (Eom-Mi, July 25, 1995)

*Little motivation for communicative competence.* Seventeen participants identified students' lack of motivation to work on their communicative competence as a great limitation. Although an increasing number of people in South Korea have realized how important it is to be able to communicate in English rather than to know English grammar well, students in secondary schools still care much more about grammar.

12. My students know it is very important to learn to use English for communication. But since their goal is to enter the university, they prefer to work on English grammar because the National University Entrance Exam is grammar based. (Joon-Suk, July 26, 1995)
Because grammar still plays a decisive role in all English examinations in South Korea, “teachers who teach communicative competence are not liked as well as those who teach grammar” (Mi-Ju, 28/07/95). Students complained that “they [were] not learning anything if they [did] not learn new words and grammar in a class” (Na-Yun, July 26, 1995).

Resistance to class participation. Fifteen respondents cited the students’ resistance to class participation as a primary constraint in trying CLT. As students have already been in school for at least 6 years by the time they enter middle school, they have become accustomed to the traditional classroom structure, in which they sit motionless, take notes while the teacher lectures, and speak only when they are spoken to. After so many years of schooling in traditional settings, students rely on the teacher to give them information directly, making it very difficult to get the students to participate in class activities.

The inconsistencies among teachers in their expectations of students also discouraged students from participating in class activities.

13. Especially when English class is the only place where participation is encouraged, it can bring about confusion for the students as most teachers of other subjects will probably never tolerate, not saying encourage class participation. (Jin-Kyu, July 17, 1995)

To play it safe, students usually chose to behave traditionally in English class. When students were not willing to participate in class activities, teachers saw little chance of fulfilling their goal of using CLT, rendering it pointless to adopt CLT in their class.

Difficulties Caused by the Educational System

The third main group of difficulties relates to the educational system in South Korea. Four major constraints were identified: large classes, grammar-based examinations, insufficient funding, and lack of support (see Table 3).

Large classes. All 18 respondents referred to large classes as one of the principal constraints on their attempts to use CLT. In South Korea, a secondary school class usually contains 48–50 students. The teachers found it very difficult, if not entirely impossible, to use CLT with so many students in one class because they believed that oral English and close monitoring of class activities were essential in CLT.

14. With that number of students in one class, first of all, it is very difficult for class management if we use the communicative method. For example,
when everyone starts to talk, the class can be very noisy. Teachers and students in nearby classrooms will complain about the noise in the English class. Secondly, it is not possible for the teacher to give each of them [individualized] attention as required by the communicative method. With nearly 50 students in one class, it is really difficult to make sure that everyone is on task. As I have found, some kids like to play around during group work time. Thirdly, with so many students in one regular classroom, there is not even enough space for the students and the teacher to move around to carry out the communicative activities. Especially when the desks and stools are fixed to the floor, you cannot even move them, and that makes it difficult to rearrange seats to form nice groups for discussion. (Jin-Kyu, July 17, 1995)

**Grammar-based examinations.** Grammar-based examinations were named by all 18 respondents as another important constraint. Among the many English examinations in South Korea, the National University Entrance Examination (the English section) is the most important one because other formal and informal English examinations are modeled on it. Until 1994 it consisted mainly of grammar, reading comprehension, and translation items. Now it has an additional part called “Listening Comprehension,” but its grammar-based nature has remained unchanged. Teachers, under pressure to make their students do well on such tests, often devote valuable class time to teaching test-taking skills and drilling students on multiple-choice grammar items. This exam has strongly affected the way English has been taught in South Korea.

15. This exam [the National University Entrance Examination] has had tremendous influence on the English teaching in South Korea. As soon as students start middle school, they have a clear goal in mind—to pass the National University Entrance Examination. Teachers also have a clear goal in mind—to help students succeed in the Examination. Because it only tests students’ grammar knowledge and reading ability, both students and teachers are interested in grammar and reading in English classes. (Young-Cheol, July 26, 1995)

Such an attitude leaves little room for CLT for both teachers and students. As Savignon (1991) observes, many curricular innovations have been undone by a failure to make corresponding changes in evaluation.

**Insufficient funding.** Thirteen respondents mentioned insufficient funding as a constraint. To use CLT in teaching English, certain equipment and facilities must be in place. Extra funding is needed to obtain resource books and materials for communicative activities. When the funding is not there, using CLT is hard.
16. For example, we will need a photocopier to copy materials for students. That means we need extra money which is not always there. It's always more difficult than you plan and imagine. (Eom-Mi, July 25, 1995)

**Lack of support.** Lack of support was cited by 12 respondents as a constraint. Although some of the teachers had learned about CLT in university methods courses, “applying it was yet another thing” (Dong-Soon, July 31, 1995). Because the teachers were inexperienced in using CLT, they would often find themselves in need of help. Unfortunately, they often found nobody with expertise to turn to for advice.

17. When I had questions about what I was doing, I talked with my fellow teachers, hoping to get help from them. Often they could not help me. How I wished there was a CLT expert for questions and support. (Joon-Suk, July 26, 1995)

Teachers also found lack of support from administration frustrating.

18. It’s difficult to get help from our administrators. Particularly before the new curriculums were published, the principal in my school didn’t care about the method I used. He was only interested in the scores my students got in exams. Even now after the publication of the new curriculums, he still cares mostly about the students’ scores. (In-Ran, July 24, 1995)

The respondents also indicated that they seldom got support from fellow instructors teaching other subjects in the same schools.

19. Also, sometimes I needed cooperation from teachers of other subjects; but, for some reasons, they showed little interest in what I was doing. (In-Ran, July 24, 1995)

Teachers generally found this lack of professional, administrative, and collegial support discouraging. Often they lost interest in coping with the challenges of introducing CLT in their classes.

20. This [lack of support] was extremely discouraging. It was so hard when everything was on your shoulder. Finally I had to give up CLT and return to the peaceful and easy traditional method of teaching English. (Dong-Soon, July 31, 1995)

**Difficulties Caused by CLT Itself**

The respondents reported two main problems with CLT itself: CLT’s inadequate account of EFL teaching and the lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments in CLT (see Table 3).
CLT's inadequate account of EFL teaching. All 18 participants reported that CLT has not given an adequate account of EFL teaching despite its initial growth in foreign language teaching in Europe. The teachers saw important differences between teaching EFL and teaching ESL. They expressed frustration at the fact that the research community, especially many Western language education researchers, has rarely differentiated EFL from ESL.

21. In my opinion, EFL is very different from ESL. But many people tend to confuse them and often ignore the special elements of EFL situations. I think that's why we EFL teachers usually find Western language teaching methods difficult to use. (Joon-Suk, July 26, 1995)

The significant differences that the teachers saw between EFL and ESL included the purposes of learning English, learning environments, teachers’ English proficiency, and the availability of authentic English materials.

22. We have a totally different situation in Korea. . . . In ESL situations, teachers are mostly English native speakers and they are fluent in English. But in our case, English teachers are mostly Koreans, and our spoken English is poor. Besides, in ESL situations, there are many English materials of different levels that can be used in English classes. But in Korea, I have difficulty to find authentic English materials except textbooks. (Tack-Soo, July 20, 1995)

23. For example, in ESL situations, students usually have a very supportive learning environment outside school. They have many chances to hear and speak English outside class, which can reinforce what they learn in class. Besides, they have the motivation to work on oral English because they need it in their lives. In our situation, the classroom is the only place where students can hear and speak English. They do not need to use the language in their lives but only in pretended situations. (Jin-Kyu, July 17, 1995)

To the Korean teachers, accounts of CLT have not taken into consideration some of the salient features of EFL learning and teaching. Consequently, introducing CLT into the Korean EFL context could be problematic.

24. Because they do not have a good learning environment and they have only 4 or 5 hours in a week to learn English, our students would soon forget what they learn in a communicative class because they do not use English in their everyday lives. (Eom-Mi, July 25, 1995)

Lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments. Sixteen respondents referred to the lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments as a
barrier to trying CLT. Used to traditional discrete-point testing of grammatical knowledge, the teachers found it disconcerting that there were no prescribed, ready-made assessment tools for communicative competence and that they would have to design their own. The Korean teachers believed that one of the best ways to test students’ communicative competence was to give the students oral tests. In general, they each taught four classes of approximately 48 students. Finishing even one round of individual oral tests would take a long time, and there was nobody to supervise the other students while the teacher was conducting the tests.

25. When you teach four classes and each has nearly 50 students, you are dealing with 200 students. If I have to do oral examinations to assess their communicative competence, it would take me dozens of days to finish just one round. (Mi-Ju, July 28, 1995)

Besides, the Korean teachers generally did not support these subjective tests.

26. There is no way that my colleagues and I would use the same criteria in the test. Even I myself probably cannot use the same criteria all the time. I would probably use different criteria when I am tired after long time of testing. (Joon-Suk, July 26, 1995)

The South Korean teachers also found it difficult to balance content and language when scoring oral exams.

27. About a year ago, for the final exam, besides the written test, I did an oral exam for the students in one of the classes I taught. Giving them a score was so difficult compared with grading the written tests. My biggest problem was how much I should assign to the content of their talk and how much to the language they used. Even before I finished the test, I knew that I used different criteria. I did not like the results of the test because they were not reliable. (Myong-Sook, July 30, 1995)

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Much of what the Korean teachers said about EFL teaching in their country and about their difficulties in using CLT is common to many parts of the world. The following discussion, although it particularly addresses EFL teaching in South Korea, thus extends to other EFL countries as well.

A conflict apparently exists between what CLT demands and what the EFL situation in many countries, such as South Korea, allows. This conflict must be resolved before EFL teaching in these countries can
benefit from CLT. To resolve the conflict, attention should be given to the following areas.

**Educational values and attitudes.** The fundamental approach to education in Korea needs to change before CLT can be successful there. The predominance of text-centered and grammar-centered practices in Korea does not provide a basis for the student-centered, fluency-focused, and problem-solving activities required by CLT. As Price (1988) points out, reform of education is not simply reform of the school system but reform of the behavior and thinking of the wider social teaching-learning process that guides moral-political ideas and behavior. Far-reaching curriculum innovation involves fundamental shifts in the values and beliefs of the individuals concerned (Brindley & Hood, 1990; Burns, 1996). If CLT is to be implemented in a previously traditional classroom, teachers, students, parents, administrators and other stakeholders must shift their conceptions of what constitutes good English teaching (Enright & McCloskey, 1985; Markee, 1997; Penner, 1995).

However, such a fundamental change takes time. “Changes in the way people think usually lag behind changes in social structure” (Ting, 1987, p. 49). Therefore South Korea and other EFL countries with similar situations should adapt rather than adopt CLT into their English teaching. Rather than simply jumping onto the CLT bandwagon by mandating its use, the government and EFL teachers of South Korea and other EFL countries should carefully study their TEFL situations and decide how CLT can best serve their needs and interests.

**Reading.** Because the main purpose of learning English for many people in South Korea and other EFL countries is to be able to read and translate into their mother tongue scientific, medical, and technical documents written in English, Korean teachers should continue their emphasis on developing students’ reading abilities. However, instead of spending much precious time on intensive reading and grammatical analysis, teachers might introduce some ideas from CLT, such as extensive reading and reading for meaning.

**Oral skills.** Because the demand for people who can communicate orally in English has increased as the result of international trade and globalization, English classes should include listening and speaking activities. Teachers and administrators must be aware of the shift in societal needs and make conscious and persistent efforts to introduce more CLT into English teaching. With globalization, smaller classes, a better economy, and more competent teachers, a better understanding and acceptance of the philosophical underpinnings of the CLT are
possible. South Korea and other EFL countries may then be able to use more CLT or, better still, develop their own "locally appropriate version of the communicative approach" (Tomlinson, 1990, p. 36).

**Grammar.** While trying to introduce CLT, teachers should not feel guilty about teaching grammar. Contrary to a common misconception, CLT does not exclude the teaching of grammar (Tompson, 1996). The literature abounds with arguments for including grammar instruction in L2 teaching (Lightbown, 1991; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Savignon, 1991; Schachter, 1991; Widdowson, 1990). Indeed, Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1997) believe that "CLT has arrived at a turning point: Explicit, direct elements are gaining significance in teaching communicative abilities and skills" (p. 148). However, teachers must also bear in mind that the purpose of teaching grammar is to help students learn the language, and teachers must be wary of making grammar the end of their teaching. Teachers should also consider alternatives to traditional grammar instruction, such as grammar-consciousness-raising tasks (Fotos, 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1991).

**Students' attitudes.** Students and teachers who are negotiating CLT in the traditional language classroom will need help in adjusting (Abbot, 1987; Deckert, 1987). In introducing CLT to students who have previously studied foreign language in a traditional fashion, teachers are likely to encounter some initial reservations. Thus, teachers will need to consciously reorient students to "the basic function of the classroom, the role of the student and the nature of language" (Deckert, 1987, p. 20).

**Teachers' attitudes.** Likewise, some teachers may be reluctant to try CLT, as it forgoes much of the familiar and requires something different. Therefore teachers should also have assistance and encouragement in trying out new ideas and materials. Continuing support for teachers who may need further help with CLT along the way is also important. This can be achieved mainly by appointing highly qualified teaching consultants and conducting in-service teacher education programs. In such programs, teachers should have opportunities to retrain and refresh themselves in CLT and, more importantly, teachers should receive help in revising, refining, or changing their educational theories and attitudes (Johnson, 1994; Littlewood, 1984; Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Tilleman, 1994). A language improvement component should also be a part of such programs (Cullen, 1994; Murdoch, 1994). Although all the language skills should be covered, the program should emphasize the participants' speaking and listening skills, a weakness of English teachers in South Korea and many other EFL countries.
Preservice teacher education. The delivery of EFL methods courses in preservice teacher education programs should change. CLT should not be lectured about but demonstrated. Novice teachers should have opportunities to get hands-on experience with and gain confidence in using CLT.

More importantly, considering the dynamic nature of the EFL teaching, preservice teacher education should focus on developing student teachers' autonomy and their decision-making and problem-solving abilities as well as their ability to be reflective practitioners (Richards & Lockhart, 1994; Schön, 1983).

Local educational growth. Inasmuch as many teaching methodologies developed in the West are often difficult to introduce into EFL situations with different educational theories and realities, in the long run EFL countries may be better off developing methods in their own contexts. Rather than relying on expertise, methodology, and materials controlled and dispensed by Western ESL countries, EFL countries should strive to establish their own research contingents and encourage methods specialists and classroom teachers to develop language teaching methods that take into account the political, economic, social, and cultural factors and, most important of all, the EFL situations in their countries (Daoud, 1996; Phillipson, 1992). In this way, they will be able to devise teaching methods “appropriate to their learners, their colleagues and their societies” (Edge, 1996, p. 18).

CONCLUSION

Curriculum innovation involves multiple and interrelated factors that may influence it at different stages and at different levels (Shamin, 1996). “As a socially situated activity, its success is affected by ethical and systemic constraints, the personal characteristics of potential adopters, the attributes of innovations and the strategies that are used to manage change in particular contexts” (Markee, 1997, p. 41). In any attempt to improve education, teachers are central to long-lasting changes (Frymier, 1987; Fullan, 1993). How teachers as the end users of an innovation perceive its feasibility is a crucial factor in the ultimate success or failure of that innovation.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I thank Sandra McKay and two anonymous TESOL Quarterly reviewers for their insightful comments on earlier versions of the article. I am also grateful to Marg Iveson and Tracey Derwing for reading the manuscript and making useful suggestions.
THE AUTHOR

Defeng Li is Assistant Professor in the Faculty of Arts at the Chinese University of Hong Kong. His scholarly activities, publications, and teaching relate to the teaching of ESL/EFL, to teacher education, and to translation studies.

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APPENDIX

Questionnaire

Please complete the following questions as appropriate.

1. Age __________
2. Sex __________
3. How many years have you been a teacher of English? _____________
4. Are you teaching in a middle school or high school?
   ☐ Middle School ☐ High School
5. Which grade(s) are you teaching? ________________
6. Are you teaching in an urban or rural middle/high school?
   ☐ Urban ☐ Rural
7. Are you concerned about the methods you use in teaching English?
   ☐ YES ☐ NO
8. What methods are you using now?
9. Have you tried Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?
   ☐ YES ☐ NO
10. Why did you or why didn’t you try CLT?
11. How did you like using CLT in your classroom?
12. The following are some difficulties that other EFL teachers had in adopting CLT. Did you come across these difficulties or do you think they might be difficulties for you in adopting CLT in South Korea?

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulty</th>
<th>YES</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Teachers' deficiency in spoken English?</td>
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<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Teachers' deficiency in strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English?</td>
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<td>☑</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Teachers' having little time to write communicative materials?</td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Students' low English proficiency?</td>
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<td>5. Students' passive style of learning?</td>
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<td>6. Lack of authentic teaching materials?</td>
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<td>7. Grammar-based examinations?</td>
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<td>8. Large classes?</td>
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<td>9. The differences between EFL and ESL?</td>
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