



Changes in Practice and Professionalism in EFL in the Arabian Gulf Context

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ABSTRACT

Many EFL/ESL teachers begin their training on a Cambridge Certificate in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (CELTA) course or equivalent, with an emphasis on the communicative language teaching (CLT) approach. For most of my peers here in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), this is also how they started their careers, before going on to teach in a variety of countries. But have they maintained this approach, continuing in the path of their learnt communicative methodology, or have they adopted alternative classroom approaches? This paper seeks to answer these questions.

The aim of this study was, therefore, to confirm that CLT was the initial methodology teachers were trained in, and whether they had changed their approach since, and if so – how, why and when? The exploratory nature of the study was such that it lent itself to an interpretative research design, adopting an exploratory, phenomenological approach using qualitative methods; whereby a small sample of teachers at tertiary institutions in the UAE were interviewed. The study found that the teachers had all been schooled in CLT, and all had indeed deviated from that approach in a variety of different teaching situations.

Before the research was started, it had been surmised that any changes in approach that may have emerged were due to cultural accommodation, or institutional factors such as a prescribed methodology or rigid curriculum. However, this was not the case – teachers diverged from CLT methodology largely due to practical, experiential reasons, though cultural and institutional factors were also cited. Furthermore, though alternative approaches had been adopted by all participants, CLT had not been entirely discarded – it had been retained where it was seen as suitable for the teaching situation. CLT tended to be viewed as a resource which is part of the eclectic approach that this highly-experienced cohort of teachers had at their disposal.

Key words: ELT/EFL/ESL, Arabian Gulf, teaching approach, methodology

INTRODUCTION

It could be argued that to be a successful international EFL teacher, cultural adaptation and tolerance for diversity mark the profession as unique, which coupled with the often low pay teachers receive, it is quite remarkable that so many continue in their chosen career for decades. The Arabian Gulf, as one of the highest paying regions in the world for EFL teachers, is where many end up in the latter part of their careers, after an often fascinating cultural journey around the world. During this journey, do teachers change their teaching approach since their initial training, and if so, is it due to cultural reasons, institutional reasons or experiential factors? This is the research question and focus for this paper. Before embarking on the research, cultural and institutional factors were initially thought the most likely causes of any such change. However, practical experience built up since the young fresh-faced Certificate-level teacher graduated several decades ago could be an influence too, and in fact emerges as a major factor.

The UAE context and its ESL teachers

ESL teachers in UAE Universities Colleges typically have a relevant Master's degree, which is the minimum requirement at the three main public universities: Zayed University (ZU), the United Arab Emirates University (UAEU) and the Higher Colleges of Technology (HCT). Many also have the Cambridge CELTA or Diploma in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (DELTA), with some also holding doctorates. The teachers are generally highly experienced, with a minimum of 5 years teaching at tertiary level, and most having decades of experience. Many have published papers in peer-reviewed journals and co-written textbooks.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Communicative language teaching (CLT) has been the most influential and important methodology in ESL/EFL for several decades since its inception in the 1970s (Richards, 2006: 1).

Definitions of CLT vary among the well-known writers in the field such as Widdowson (1978), Breen & Candlin (1980), Savignon (1983), Richards & Rogers (2001), and Nunan (2003). In spite of these differences, there are a number of core components that Brandl (2008: 5 - 7) usefully summarizes: that language is viewed as communication; that communication should be meaningful, via exchanges of information through activities and tasks; an emphasis on texts and communication that are realistic; and finally that the teaching should be learner-centred.

CLT's long predominance in EFL/ESL is evident in its continued use as the taught methodology of choice in ESL/EFL teacher training courses. All teachers interviewed in this study reported their initial teacher training was in CLT methodology.

As the research questions asks, have these teachers continued with CLT methodology throughout their careers, or adopted alternative classroom approaches - and if so, how and why?

The initial assumption of this research paper was that any changes teachers reported would be laid at the door of cultural accommodation. In addition to cultural factors, institutional factors, such as preferred methodologies and demands of the curriculum could also explain why teachers would diverge from their original methodology. Practical experience and tacit knowledge in the field could be further reasons. These factors will be examined later.

METHODOLOGY

The research question

As mentioned earlier, the aim of this study was to verify that CLT was the initial methodology the teachers in the study were schooled in, and to see if they had continued with their learnt methodology, or had changed their approach over time. If they had changed, was this due to cultural, institutional or experiential factors? The exploratory nature of the study was such that it lent itself to an interpretative research design, adopting an exploratory, phenomenological approach.

The research methods most closely associated with interpretivism are qualitative, with interviews, as chosen in this study, a typical data-gathering tool, as they tend to yield 'deeper' data than other tools such as surveys.

Ethical issues in data collection

For qualitative research of a high standard, a number of guidelines need to be observed. As Cresswell (2009: 177 – 201) observes, one of the most fundamental of these is the researcher identifying their personal background, possible biases, etc., as effectively it is through the lens of the researcher that the reader is privy to the data and analysis. The setting and the relationship between the researcher and participants, and any power relationships (e.g. teacher-student) should also be clarified. Another important part of data collection ethics is assurance of confidentiality and anonymity in the study. Not only were participants' identities kept confidential, but also the identity of the institutions where they currently worked.

The participants in the study

The 6 teachers interviewed in this study are highly qualified and have extensive experience. All reported their initial training was via CLT methodology in the late 80s/90s. Though not from my own institution, the teachers selected were personally well-known to me from over 10 years of interaction in the field in the UAE, from research, professional institutions such as TESOL Arabia, and in several cases they are close personal friends. This created an atmosphere of trust and confidentiality (Cresswell, *op.cit.*, p. 192), which would hopefully produce candid responses from the participants. In addition, as academic peers, this was hoped to minimize any issues of a participant-researcher power imbalance, as mentioned in the preceding Ethics section.

Interview design

The semi-structured interview asked the following ‘core’ questions, which were pursued when appropriate:

- What was the methodology you were trained in?
- Did you apply this approach in your first teaching assignment?
- What were your subsequent teaching posts?
- Did your teaching approach change in any of these posts?
- If yes, what reasons could you give for this?
- How would you describe your approach now?
- For what reasons do you think you have adopted this approach?

The questions were chosen to fit the research question by identifying the initial methodology the teachers were trained in, and then exploring the issue of whether they had diverged from this approach, and subsequent follow-up questions would tease out the reasons for changes in approach.

Procedure

Standard procedures and protocols of interviews were followed, such as suggested by Cresswell (*op. cit.*, p.182), with informal warm up questions to ‘relax’ the subject before the core questions and associated probing questions were posed, followed by a concluding statement. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and themes teased out according to guidelines proposed by Cresswell (*op. cit.*, p.185 – 7) and Cohen *et al* (2007: 184). Likewise, procedures for reliability and validity of data as recommended by Gibbs (2007), cited in Cresswell (*op. cit.*, p. 190) were used.

Limitations of the study

Though the possibility of bias exists in reporting of the data, all endeavors were made for it to be minimized, and present the data and my interpretations as objectively as possible. This is a small scale study with a limited number of participants, and does not attempt to extrapolate its findings to a larger sample than the participants themselves, which would invite external validity threats.

FINDINGS

Thematically, a number of ways to group responses were anticipated, and my initial ideas on how to code and classify the data into why teachers had adopted a different approach to CLT were these:

1. Classroom management
2. Motivation
3. Learner autonomy
4. Learning
5. Professionalism
6. Institutional expectations

However, this was simplified to just three categories on analysis of the data, enabling a tighter fit with the research question:

1. Cultural
2. Experiential
3. Institutional

There was overlap in some categories, particularly between experiential and institutional reasons, which one interviewee (D) even remarked upon.

Overview of responses

The three categories for classification of the data: ‘cultural reasons’, institutional factors such as materials, class size and curriculum, and experiential factors causing a shift in approach, were further divided into themes, which for reasons of clarity are best represented in a table. The table below summarizes the participants’ responses.

Category	Themes	Number from sample	Total
Cultural reasons	1. Culture of the student/wider L1 culture	3 (P), 1(J), 2 (D), 3 (N), 1 (R)	11
Institutional reasons	1. curriculum/syllabus/ materials	1 (P), 2(A), 2(J), 2(D), 1(N), 1 (R)	9
	2. methodology/approach	3 (D), 1 (R)	4
Experiential reasons	1. Newly qualified teachers	3 (N)	3
	2. Practical (experiential) knowledge	4(P), 2(A), 2(J), 3(D), 1(N) 2 (R)	14
Grand Total			41

Table 1: Categories and themes of responses

What follows is a breakdown of the most significant reasons where teachers detailed deviations from the CLT methodology they had been trained in, as they adopted new approaches to deal with new-found teaching situations during their careers. Though some of the quotes are lengthy, I feel it important to document the raw data to avoid the danger of what Golden-Biddle and Locke (2007: 52 - 60) refer to as too much ‘telling’ about data, and not showing it, whereby researchers concentrate on their interpretations rather than show the raw data that lead them to their conclusions.

Cultural reasons

‘Culture’ here is defined as per Holliday’s definition of ‘large culture’, whereby ‘large’ signifies “*ethnic, national, or international cultural differences*” (Holliday, 1999: 237) which, he argues, is what makes cultures essentially different to each other. As such, many Western teachers would be thought to have a BANA (British, Australasian

and North American) cultural norm of teaching, and the participants in this study were no exception, all having been schooled in CLT methodology.

As some noted below, students not used to this cultural approach to teaching might find it puzzling or reject it outright. Teacher P described a situation where his Chinese students' preferred learning style was at odds with his contemporary EFL teaching style:

"We went to China for 4 years. That was our first time to be in a higher education situation. The focus there switched a lot more to academic reading and writing for the Chinese students. And at that point, a lot of the TEFL techniques were not really relevant then. Students were very diligent, very hardworking. They didn't want to play language games. They didn't want to mess around with ... realia! [laughs]. They wanted worksheets and textbook and intensive reading lessons... it was very different from Japan."

Later in his career, at a tertiary education institution in the UAE, he noticed a very different but nevertheless significant cultural effect, the presence of a minority culture in his all-Emirati classes (unlike other public tertiary universities, at this particular institution there are small numbers of non-Gulf Arabs and other nationalities in some classes). This, he surmised, had an effect on the other students in the class, but he also revealed it had caused him to adopt a more academic tack in his pedagogical approach at the time, avoiding some of the 'lighter' CLT activities that he uses with other classes:

"They should be similar, but one of the classes - and I think this is significant - one of the classes has ... 3 people who are not from the UAE. They are very good, very mature, I think they are the sons of lecturers at the university, and their influence on the rest of the class is quite a big thing, that class is much more serious ... the level of English they have is better. The other classes are 100% Emiratis ... they love games and stuff, but their focus is much weaker."

Cultural reasons were also singled out for differences in class management issues by some interviewees. As D noted, contrasting the different 'types' of student in the Gulf and Europe:

"Managing a class of Emirati women is not a difficult thing in terms of managing them to be focused on you when you want them to focus on you, and focused on the task when you want them to focus on the task, because by their nature, through their upbringing, they're used to listening to an authority figure."

He contrasts these Emirati students with European students, who he claims are far more demanding and difficult to manage:

"Managing a class of ... either mixed students in an institution in the UK, or Spanish students ... or Greek students or whatever... is that management of them was all about how interested they were in what they were doing, and whether they thought they were learning. Because ... their stake in what was happening was much greater. I can walk into a classroom here [the UAE], and I

could have written the lesson plan in the corridor on the walk between my desk and the classroom, and the students will be receptive ... not questioning the value of what you are doing with them. Whereas I would be more prepared in a class even of Spanish teenagers ... and certainly of Greek businessmen ... because at the end of the lesson, or even in the middle of the lesson, somebody may legitimately say "What's the value of this" Or "How is this related to what we did last week?" So, in terms of managing, it is very different here."

Teacher R moved to Kuwait and very quickly changed his approach, moving from a CLT approach to what he described as a *'dynamic form of lecturing... very teacher-lead but I also focused on individual students as much as possible.'* He found this necessary to manage the class and maintain order – his early attempts at student-centred learning had failed, largely as he saw it due to students not taking activities seriously which did not involve the teacher 'leading'.

He recounts his experience teaching in Kuwait, and in particular the shock of teaching Gulf students, having previously taught more motivated students in Europe, Latin America, and S.E. Asia.

R: "What surprised me initially with my Kuwaiti students was their lack of any kind of work ethic, lack of interest in anything other than their immediate interests, and frankly, childishness. I had been warned of this by colleagues in the region, though it was still a surprise, especially as I was teaching officers on a military base. Having taught both in Europe, Latin America and the Far East... I had been used to ... adults who were there to learn, to participate... to be engaged. I had to change my approach radically, though. After wanting to quit after the first week... [laughs]... somehow I got used to them and they got used to me. Or maybe it was just me!?" [laughs].

Other respondents picked up on cultural differences that may have actually been more to do with being busy professionals rather than the broader national culture, such as the businessmen J found himself teaching in the Czech Republic, who rejected his attempts at a CLT approach because:

"They were lazy! No, they were hardworking businessmen who saw their English classes as some kind of break and we'd go out for lunch and whatever, they'd ask me questions about America, ask me questions about my family. I'd ask questions about the Czech Republicthere was not much structure, I don't think they thought that they needed English classes per se, they just wanted to maintain [the level] where they were."

Institutional reasons

Curricula/syllabi/ materials

Lack of resources forced some teachers to change their approach, just shortly having arrived at a new post. Teacher A, though a relatively experienced trained teacher with the equivalent of a PGCE from his native Ireland, a TEFL Certificate and

several years of teaching behind him, spoke of his shock on arrival at his institution in Sudan:

“Well, when I got there ... there were huge classes of up to 60 students without any resources, without even a proper blackboard, and the CLT I'd been trained in was all dealing with small, highly motivated groups of European language students, that's what it was tailored for, and that's what I taught in Dublin, those French and continental European teenage students coming to Dublin to learn English, so it was very different, it was a huge shock. I quickly got in touch with Hywel Coleman, who was at one of the northern universities [in the UK] and he was doing a project into teaching ESL/EFL to large classes, and they had material which they freely distributed ... and it was extremely helpful.”

Lack of resources also forced a change in approach on N, who had just completed a CELTA certificate course and found himself in Hungary. CLT methods did not seem to be working, so he tried a project-based approach, which though it engaged students, seemed to produce little language competence. As he recollects:

“I still remember the school in Hungary, they didn't have materials or course books so it was very much 'make it up as you go along'. I tried to do some project work. I had my students do a project about ... a tourist guide to Hungary. I thought 'that's a great idea, they can be creative', but they just sort of copied it off the Internet. I mean it looked great, and they printed it off, but there hadn't actually been much engagement or of learning English, and I remember frustratingly thinking 'How do I get around that?'”

A large syllabus was problematic for J while teaching in Korea. Though he was able to apply some aspects of his CLT approach, he felt unable to utilize it fully and achieve what he felt was real student competence in structures and skills. As he says:

“The syllabus was way too much, way too much; the target language we had to cover... it was kind of like here [the UAE] sometimes. You just had to cram it all in.”

Curriculum constraints and materials also forced changes in teachers. P recounts his experience in Saudi teaching business English, where he found his CELTA background of little use due to the curriculum.

“[In] Saudi Arabia, I worked for a sub-contractor in Riyadh, because I was finishing off my Master's then, and that was mainly business English ... quite different again ... and I'm not sure that the CELTA background was an awful lot of use at that point. It tended to be more.... I guess again more mainstream type teaching techniques. Fairly large classes there, [mainly] reading and writing, with far less focus on oral English.”

Two teachers worked on military bases in the Gulf, and the rigid structure of the materials and syllabus forced a change in their approach. Teacher D, who had earlier

defined his approach as eclectic, retaining many aspects of CLT, noted the change as follows:

“When I got to the Middle East, that became a very kind of formulaic, book-driven teaching method. I worked for the military in Saudi Arabia; it was the American Language Course for military personnel. Basically, it was a book every 4 weeks, then a test, then a book for 4 weeks, and then a test again, a book for 4 weeks then a test throughout the year. And at the end of the year the student got a grade that allowed them to go and study at an air force base in America ... or not! [laughs]. All the materials were provided by the American government.”

In Kuwait, he also taught the same course, and found the materials “... so dry, very prescribed ... very tedious, very formulaic”. R who also worked in Kuwait on a military base found exactly the same, a forced shift in teaching approach, dictated by an extremely prescriptive course.

On arrival at a tertiary-level technology college in the UAE, D again found the curriculum dictating his approach, in that teachers were allotted specific skills. On the first day of the semester, his line manager told him:

“He said ‘OK, you will be a writing teacher this semester’, which surprised me as ... as you know the idea of splitting skills in EFL is a very old idea, which even at that time was kind of very out of date, but at that time they had writing teachers and reading teachers, so there’d be the receptive skills and the productive skills as they called them. You have a writing teacher and a speaking teacher, and a reading and listening teacher, and they were timetabled like that, separately, and that’s all they were responsible for.”

Methodology/approach reasons

After his Sudan experience, with large classes bereft of materials, teacher A encountered a very different issue 15 years later in the UAE, where technological innovation side-lined traditional pedagogy and methodologies, leaving something of a gap. The new college policy of laptop learning for all students, involved all courses being re-written by teachers and put online. There was an emphasis on projects and a movement away from any form of explicit language teaching, and A found this a destabilizing time when he was forced to abandon his CLT methodology or indeed, any form of traditional pedagogy. With no place for textbooks and with little explicit teaching of English skills, grammar, lexis, etc., ESL teachers were pushed into unfamiliar territory. As A states:

“In 2000 the laptop initiative seemed to involve tearing up the old methodology ... in terms of what you did in the classroom. In some ways it was exciting and innovative, in others it was challenging and ... also quite destabilizing, you know because the old certainties were not there anymore ... I felt that things were questioned, and cast aside, things that were still very valid and useful, and as you probably know, you sometimes feel unsure of your rights to professionally question some things ... you know I can remember at one stage, you probably remember this too, there was a downgrading of for example ... grammar was out for a while. You know I don’t feel I’m being unduly critical.”

He considered the institution's Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach and emphasis on technology, though interesting and innovative, had forced teachers to abandon important aspects of pedagogy and undermined students' skills in core English skills, as he went on to mention:

"Well ... [grammar] ... was just not seen as a priority, it was seen as a bit of a waste of time, it was felt the students would just pick it up incidentally. Then suddenly it came back, because people could see it was obviously important, and we needed it, to explicitly teach it ... I think with PBL it was just felt they would pick it [grammar] up, and that was felt the same with vocabulary etc., too. So I think in some ways it was good, I had to challenge my own thinking, but in other ways it was bad, a certain baby going out with the bath water too, but that's probably happening in lots of contexts, and I feel that technology and the constantly changing profile of students who have learnt different ways of interacting with information and communicating is posing quite a challenge to educators, obviously."

J found something similar in the UAE context, and its preference at the time of PBL, with less focus on language, and more on 'the project'. Though he had to change his methodology from the CLT he used successfully in Korea, he seemed unruffled by the new institutional approach, and compensated for it by focusing on - and explaining - structure. As he explains:

*"My methodology? It's changed, I'm more laid back here kind of, and some levels [of teaching] are project-based here. When I do find time to teach **English** [his emphasis due to the project-based nature of the course, laughs], I work through a kind of casual way. I try to get them to work through group and pair work ... [and] I explain grammar a lot, I find myself explaining things a lot here, more than I ever did before in my teaching career."*

Teacher D describes the PBL approach that was introduced in his college in the UAE, but despite the dramatic change he had to make in teaching style, was positive about it, more so than A for example:

"About 10 years ago, they decided that they should take this task-based learning approach, that it should be all about experience and doing things that were real. And so the language became integrated with the content subjects, and it was used to achieve real things ... rather than contrived language classroom things. Which I think was a very good ... approach to take."

Upcoming changes in the institutions seemed not to perturb him, as his eclectic approach allowed him to adapt to institutional changes:

*"I think even project-based learning has died a little bit now, and we are into kind of modular approach to courses, which is going to dictate **again** [his emphasis] the way we approach language teaching Yes, even ... in whatever institutionalized approach to language or to learning that has been imposed ... I have always kept things, some of those things I know worked."*

Experiential reasons

Newly Qualified teachers (NQTs)

One of the 6 teachers experienced difficulties several times in applying his taught CLT methodology, both in Egypt and the UK, which he laid at the door of his lack of experience, though there are possibly cultural and institutional elements accounting for

his perceived lack of experience too. (It should also be noted that the CELTA is a qualification to teach English to adults, not for teaching children).

He describes his perceptions of his CELTA course in relation to his first teaching position at an Egyptian primary school, which he recalls as something of ‘a baptism of fire’ after attempting to implement his CLT methodology; he then switched to a disciplinarian, book-based approach, resorting to banging on the table when discipline broke down, and when that failed, walking out of the classroom.

“I want to be honest; it [the CELTA] didn’t really prepare me for a class of 25-30 rowdy, rumbustious youngsters. I mean it gives you the knowledge in English language and structures and functions, you get to do a little bit of teaching practice. But to be honest with you, I don’t think it really prepared me, I felt that the 2 years of my first teaching job was a preparation if you like. I don’t think ... the CELTA doesn’t really give you enough experiences with challenging scenarios. You usually get a bunch of volunteer students who are very pleased to see you and they’re as good as gold. I mean, it set me off on the track, but I certainly didn’t feel I was qualified after it!”

Later after completing a PGCE in the UK, he worked as a language support teacher in a secondary school, teaching ESL to largely Pakistani-origin students, but he still described himself as feeling under-equipped to teach, and ‘very unsure of my skills and ability in terms of teaching effectively.’

Practical (experiential) knowledge

This was the most frequently-given reason for diverging from CLT methodology, with it being cited 14 times by the interviewees.

Teacher P, who had almost 20 years of experience in the UK, China, Japan, Saudi Arabia and UAE, had clearly evolved a teaching style to suit what he believed his learners wanted, particularly he says with reference to his students in Saudi Arabia. Only on arrival in the UAE was he made to question the approach he had developed, being observed by a line manager who considered it ‘far too teacher lead.’ On reflection, he explained:

“I’d certainly got much more into that mould I think ... at King Fahad University ... it’s actually in the literature, I think it’s Adrian Holliday ... he writes about teaching performances. The teacher puts on a great show, and the students sit there and passively watch it. I probably started to go too far towards that. So when I got to HCT, y’know, in conjunction with the supervisor, I started to move away from that, trying to do more kind of discovery-type learning.”

He later justified his teaching style and argued, based on his experience, saying he would adapt it to whatever teaching situation he found himself in., with a particular emphasis on student needs:

“To be honest if somebody said “What is your teaching style?” I don’t think I could say. And I was once criticized ... about something I wrote ... in a paper ... about teaching techniques and methodology and that. A tutor actually criticized this and said “This just looks like a rag bag of techniques, are you telling me that you will do anything if it works?”, and my response was “Actually, yes”. I look at the students, and think “Are our students capable of this, are they capable of, for example, discovering things for themselves?” And if they like active things, I’ll go

with that. But if the needs of the course are that they improve their reading for an IELTS exams in a 6 week period, then I will go back to probably teaching reading strategies in a very traditional manner... I think the bottom line is very, very much – what do these students need?”

He went on to give a specific example where he addresses students' needs, in this case employing a 'traditional' grammar class to meet what he considered to be a deficit in the students' knowledge:

*“A good example is I'm doing level 1 writing at the moment, and ... some teachers I know basically just fire lots of writing activities at the students as if they are simply going to get better by writing, writing, writing. I mean, obviously lots of practice helps, but some teachers just go in and it's like: “OK, here's task 1, here's task 2, here's another task 1” [speaking of IELTS writing tasks] and get them to write them, correct them and give them back. Whereas with a class I've got at the moment we're supposed to be ... writing an assessment piece on the past tense. So I just chucked the writing book out the window last week and gave them a good old fashioned grammar lesson on how the past tense was, because it didn't appear to me that they knew, they didn't really know, and they were just guessing... And then we did some activities to use the words and I thought that was an effective way, an **effective** [his emphasis] way to focus on the form on what they had to do. But I find some colleagues, they would say “I'm not a grammar teacher, I'm a writing teacher” and just give them a past tense writing question, without them having checked if they know the past tense, and how it works.”*

When asked about his teaching approach, teacher A gave an insightful and philosophical insight into how he had moved away from CLT and embraced a wide teaching repertoire, and that he had actually entered into, as he terms it, a meta-educational perspective on the classroom, looking far beyond it in terms of inspiration, rather than the nuts and bolts of the profession:

“Well I go back to the old Richards and Rogers cop-out, the eclectic approach, but I think CLT had lost its gloss anyway, as I think questions were asked as to what was lost in terms of adopting CLT, things like the grammar and, you know, content aspects of language teaching were lost for a while...[it]... was a lot more on communication, so you know if you can communicate it didn't really matter how you did it, as long as the student was understood or was confident. But I think there's now an eclecticism, there has been a revival of a need for real competency in skills, especially in our environment where students are studying in English, or working in English, so a return to ways of getting them to be better in all the skills, writing, reading etc. ... not necessarily that they are getting better [laughs], but at least professionally there has been an acknowledgement that that is important, while before it wasn't acknowledged.”

His critique was not just limited to CLT, but education and educational policy as a whole, and, as he went on to explain, he had adopted a more philosophical viewpoint both on education as a whole, and the Arabian Gulf in particular.

“I've also feel professionally I've become interested in broader issues, it's not so personal, things like policy and education in general - rather than just English language and the classroom context - even our mission here and preparing people for work, and the questions related to that, I mean, is that a valid mission for education? And the context of the Gulf too, and the issues

associated with that. I find that interests me more than the kind of language-focused concerns, you know the kind of old-fashioned rarified PhD research into why Arabic readers can't spell for example, or another second language inter-language error analysis, it doesn't turn me on any more, though it used to! [laughs]. *I mean since starting a doctorate, I feel I've moved from the classroom and the language and almost entered a meta-educational analysis to the whole thing of what I'm doing, an almost existentialist philosophy of education, whereas when you start it's very technical, I do this and I do that, and you worry about how to get through the 45 minute lesson, it's almost like I'm fixing a car, whereas now I'm musing do I need the car? [laughs], or that it looks good but it doesn't go....or even what was the point of it in the first place?! Has it really benefitted us?!"*

Teacher N has also arrived at a similar conclusion, acknowledging that his methodological approach has changed many times since starting his career. In his current position, it has changed again, but unlike earlier in his career when in more than one situation he admits in his own words he 'had no idea what he was doing', now with a doctorate he has confidence in methodological shifts, including his latest shift in direction:

"I think it [my methodology] has changed, and lot of it was due to ... the development I got when doing the doctorate...about my search sort of for ... methodological stability - and not finding it! It really started when doing the doctorate and that gave me confidence in my own ... subjectivity."

Like teacher P, teacher J, now teaching in the UAE, has arrived at a teaching style that is very much teacher-lead, with an emphasis on explanation to his students, in sharp contrast to his initial CLT training. Also like P, he justifies this based on his understanding of the needs of his students. He describes his approach as follows:

"I know this methodology goes against popular trends, current trends ... but I explain grammar a lot, I find myself explaining things a lot here more I than I never did before in my teaching career. Not just through examples, I want the students to know these things, and I find myself explaining more, and when I do that, I think, I have this idea the students will understand my explanation better. I never did that before ... [but] here is my understanding. The girls have listened to English a lot; they've had a lot of exposure, but maybe not to very good English. A teacher presenting is something they can keep up with. So that's why I do what I mentioned before, it's a time saver."

Teacher D questioned many of the premises of his training early on, which he characterized as consisting of elements of CLT and the direct method. Even at the time of his training, he felt some of the elements of his training bordered on the foolish, and he ignored some of his training and put into practice ideas he found valid, as he describes:

*"There was a period, wasn't there, where they took the direct method to the extreme, where you weren't allowed to speak the learners' language, you learnt the language through osmosis [laughs] ... that whole Rinvolucri thing, where you know, you are sitting around in circles, throwing pillows at each other, I could never get into those kind of things [laughs]! I mean I could never really get into that approach anyway ... but that was the kind of approach that was the most acceptable. In fact, in teaching practices, it was very much frowned upon to use **any form** [his emphasis] of translation to help students which even then, even*

though I didn't know much about it, it seemed to be ignoring something that would facilitate the whole process. They were evangelical at that time about the whole idea – y'know, keep all other languages out, just work out meanings of words. They put a great deal of emphasis on the teacher's communicative ability.... And yet you knew perhaps the word in Spanish, or the word in French, or even in Greek or whatever. That was precisely what you wanted ... and obviously in any normal classroom that's what you'd do, you'd translate. But if you were being observed ...you couldn't do that."

Frustration with the CLT/direct method training he had been schooled in caused him to create his own methodology almost immediately:

*"As soon as I started teaching properly overseas, I created a hybrid of my own which worked for me, and it used the value that I saw in the way **I had been taught** [his emphasis] languages in school, and the way I had been taught **to teach** [his emphasis] languages. Which were kind of two diametrically opposed elements to an approach, two ends of a spectrum: grammar translation, and this communicative direct method."*

As he mentioned, there were elements of CLT and the direct method which he considered valuable and retained in his hybrid approach, and returning to the UK after working in the Arabian Gulf, he was keen to get up to date with language teaching methodology. As he states:

"I thought the time spent in Saudi and time I spent in Kuwait had slightly de-skilled me. And I wanted to get back into a normal EFL classroom. So I was teaching throughout that year, but only part-time. So by the time I got here I was getting back up to date with the current sort of EFL approaches and things."

As mentioned earlier, irrespective of his teaching situation, he takes a pragmatic and eclectic approach, like teachers N, A, J, and P, cherry-picking whatever he feels will work, despite the institutional constraints:

"In whatever institutionalized approach to language or to learning that has been imposed ... I have always kept things, some of those things I know worked."

Teacher R concurs with his opinion, remarking of the way things have fallen in and out of favour over his teaching career:

"I suppose I have developed quite a bag of tricks over the years in terms of teaching. The CLT I was schooled in I have largely dropped here in the Gulf, to be honest with you. I just feel ... learners here [in the UAE] are lacking in study skills, yet paradoxically they seem to respond better to traditional teaching methods. If you play language games with them too much, they can accuse you of just 'playing'! So I do a bit of everything, even drilling which they seem to enjoy. I go to TESOL Arabia every year [a regional EFL conference], and I remember a year or two ago, a speaker mentioned the benefits of reading aloud, as if it was a ... a new technique, or a new dawn [laughs]. I've been doing it for years here, it seems one of the best ways to keep the class focused and effectively manage them."

CLT: its continued relevance for the participants

It is perhaps important to note that though all the teachers did deviate from CLT at various stages in their teaching career, all reported CLT did remain their chosen approach in a variety of teaching situations, though this was not something specifically looked at in the research question, nor asked for in the interviews. In some cases the CLT methodology seemed to be accepted unquestionably by students, but in others, initial acceptance was less forthcoming, as teacher N noticed at the British Council in Hong Kong, where new students seemed surprised at the in-house CLT methodology. As he details, there was something of a cultural shock:

“... in-terms of students from the Hong Kong education system, which tends to be very rote- learning based, and very teacher-centered. When they ... came to ... courses in the British Council they would be very taken aback, at least initially, that we were expecting them to talk to each other, to participate... once they cracked the er... change, the fear of that, they'd be fine, but sometimes it took a little bit of time to work on them.”

In total, the teachers detailed 11 different countries as varied as Japan, Hong Kong, Mexico, Saudi Arabia, Korea and Spain where CLT remained their chosen approach. These responses are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Teachers citing examples where their initial CLT training was successfully applied

Teacher	Teaching situation	Total
P	Japan (private language institution), Saudi Arabia (University co-sessional course)	2
A	Malaysia (International Islamic University, foundations and co-sessional courses)	1
J	Korea (University)	1
D	Spain, Greece (private language institution)	2
N	UK (ESL language support in secondary school), Hong Kong (British Council)	2
R	Spain, Mexico (private language institutions), Indonesia (University foundations and co-sessional courses)	3
Grand Total		11

DISCUSSION

It should perhaps be seen as no surprise that these participants, all highly experienced ELT professionals, have progressed in terms of their skills acquisition from Cert TEFL recruits to a level where some, as teacher A eloquently phrases it, have reached a philosophical, meta-educational view of the classroom, and the actual teaching approach has become an application of what works based on their long experience, a mix of methodologies and techniques with no particular affiliation to any

particular school. In many ways this mirrors the Dreyfus Model (1986) of progression from novice to expert, with these teachers at a point in their careers where they no longer rely on rules, plans or maxims, but have an intuitive grasp of situations based on deep tacit understanding. As Dreyfus and Dreyfus remark (1986: 4):

*“Human understanding was a skill akin to knowing how to find one’s way about in the world, rather than knowing a lot of facts and rules for relating them. Our basic understanding was thus a **knowing how** rather than a **knowing that**.”*

Their level of experience and lack of adherence to any particular methodological dogma endorses Loughran’s point (2010:14) that *“coming to understand that there is not one correct and best way of doing teaching is embedded in experience.”* It may be argued that some of the teachers have slipped into a rut in regard to their teaching: both J and P have adopted teacher-lead approaches because they appear to work and are effective ways to manage the class, though they are aware this could leave them open to criticism - P concedes his line manager criticized his approach, and J acknowledges his ‘lecturing’ approach is controversial and it is ‘against current trends’.

However, the participants have not totally discarded the CLT methodology they were schooled in, with 11 unsolicited endorsements of CLT in the earlier ‘overview of responses’ section, with the methodology reported to work well in non-BANA countries as diverse as Japan, Saudi Arabia, Korea, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia and Mexico. Some, such as teacher P, actually explicitly stated they have ‘returned’ to some of the aspects of CLT in their current teaching situation, recognizing that their approach had become too teacher-centred, and despite giving the illusion it ‘worked’ through student ‘approval’, was probably engendering student passivity rather than active learning. So although the continuing relevance of aspects of CLT was not something actively sought out in the research, nor pursued in interviews, nevertheless it is worthy of mention and possibly further investigation.

In conclusion, the research sample indicated that with a total of 41 responses of divergence from their schooled CLT methodology, all the teachers had adopted different approaches for a variety of reasons, embracing eclecticism in their teaching largely based upon whatever ‘worked’, and generally for experiential reasons rather than cultural or institutional considerations.

It is perhaps pertinent to note that such a favouring of an eclectic methodology amongst an experienced body of teachers is hardly new, and indeed echoes the findings of Dr. Henry Sweet, writing over 100 year ago:

“But none of these methods retain their popularity long — the interest in them soon dies out... [they] have all had their day. They have all failed to keep a permanent hold on the public mind because they have all failed to perform what they promised: after promising impossibilities they have all turned out to be on the whole no better than the older methods.... A good method must, before all, be comprehensive and eclectic.” (Sweet, 1899: 3).

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