THE IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN AN ENGLISH DEPARTMENT IN A LAO HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTION: A CASE STUDY

BY

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DECLARATION

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This Thesis Entitled: **"The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an English Department in a Lao Higher Educational Institution: A Case Study"** is submitted in partial fulfilment for the requirements for the Unitec degree of Master of Education.

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ABSTRACT

English language is an international language used in order to communicate in the fields of education, technology, trade and politics so that it is learnt as a foreign language in many countries around the world. Due to the importance and necessity to communicate in English, in recent decades many EFL countries as well as Lao higher educational institutions have shifted from traditional grammar-based teaching method to communicative-focused instruction. However, some research has reported that there is still has a gap between schools' language policy and classrooms' practices. This study explores the understandings and attitudes of English teachers in adopting a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach into their classrooms. It investigates factors that promote or hinder EFL teachers' implementation of this teaching approach into Lao higher educational institutions English classrooms. It also examines the syllabi that influence them in teaching communicative English.

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of English teachers in a Department of English and a case study approach was applied in order to explore teachers' understandings of CLT. Ten English teachers from one department in a Lao higher education institution were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The study compares the literature about communicative English teaching with the findings of data collected from these ten one-to-one, in-depth interviews in the same setting.

The findings indicated that the factors that affected the implementation of CLT in the Lao context related to teachers' factors include: misconceptions of CLT, traditional grammar-based teaching approach, teachers' English proficiency and lack of CLT training. The issues raised from students include: students' low English proficiency, students' learning styles and behaviours, and lack of motivation to develop communicative competence. Other difficulties caused by educational system were: the power of the examination, class size, and insufficient funding to support CLT and the last factors caused by CLT itself was: the lack of CLT interaction in society and school.

The study also provides a range of practical recommendations for the faculty deans, senior managers at higher educational institutions, ministry educators and policy-makers to further improve implementation of CLT and to help ensure the success in implementing this approach in Lao higher educational institutions.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Pages

DECLARATION…….....ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENT…….....iii
ABSTRACT…….....iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS……vi
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS……vii
LIST OF TABLES…….....ix

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW……...……1
1.1. NTRODUCTION……..…….…….1
1.2. BACKGROUND OF CLT……..……..……..1
1.3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY…….……..……3
1.4. VALUE OF THE RESEARCH……,…….5
1.5. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS…….....6
1.6. OVERVIEW OF THE RESEARCH…….……..6
1.7. SUMMARY…….....7

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW……..….....8
2.1. INTRODUCTION……..…….8
2.2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE……..…….8
2.3. DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING……....9
2.4. CHARACTERISTICS AND PRINCIPLES OF CLT…….……..10
2.5. ADOPTION OF CLT IN EFL CONTEXTS……...……..10
2.6. ISSUES OF ADOPTING CLT IN EFL CONTEXTS…….…….....12
2.7. SUMMARY…….…….……27

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY…….....28
3.1. INTRODUCTION…….…….…….....……..28
3.2. METHODOLOGY…….…….....….....28
3.3. RESEARCH METHODS…….35
3.4. DATA COLLECTION……..…….....37
3.5. DATA ANALYSIS……..38

3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY…….....40
3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS…….42
3.8. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY…….43
3.9. SUMMARY……44

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS……..……45
4.1. INTRODUCTION……45
4.2. TEACHER BACKGROUNDS…….....45
4.3. INVOLVEMENT IN CLT…….....46
4.4. INTERPRETATION OF CLT…….....47
4.5. BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING CLT…….53
4.6. SUMMARY……..67

CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS……..68
5.1. INTRODUCTION…….……68
5.2. MAJOR FINDINGS……..…….……...68
5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS…….…..84
5.4. FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES…….....86
5.5. RESEARCH SUMMARY……86

REFERENCES…….……87
APPENDIX……...…….…..95

Appendix 1: Qualitative Research for In-depth Interview Questions…….....95
Appendix 2: Participant Consent Form……..…….…….…...96
Appendix 3: Information Sheet……..…….……..…..……98

ABBREVIATONS

AEC: Asian Economic Community

ASEAN: Association of the South East Asian Nations

ASEM: Asia-Europe Meeting

ASEP: Asia and Europe Parliamentary Meeting

BA: Bachelor of Arts

CET: Communicative English Teaching

CLT: Communicative Language Teaching

DoE: Department of English

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ELT: English Language Teaching

ESL: English as a Second Language

ESP: English for Specific Purpose

FoL: Faculty of Letters

GE: General English

LCD: Liquid Crystal Display

LP: Language Practice

MA: Master of Arts

NGOs: Non-Government Organisations

NUOL: National University of Laos

TEFL: Teaching English as a Foreign Language

TESL: Teaching English as a Second Language

TESOL: Teaching English to Speaking Other Language

UK: United Kingdom

UREC: Unitec Research Ethics Committee

US: United States

WTO: World Trade Organisation

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE ONE: DEFFERENCES BETWEEN TESL AND TEFL……...26

TABLE TWO: SUMMARY OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN RESEARCH ASSUMPTIONS…….31

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

1.1. INTRODUCTION

Modern science and technology are increasingly changing the world into ‘a global village’ and bringing people from different places around the world into frequent communication. Globalisation is also reflected in the worldwide use of English language. English plays a crucial role in many areas: education, science, technology, politics, and trade. As a result, many Asian countries, where English is taught as a foreign language, have shifted from a traditional teaching method towards communicative-focused instruction. Laos is one of a number of developing countries in South East Asia that is accelerating its entry into joining a globalised world while developing its economy. This teaching method is called *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*. CLT is generally regarded as an approach to language teaching (Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards and Rodgers, 2001). It is based on the theory that the key function of language use is communication and its primary goal therefore is for learners to develop communicative competence (Hymes, 1972, Richards and Rodgers, 2001; Ying, 2010). In other words, its goal is to make use of real-life situations that necessitate communication.

This chapter will present the background of this study. Then the value of the research will be explained and in the following section the research aims and questions will be outlined. Lastly, the overview of the thesis will be outlined.

1.2. BACKGROUND OF CLT

CLT first emerged in European countries in the 1970s and was successfully implemented into the English curriculum in other countries in the 1980s (Littlewood, 2007; Ozsevik, 2010). Following the emergence of CLT in English-speaking nations, CLT is the most influential language teaching methodology in the world (Ying, 2010). European linguists saw the need for language instructors to focus on communicative competence rather than on the mastery of structures alone (Savignon, 1991; Littlewood, 2007). The term ‘communicative competence’ was first used by Hymes, who referred to it as “that aspect of our competence that enables us to convey and interpret messages and to negotiate meanings interpersonally within specific contexts” (as cited in Brown, 2007, p. 246). Since then, researchers have sought diligently to define and redefine the construct of

communicative competence and the most widely accepted definition by Canale and Swan (1980) that there are four different components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. CLT primarily aims at developing language learners' communicative competence (Tsai, 2007). Pei-long (2011) also argues that language teaching should focus on communicative proficiency rather than mastery of sentence structures. Therefore, several researchers identify CLT as one of the most influential and effective language teaching methodologies that increase learners' communicative competence (Laio, 2000; Savignon, 2002; Ying, 2010)

Due to the needs of international communication in the early 1990s, the CLT approach was introduced in many countries where English is learnt and spoken as a foreign language in EFL classrooms (Liao, 2000; Ying, 2010). In the last thirty years, there have been opposing views on the appropriateness as well as the feasibility of implementing CLT in EFL contexts. Some ELT (English language teaching) scholars have emphasised the significance of the local needs and the conditions of particular EFL contexts, and the benefits of the traditional methods of language teaching (Incecay & Incecay, 2009; Ozsevik, 2010). On the other hand, some researchers have taken a strong point of view for adopting CLT in Asian countries (Liao, 2004, Li 1998).

Nevertheless, the majority of the ELT researchers have advocated that neither of these extreme positions will benefit English teaching and learning in Asian contexts (Ozsevik, 2010). Given the current English teaching circumstances in Asian countries, these researchers have argued that implementing fully a CLT approach in non-English-speaking countries is almost impossible. They have also pointed out that certain barriers need to be overcome for the effective implementation of CLT in Asian countries (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Rao, 2002). The implementation of CLT has also encountered problems and resistance in EFL classrooms (Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004; Rao, 2002; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001).

1.2.1. CLT in the Lao context

In Laos, English is only used for communication in education, science, technology, trade and politics. This century there has been an attempt by the Lao Government to improve the communication language skills of higher education students. Subsequently, CLT was introduced into the Lao higher educational institution's curriculum in 2005. One of the

other foremost goals of this curriculum is to build and develop students' communicative competence which includes reading, writing, speaking and listening skill in Lao higher educational institutions (National University of Laos, 2005). In addition, this curriculum indicates that the most significant in learning and teaching a new language is emphasising communicative skills rather than grammar rules (National University of Laos, 2005). As a result, oral communication skills were adopted into the curriculum of the Department in the following year.

1.3. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The research was conducted in a higher educational institution in Laos, comprising 10 faculties and departments and provides teaching and learning for the Bachelor of Arts (BA) (full-time and part-time), Master of Arts (MA) and teaching English for other departments around the campus. Currently, because of high demands for English in Laos, the number of students (who finished upper secondary level, NGOs staff and government officials) enrolling in the Department has increased. For instance, in the academic year 2003-2004, the total number of students was 2433, and in the academic year 2006-2007, it was 3821 (Faculty of Letters, 2007). And then, in the academic year 2009-2010, it was 4012 (Faculty of Letters, 2010)

This increase number of students means the department plays an important role in providing English skills for the students in order to serve Laotian society needs. In other words, the main goal of the department is to produce highly qualified graduates who are capable of using the English language skills in their social life and career in Lao higher educational institution. It can be seen that the Department is required to provide society with human resources who can use English in future work places.

However, the English skills of the graduates do not appear to achieve the goals of the programme. In the current situation, some research (Soulignavong, 2006; Chapichith, 2008) show that students in the Department, who graduated from this institution have often not learned to use English effectively. They are not able to meet the society's needs because the graduates who were working in public and private sectors had difficulties in listening and speaking when doing the required jobs. They also had difficulties in their daily use of English for their social life. In relation to these results, there were two researches particular conducted on writing and reading skills of students in the Department and Pasanchay (2008) found that the English skills of writing grade 3 in the Department were very low, and they had problems in writing English paragraph structures. In addition,

Saychounmany (2008) discovered that in most grades, students in the Department faced reading problems; they had difficulties in understanding simple texts consisting of 1-1000 level vocabulary and simple sentence structures. In the following year, Nounpaseurth (2009) specifically conducted her research on the oral communicative skill of the final year students at the Department and found that students were very poor in oral communication skills because of the lack of grammatical competence and vocabulary. This caused poor overall communication skills (Nounpaseurth, 2009).

It can be argued that not only graduate students, but also students who are currently studying in the Department have poor listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, which are key elements of the communicative competence. As a result, English teachers are often criticised for the unsuccessful teaching of communicative English (Soulignavong, 2006; Chapichith, 2008; Pasanchay, 2008; Saychounmany, 2008; Nounpaseurth, 2009). According to the findings of these research studies, the researcher noted that these research studies were only conducted on students' English learning skills. Since CLT was adopted in the department in 2005, there has been no particular research that has been conducted on teachers' perspective of English teaching in this department. As a result, the research thought that it is necessary to conduct research on teachers' perceptions of CLT in order to identify what factors hinder teachers to implement CLT in their classroom teaching.

Furthermore, the researcher's own professional and personal experience of working as an English teacher in this institution particularly in the department makes her interested in this study. The researcher has noticed that one of the most common problems in her classroom is that students are not willing to learn and participate in communicative English activities. They appear to want to learn mainly by focusing on linguistic knowledge such as grammar rules, which they believe could help them to pass the examinations. Besides, most of them cannot apply what they learn in the class into the situational settings in their daily life. Although they have acquired enough English linguistic knowledge during their five-years in university, they can neither speak it nor listen to it or even understand it.

The lack of sufficient environmental opportunity for using English might partially explain this problem. The researcher does not think that she and other teachers had been offered enough training to develop their English skills. For example, some teachers in the department might have the opportunity to attend the Lao TESOL conference that is organised each year in order to discuss issues around English classroom teaching and improve their teaching skills. On the other hand, the participants who participated in this

workshop were teachers who teach English from primary to higher education institutions around the country. Therefore, only some teachers were selected to participate, while the rest have to wait for another year. Therefore, the researcher did not have enough opportunity to learn communicative English teaching skills as she just learned how to teach in the way expected. Perhaps what happened to her personally cannot be extended to describe other English teachers' teaching and training experience, but it can help us understand that tertiary English teachers in Laos lack opportunities to develop their professional skills for teaching communicative English.

This research project collected qualitative data in the department of English in one higher education institution in Laos. There are over fifty teachers who teach various subjects of English such as Language Practice (LP), Grammar, English for Specific Purpose (ESP), Phonetic, Reading and Writing to Lao students who are majoring in English.

This research is designed to explore the understandings and attitudes of teachers in the adoption of CLT in a Lao higher educational institution, to potentially identify some issues around CLT and to find some possible solutions for these issues. Graduates with enough communicative English skills are essential for sustaining economic development in countries like Laos. Previous studies show that there is a need to explore why the communicative competence of English language students in the Department is poor and to identify the most important factors that are affecting the teaching and learning process. This thesis therefore aims to identity the main factors influencing CLT implementation and the challenges for teachers to implement the CLT in the department of a Lao higher education institution.

In this thesis, the researcher has explored teaching methods and strategies that English teachers think they could use to arouse students' interests in learning communicative English and makes recommendations that could help Lao tertiary institutions to train English teachers to teach communicative English. She has also made recommendations for English teaching policy-makers and syllabus-makers in Laos for making new policies and syllabi which could enhance communicative English teaching in the future.

1.4. VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

The research outcomes and recommendations resulting from this thesis have the potential to help Lao tertiary English teachers enhance English teaching efficacy in the following areas: it may help them to identify the main impacts of CLT in a Lao context and this research may provide potential suggestions for Lao English teachers to improve their

teaching strategies to improve students' communicative competence. Moreover, insights gained from this research may improve the teaching and learning experiences for both teachers and students in Lao higher education particularly in the department. The results of this study might also help both teachers and students change from emphasising grammar-based translation to a communicative approach, which could motivate Lao tertiary students to be more focused on communicative activities and improve students' communicative competence. Lastly, it might assist Lao tertiary policy-makers and users to understand the complexity of introducing communicative English teaching into the syllabus.

1.5. RESEARCH AIMS AND QUESTIONS

1.5.1. Aims

The first aim of the study is to explore the understandings and attitudes of Lao EFL teachers in adopting CLT in their classroom practices in order to better understand the appropriateness and effectiveness of CLT activities in their classroom teaching practice.

The second aim in this research is to investigate and understand the factors that help and hinder Lao tertiary teachers' implementation of CLT into their classroom.

1.5.2. Research questions

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are Lao tertiary English teachers' interpretations of CLT in the Lao context?
2. How do they implement it in their classrooms?
3. How do they evaluate the value of CLT in their teaching?

1.6. OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS

The thesis is organised into five chapters as follows:

Chapter One briefly provides the background of this study. It points out the overall aims and questions of this research and provides an introduction to the setting of the research and overview of the whole thesis.

Chapter Two critically reviews a wide range of literature around the topic of communicative English teaching such as the definition, the characteristics and the principles of communicative language teaching, and the issues around the CLT in relation to a Lao context. These issues identified help the researcher conceptualise the hypotheses for the research.

Chapter Three discusses and justifies an overview of the methodology that has underpinned this study. It details the subsequent research design and data collection methods and how they ensure the validity, and reliability of the findings. It then provides details of key issues around how the data were collected and analysed. It also discusses the ethical issues in this study and points out the limitations of this study.

Chapter Four presents the data results and findings of this study from in-depth interviews with ten teachers who teach English to Lao students. The data results and findings are organised according to the themes identified.

Chapter Five discusses the key findings from the previous chapter and compares these key findings with the documented expectation from the literature review, and provides conclusions of the whole study in relation to the research questions that guided this thesis. Several recommendations are made in this chapter in the hope that communicative English teaching will be improved in Lao tertiary institutions in future.

1.7. SUMMARY

This introductory chapter provided an overview of this research to give readers direction about what they expect to read in the following chapters. It introduced a research background and the value of the research, and then aims and research questions were outlined. In the next chapter, the literature will be critically reviewed such as the definition and characteristics and principles of communicative language teaching, the issues around the CLT in relation to a Lao context.

CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter reviews the literature relating to the area of *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)* which is the most influential language teaching methodology in many countries around the world. The purpose of this literature review is to examine CLT situations in EFL settings and to investigate potential issues around the adoption of it into English as Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. The following issues are discussed with reference to relevant literature: communicative competence, definition of communicative language teaching, characteristics and principles of CLT, the adoption of CLT in EFL contexts and issues of adopting CLT in EFL settings.

2.2. COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

The concept of *communicative competence* was proposed by Hymes (1972), who claimed that the study of human language should place humans in a social world. The definition of communicative competence is what a speaker needs to know in order to communicate in a speech community (Hymes, 1972). For example, in the everyday contexts, not only is a speaker expected to produce a grammatical sentence, but she or he should also consider the situation or context in which the sentences are used. In relation to this, Ying (2010) argues that communicative competence refers to a language learner's ability to use the target language successfully in real world communication.

According to Hymes (1972, p. 63), competence should be viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses." That is, the concept of communicative competence entails knowledge of the language and the ability to use the knowledge in context. Hymes (1972) proposed four sectors of communicative competence. First, "whether or not something is formally *possible*" refers to the notion of grammatical competence. It is concerned with whether an utterance is grammatically correct. Second, "whether something is *feasible*" deals with its acceptability, in addition to being grammatically possible. Third, "whether something is *appropriate*" means that a sentence should be appropriate to the context in which it is used. Finally, "whether something is in fact *done*" implies that a sentence may be grammatically correct feasible, and appropriate in context, but have no probability of actually occurring (Hymes, 1972, p. 63). It can be argued that communicative competence consists of

knowledge of linguistic rules, appropriate language usage in different situations, connection of utterances in a discourse, and language strategies.

2.3. DEFINITION OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING

Different researchers have presented their understandings in relation to communicative language teaching. Ying (2010) argues that CLT is an approach to the teaching of second languages that emphasises interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as a "communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages" or simply as the "communicative approach" (Ying, 2010, p, 2). In relation to this, Larsen-Freeman (2000) argues that CLT aims broadly at the theoretical perspective of a communicative approach by enabling communication. Communicative competence is the goal of language teaching by acknowledging the interdependence of language and communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

It is clear to see that CLT here means that the language teacher uses communication as a teaching approach to enhance students' communicative competence. In relation to this, Ellis (1997) also supports that the pedagogical rationale for the use of communicative approach in a language teaching class depends in part on the claim that they will help develop learners' communicative skills and in part on a claim that they will contribute incidentally to their linguistic development. Here, it becomes clear that in relation to being able to communicate, language teaching not only needs the mastering of linguistic knowledge, but also communicative competence.

It also states that communicative competence is the ability to understand the logical basis of linguistic competence (Finch, 2003). According to Finch, there are three kinds of logic: the first one is formal logic, which is connected with the rules which govern valid argument and gets us so far in understanding the basis of communication. Then to be fully competent, we need knowledge of natural logic, which means understanding what people are trying to do through language. In addition to these two logics, we also need to understand the force of our utterance, which requires us to understand the meaning of our utterances according to its social context or particular situational settings. Gonzales (1995) supports this, by arguing that communicative competence includes mastery of language that is needed to handle various situations.

Therefore, when it is deliberately taught to students, the language teaching will create language appropriate for such language-use situations as ordering in restaurants, giving directions or applying for a job. To summarise, communicative competence not only

includes good mastery of linguistic knowledge, but also the ability to understand the logic to handle realistic situations. Furthermore, the other researchers also argue that there is considerable debate as to appropriate ways of defining CLT, and no single model of CLT is universally accepted as authoritative (McGroarty, 1984). However, according to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT starts with a theory of language as communication, and its goal is to develop learners' communicative competence.

2.4. CHARACTERISTICS AND PRINCIPLES OF CLT

CLT has become popular and widespread in second foreign language teaching (Brown, 1994). Contrary to the teacher-centred approach, in which teachers are regarded as knowledge-givers and learners as receivers, CLT reflects a more social relationship between the teacher and learner. This learner-centred approach gives students a greater sense of "ownership" of their learning and enhances their motivation to learn English (Brown, 1994).

CLT emphasises the process of communication and leads learners to roles different from the traditional approach. The role of the learner is negotiator between the self, the learning process, and the object of learning. Learners are actively engaged in negotiating meaning by trying to make them understood and in understanding others within the classroom procedures and activities (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Teachers also take particular roles in the CLT approach. First, the teacher facilitates the communication process between all participants in the classrooms. The teacher is also a co-communicator who engages in communicative activities with the students (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). In addition, the teacher acts as analyst, counsellor, and group process manager (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

2.5. ADOPTION OF CLT IN EFL CONTEXTS

CLT has been become widespread in English language teaching since its emergence in the 1970s (Littlewood, 2007). Beside its quick expansion in English as a Second Language (ESL) context, CLT has been implemented in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context too. ESL essentially refers to the learning of English as the target language in the environment in which it is spoken as the primary language of interaction, communication, as well as business. EFL, on the other hand, differs from ESL in that EFL refers to the learning of English in the environment of one's native language (Ozsevik, 2010; Ellis, 1996). For example, Lao speakers who learn English in Laos or Russian speakers who learn English in Russia are EFL learners. It is noteworthy to identify the fundamental

differences between ESL and EFL to gain a better understanding of their implications on the use and implementation of CLT in each different learning and teaching environment.

To increase the number of learners who are able to effectively communicate in English, national language education policies in many EFL countries have moved towards CLT since the 1990s (Littlewood, 2007). Traditionally, the teaching of EFL has focused on knowledge about the structure and grammar of English language instead of the actual use of English form communication. Traditional approaches such as the grammar translation method and audio-lingual methods, commonly used for English teaching, were accepted because few people had opportunities to use English for real communication in EFL contexts. However, because of rapidly growing international needs for business, travel and technology, EFL learners now need to use English for communication purposes. These traditional approaches are seen as no longer serving the needs of EFL learners.

It can be argued that the communicative approach is the most popular direction in ESL and EFL teaching settings. Most modern teaching methods emphasise it and most textbooks are designed for it (Anderson, 1993). In relation to this, many universities of EFL nations have offered courses that focused on integrated English skills or specific topics. For instance, Liao (2000) stated that CLT was introduced as a problem-solving instrument into secondary schools in China in the early 1990s. In addition, the general English courses offered to university freshmen, elective courses were also offered in the second, third or fourth year to develop students' English proficiency (Rao, 2002). Moreover, Shin (1999) investigated English programmes in Taiwanese universities and found that English courses had changed from a traditional form-base to a communication-base, with emphases on language functions and learners' needs.

Laos is one of a numbers of EFL countries in the South East Asia that CLT was also adopted into English classrooms. In 2005, the higher educational institution's curriculum was renewed in Laos and communicative English teaching (CET) has been introduced as the basis of the curriculum (National University of Laos, 2005). One of the main goals of this curriculum is to develop and improve written and oral communicative skills of English learners in Lao higher educational institutions (National University of Laos, 2005). This curriculum also dictates that the most important of learning a new language is focusing on communication rather than the grammatical sentence structure (National University of Laos, 2005).

2.6. ISSUES OF ADOPTING CLT IN EFL CONTEXTS

Even though national policies and school curricula shifted toward CLT in a variety of EFL contexts, researchers have pointed out that there is still a gap between policy and teaching practices (Nunan, 2003; Littlewood, 2007). The implementation of CLT has encountered problems and resistance in several EFL classrooms (Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004; Rao, 2002; Savignon, 2002; Yu, 2001). Various research projects reported that instruction in EFL classrooms is still predominantly based on traditional approaches (Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Rao, 2002; Nunan, 2003; Littlewood, 2007). The ideas of CLT are different from the educational values and traditions of many EFL settings (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998). In addition, situational factors such as large class size, test-oriented instruction and students' low proficiency have also influenced CLT practices. Even if the policies and curricula support the adoption of CLT, ultimately it is only the classroom teachers who decide what really happens in their classrooms.

Researchers have also reported that the situational constraints in local contexts affecting teachers' success in implementing CLT. Various research studies showed that teachers usually used form-based instruction because they felt pressure to help students pass the exams (Karim, 2004; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Liao, 2004; Menking, 2001; Dong, 2007; Rao, 2002; Yu, 2001). In addition, the research findings suggest that teachers find it difficult to manage group work for large-size classes (Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Liao, 2004; Karim, 2004; Yu, 2001). There are also factors that arise from the teachers and students. Some teachers are concerned about their non-native English proficiency.

In some studies, EFL and ESL teachers expressed difficulties in including cultural aspects into their classes because of lack experience in an English-speaking country (Yu, 2001; Liao, 2004). Students' resistance and low-English proficiency also deter teachers from using CLT (Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Yu, 2001; Liao, 2004; Chang, 2011). These situational factors may weaken the teachers' efforts to use CLT. Whether or not teachers face difficulties in implementing CLT in EFL settings, it is necessary to count their voices in the discussion.

The literature on CLT has focused on a range of issues, such as English proficiency of both teachers and students, the design of classroom activities, facilities, social interaction activities, listening activities and the role of teachers, students, funding and instructional materials. Here according to the literature, some of the identified major themes influencing the implementation of CLT in EFL classrooms in a Lao higher education English

classroom: teachers have a low level of English language proficiency, teachers lack professional development, low English proficiency of students, students learning behaviour, class size, test-oriented instruction and an over-emphasis on grammar and lack of social interaction. These issues will be discussed in the following sections.

2.6.1. Students and Teachers

The behaviour and classroom participation of teachers and students play an important role in the successful implementation of communicative language teaching in EFL contexts. In the CLT classroom, it seems to be student-centred which does not depend on their teachers all the time, waiting for instructions, words of approval, correction, advice or praise (Jones, 2007; Ozsevik, 2010; Chang, 2011). They do not ignore each other, but look at each other and communicate with each other. They value each other's contributions; they cooperate, learn from each other and help each other in order to reach the goal of communication (Jones, 2007; Ozsevik, 2010; Chang, 2011). When in difficulty or in doubt, they do not immediately ask the teacher for help or advice, but only after they have tried to solve the problem among themselves with an emphasis on working together in pairs, groups and as a whole class. At the same time, the teacher's role in the CLT classroom acts as a facilitator or instructor, who guides the students, manages their activities, and directs their learning process in order to develop their language skills (Jones, 2007; Ozsevik, 2010; Chang, 2011).

Similarly, Ozsevik (2010) and Chang (2011) argue that learners in CLT classrooms are supposed to participate in classroom activities that are based on a collaborative, rather than individualistic, approach to learning. They are portrayed as active participants in the language learning process (Ozsevik, 2010, Chang, 2011; Jones, 2007). In addition, CLT as a methodology has much to do with interaction (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Doherty & Singh, 2005). Accordingly, it would be wise to claim that a teacher's and students' roles in the CLT classroom are a dynamic feature and thus they tend to vary all the time (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Jones, 2007; Ozsevik, 2010, Chang, 2011).

Several roles are assumed for teachers in communicative language teaching, the importance of particular roles being determined by view of CLT adopted. Breen and Candlin (1980, p. 99), describe teacher roles in the following terms:

> *The teacher has two main roles: the first role is to facilitate the communication process between all participants in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts. The second role is to act as an independent*

participant within the learning-teaching group. The latter role is closely related to the objectives of the first role and arises from it. These roles imply a set of secondary roles for the teacher; first, as an organiser of resource and as a resource himself, second as a guide within the classroom procedures and activities…. A third role of the teacher is that of a researcher and learner, with much to contribute in terms of appropriate knowledge and abilities, actual and observed experience of the nature of learning and organizational capacities

This quotation draws attention to a distinctive feature of CLT – that of a "learner-centred and experience-based view of second language teaching" (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 69). Thus, it is advisable for teachers adopting a communicative approach to produce and use authentic teaching materials that meet the needs of their particular learners (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Moreover, teachers need to motivate their students, as well as provide them with a comfortable classroom atmosphere for language learning (Breen and Candlin, 1980; Jones, 2007; Chang, 2011). Littlewood (1981) states that the roles of a teacher in a CLT classroom consists of coordinator and manager of activities, language instructor, source of new language, consultant when needed, as well as participant.

In addition, it is typical in a CLT classroom that it is not merely the teacher, but everyone present who manages the classroom performance (Allwright, 1984). Allwright argues that teachers can no longer be regarded simply as teachers and learners just as learners, since they both are managers of learning. On the other hand, the traditional image of teachers as the dominating authority figure in the classroom is dissolved into such a role that necessitates facilitating the communicative process in the classroom where students feel safe, unthreatened and non-defensive (Ozsevik, 2010).

The emphasis in communicative language teaching in the processes of communication, rather than mastery of language forms, leads to different roles for learners from those found in a more traditional second language classroom. Breen and Candlin (1980, p, 110) describe the learner's role within CLT in the following terms: (cited in Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 166)

The role of learner as negotiator – between the self, the learning process, and the project of learning – emerges from and interacts with the role of joint negotiator within the group and within the classroom procedures and activities which the group undertakes. The implication for the learner is that he should contribute as much as he gains, and thereby learn in an interdependent way.

Furthermore, Jin, Singh and Li (2005, pp. 95-96) propose that the roles of students in the CLT classroom are supposed to be "those of negotiators for meaning, communicators, discoverers, and contributors of knowledge and information". Likewise, Ozsevik (2010), in his descriptions of students and the teacher's role in a CLT classroom, asserts that students are vigorously involved in expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning while the teacher takes on more of a facilitator and participant role in the language classroom. Finally, Deckert (2004, p. 13), referring to the student centred characteristic of CLT, emphasises that "the CLT approach features low profile teacher roles, frequent pair work or small group problem solving, students responding to authentic samples of English, extended exchanges on high interest topics, and the integration of the four basic skills, namely speaking, listening, reading and writing." She further states that CLT discourages pervasive teacher-controlled drills, quizzing of memorised material, and extensive explanation of forms of English.

On the other hand, characteristics of both teachers and students in the EFL classroom do not seem to meet the CLT classroom's characteristics because of the low proficiency of students, students' behaviour, and a culture of expressing ideas.

2.6.1.1. English proficiency of students

Many researchers and English teachers have conducted extensive studies on Asian students' learning strategies. Most of these studies revealed that Asian students' learning strategies consist of many of the following features: concentration on intensive reading as a basis for language study; a preoccupation with the careful, often painstaking examination of grammatical sentence structure and a corresponding lack of attention to more communicative skills; the use of memorisation and rote learning as basic acquisition technique; a strong emphasis on the correction of mistakes, both written and oral; the use of translation as a learning strategy (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Campbell & Yong, 1993; Doherty & Singh, 2005; Dong, 2007)**.**

In relation to these research studies, Rao (2002) also found that most students in his research are more biased to traditional language teaching styles, which are dominated by a teacher-centred, book-centred approach and an emphasis on rote memory. The students' English strategies are primarily composed of the following features: focus on reading, writing, grammar, word-level translation and memorisation of vocabulary (Rao, 2002). One exception in the literature is a recent study made by Littlewood (2000, p. 33), in which he discovered that "the stereotype of Asian students as 'obedient listeners'-whether or not

it is a reflection of their actual behaviour in class-does not reflect the role they would like to adopt in class." To support these statements, Jin et al. (2005) found that most students where they conducted this research with at least average proficiency in English they were unable to communicate effectively in English. The students were dissatisfied with their communicative competence (Jin et al., 2005).

In addition, there was research on teachers' perceptions, attitudes and expectations about CLT in Bangladesh that found that the majority of the teachers in this study identified students' low English proficiency as a major difficulty in practising and adopting CLT in their country. This is similar to Li's (1998) findings where the most teachers stated that due to students' low English proficiency they encountered difficulties in adopting the CLT approach in the classroom. From my own experience, I have found that when students are enrolled at the tertiary level in Laos, their low-level of English proficiency usually makes it difficult for the teachers to do oral interaction and other communicative activities in the classroom. Therefore, it can be argued that low English proficiency of students hampered or discouraged teachers in adopting CLT in the classroom teaching and learning. As a result, these students seem favour more teacher-centred rather than a communicative teaching approach. They want their teachers to explain everything to them (Incecay & Incecay, 2009).

2.6.1.2. Cultural impact

CLT offers more interaction among students and teachers. Students feel free to express and exchange their opinions and to be actively engaged in any communicative activities. However, traditions and cultures that expect children to listen and respect adults might also impact on students learning behaviour in the EFL classrooms and it might be one of the other factors that hinder teachers to apply CLT in their classes. Incecay and Incecay (2009) comment that the traditional learning behaviours and styles caused EFL students to be passive in communicative activities. They further argue that it is not easy for EFL students to forget their traditional learning styles and habits which are full of teachers and book-centred approaches (Incecay & Incecay, 2009).

They do not enjoy participating in communicative activities in the class because of the fear of losing face by making mistakes and they lack the confidence to express themselves in less than perfect English (Mirdehghan, HoseiniKargar, Navab & Mahmoodi, 2011; Jones, 2007). Littlewood (2000) gives the example of culture that influences both students and teachers behaviours in the EFL settings that "culture with a long tradition of unconditional

obedience to authority in which the teacher is seen not as a facilitator, but as a fount of knowledge to be delivered and no one wants to voice their opinions and challenge what lecturers say" (p. 31). In relation to this, Hui (1997) also gives an example of culture impacts on students' learning styles which cause difficulty to apply CLT into the classes. China has a Confucian culture which seeks compromise between people. When this culture is applied to language learning, it is obvious that students are unwilling to express the view loudly for fear of losing face or offending others. For this reason, group discussion may be less productive or fruitful than individual essay-writing. This statement is also supported by some Chinese sayings that discourage oral communication in class. Hui (1997, p. 2):

Silence is gold; Eloquence is silver;

It's easier said than done;

It's the noisy bird that easily shot dead;

A real man should be good at thinking, but weak at speaking;

Don't speak out unless spoken to;

A man should be responsible for his words;

What has been said can't be unsaid;

Keep your mouth shut but your eyes open;

Keep silent unless you can burst on the scene like a bombshell;

Downy lips make thoughtless slips.

In Chinese culture, teachers are viewed as knowledge-holders. If they play games with students or ask students to role-play in class, it means they are not doing their job. Meanwhile, teachers are too authoritative to be challenged so far as knowledge is concerned. Students are not in the habit of arguing for their own point of view, even if teachers accidentally make mistakes. Students have trained to be obedient and to learn by rote ever since kindergarten (Hui, 1997).

According to previous literature, Doherty and Singh (2005) conclude that Western teaching methodology does not suit an EFL setting because it is designed for active, independent, confident co-constructor of classroom interaction and knowledge. EFL students tend to be passive and non-interactive who are good listeners and observers (Doherty & Singh, 2005).

2.6.1.3. Teachers' English language proficiency

Alongside these issues for students, teachers' behaviour also plays a significant feature in the success of implementing CLT. Ellis (1996) argues that the successful adoption of CLT into EFL classrooms depends on the teachers English language proficiency and teaching resources to implement it. Most of the EFL teachers believe that they do not have adequate English knowledge and skills to facilitate communicative activities which might be considered as another barrier inhibiting the adoption of CLT into their classroom (Karim, 2004).

To support this statement, Penner (1995) observed Chinese teachers teaching in this study and found that their English knowledge was limited while CLT requires teachers to have high proficiency in English in order to modify the textbooks and facilitate students. In relation to this, Li (1998) further explained that CLT requires them to be fluent in English and most of the teachers in this study generally felt that they only had high proficiency in English grammar, reading and writing, but they had inadequate abilities in English speaking and listening to conduct communicative activities in their classes. As a result, teachers' lack of English language proficiency is identified as a major difficulty in the adoption of CLT into EFL classrooms.

2.6.1.4. Time requirements

Traditional teaching methods do not need more time to prepare teaching materials and create the classroom activities and search for extra information to support the teaching and learning process. Roberto (2004) argues that a traditional teaching method or teacher-centred approach is one where an activity in the class is centred on the teacher and teachers serve as the centre of knowledge, directing the information. In other words, in the teacher-centred approach, teachers are regarded as knowledge-givers while learners act as receivers (Brown, 1994). On the other hand, a communicative teaching approach or learner-centred approach gives students a greater sense of "ownership" of their learning and enhances their motivation to learn English and it also emphasises an interaction of students and teachers and reflects a more social relationship between the teacher and learner in order to improve students' communicative competence (Brown, 1994; Ying, 2010). Therefore, it might challenge most of the EFL teachers to switch from their traditional teaching approach to a modern method. The following comment of some teachers in Incecay and Incecay's (2009) research report the following comments of some teachers:

> *Since we have been educated by traditional teaching methods, without asking the reason of anything, it is sometimes difficult to adapt to the new activities. Also we did not have any materials except out textbooks, so it is hard for me in terms of time and ability to create the colourful teaching aids to motivate my students and get used to all of the materials and equipment used during the communicative activities (p. 621).*

Most of the EFL teachers demonstrate that they do not have enough time to prepare the CLT teaching materials or CLT activities for their classroom teaching because it needs a lot of time to do. To support this statement, the findings regarding Bangladeshi teachers' perceptions that CLT is time-consuming to prepare teaching materials and classroom activities (Karim, 2004) and similarly to this, a few studies found that the majority of the teachers in their studies argued that CLT requires a lot of time to prepare classroom activities (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Thompson, 1996). This was also found in Li' (1998) study where teachers stated lack of time for preparing and developing communicative teaching materials had prevented them from using CLT in their classroom teaching and learning.

2.6.2. Administrative Systems

When communicative language teaching was introduced in EFL classrooms at first, it met with considerable resistance (Jin et al., 2005). They state that it changes the traditional grammar-translation method into a student approach (Jin et al., 2005). However, because of teaching conditions in Lao tertiary education like class size, the testing system, format of the examination, traditional teaching approach, lack of CLT training and lack of funding to support the implementation of CLT, most of the EFL teachers who had adopted a CLT method grew less confident of it and faced difficulty implementing it (Anderson, 1993; Liao, 2000; Menking, 2001; Rao, 2002; Karim, 2004; Liao, 2004).

2.6.2.1. Class sizes

The EFL classrooms are often? not well-equipped or convenient with a lack of resources to support CLT activities and the classroom may also be inconvenient due to the large number of students and immovable desks and chairs which hinders the maximum students' participation and successful implementation of communicative activities like role-play, group-work and games (Karim, 2004). Class size can make the implementation of CLT difficult in an EFL setting. In addition, many language teachers hold a negative view on

teaching English in large classes, it is very "hard to organise class activities", "out of control" or "impossible to communicate" (Qiang & Ning, 2011, p. 2).

Similarly, these concerns are also shared by many researchers. Kennedy and Kennedy (1996) feel that it is difficult to control what happens when the number of a group passed a certain number. Hayes (1997) thinks the ideal size of a language class maximum is 30 because only under such a scale, can a teacher offer enough chances for the students to communicate with each other. Hayes (1997) classifies the problems associated with teaching in large classes into five categories as follows: discomfort caused by the physical constraints, control problems (discipline aspects), lack of individual attentions, difficulty on evaluation, and problems of charging learning effectiveness. These problems can be physical, psychological and technical (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Hayes, 1997; Ying, 2010).

In relation to this issue, Harmer (2000) also finds out in his study that large classes create difficulties for both teachers and students. It is difficult for teachers to have contact with the students sitting at the back and for students to get individual attention (Harmer, 2000). It can be claimed that it is impossible to organise dynamic and creative teaching and learning sessions. Most importantly, large classes are especially daunting for inexperienced teachers. This study also indicates that teachers need more technical strategies in large classes (Qiang & Ning, 2011). Synthesising the earlier views, Locastro (2001) summarises the problems of teaching large classes as pedagogical, management-related and affective while large classes are not definitely a pedagogical disaster; the difficulties arising from large classes raise more requirements for language teachers compared with those teaching smaller classes.

To support these claims, there are some studies (Li, 1998; Karim, 2004) in EFL settings that report large classes as a barrier to the adoption and implementation of CLT in EFL contexts, the majority of the teachers in Karim's study (2004) identified large class size as a difficulty in practising CLT or as a possible barrier to the adoption of CLT in Bangladesh namely (Karim, 2004). Similar results in the studies by Musthafa (2001), Burnaby and Sun (1989), and Gamal and Debra (2001) also identify a large class as one of the difficulties in successful implementation of CLT. Classrooms may also be inconvenient due to the large number of students and immovable desks and chairs which hinders the maximum students' participation and successful implementation of communicative activities like role-play, group work and games (Rao, 2002; Karim, 2004). 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 (Kennedy & Kennedy, 1996; Hayes, 1997; Harmer, 2000; Ying, 2010).

To summarise, teaching large classes is difficult for teachers to discipline the class, especially for students who lack self-managing in studying, to satisfy all the needs of students who have different interests (personalities and capabilities); to organise efficient class activities due to the constraints of time and space; to provide equal chances for the students to participate and practise; to give timely and effective feedback and evaluation (Qiang & Ning, 2011). Therefore, the majority of the teachers in EFL settings identify large class size as a major difficulty when adopting CLT in their classroom teaching and learning.

2.6.2.2. Grammar-based examination instruction

This type of examination and a lack of effective and efficient assessment instruments of communicative competence, traditional grammar-based examinations, are considered as a major difficulty for the implementation of CLT in the EFL settings. Incecay and Incecay (2009) argue that even though the students are aware of the importance of communicative activities, because having a grammar-based exam to pass the class, most of the students in this study lose their interest in these activities. Similarly to this, some researchers noted that EFL students preferred learning sentence structure rather than communicative activities because the contents of the examination of all the language subject tests are grammar-based (Li, 1998; Menking, 2001; Rao, 2002; Karim, 2004; Liao, 2004; Dong, 2007).

For instance one student in Rao's research (2002, p. 95) said:

> *I know it is very important to be able to communicate in English. But if I want to graduate from university, I have to pass all kinds of examinations, which are all grammar-based. That is why I like to work more on English grammar, and some students in his study claimed that they did not learn anything if they did not learn new words and grammar in class.*

These researchers also found that students in EFL classrooms have a lack of motivation to participate in communicative activities which do not help them to pass the final examination (Liao, 2000; Rao, 2004; Yu, 2001). Because of this examination format, teachers are under pressure to help their student pass the examination as well as students

tend to be more focused on grammar teaching and learning because students want to pass the exams and get good grades**.** Therefore, grammar-based examination format is identified as the biggest obstacle to students' interest in communicative activities.

2.6.2.3. Traditional teaching approaches

Although the school policies and school curricula shifted from a traditional teaching method toward communicative teaching approach in a variety of EFL contexts, most of the teachers mainly persisted using traditional practices in the classes (Karim, 2004). Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) argued that most teachers in their study were unwilling to use communicative activities. They favoured a more traditional teaching approach than a communicative teaching method (Gorsuch, 2000; Gamal & Debra, 2001). In relation to this, Penner (1995) stated that it was difficult to change the classical traditional approach of language teaching that was used for a long time and implement the modern teaching approach. When teachers often apply a traditional teaching method and focus more on grammar and students concentrate more on sentence structure, this this will lead to preventing the learners from developing their communicative competence (Incecay & Incecay, 2009).

Littlewood (1981) supports this statement by arguing that an overemphasis on grammar will lead to preventing the learners from developing their communicative competence. In a grammar-translation class teachers' detail explanation and exercises of grammar can be a waste of time and in these classes, there is little chance for students to communicate with language (Incecay & Incecay, 2009). Moreover, Incecay and Incecay further noted that 90% of EFL teachers explain the grammar rules in their mother tongue. This means students in EFL classrooms are still under the pressure of learning grammar, which is imposed during their earlier education.

According to Littlewood (1981), many aspects of language learning can take place only through natural processes, which operate when a person is involved in using the language for communication and the learners' ultimate goal is to communicate with the others. Doherty and Singh (2005) conclude that if students want to learn a new language effectively, they should take part actively in the communication with language rather than sentence structure and only passively accept what the teacher says. As a result, it can be seen that over-emphasis on grammar in the teaching and learning could be another difficulty when implementing CLT in the EFL classroom practice.

2.6.2.4. Administration supports

In adopting CLT into the EFL classroom teaching and learning, it needs supports from the administration level in order to provide facilities to support teaching and learning progress. On the other hand, most of the EFL teachers stated that they lack administrative supports with the adoption of CLT in the classroom which most teachers also identified as one of the difficulties in practising and adopting CLT (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998; Karim, 2004). Many teachers in this study tried to change the dominant teaching approach to a communicative teaching method, but quickly get frustrated, lose their initial enthusiasm and acquiesce the tradition because the lack of administration (Liao, 2000).

In addition, Li (1998, p. 693) stated that "teachers in Korea generally found this lack of professional, administrative and collegial support discouraging". Similarly to this situation, Burnaby and Sun (1989) found Chinese teachers' dissatisfaction regarding their status of professional development. Their dissatisfaction with administration is evident as they thought, "their own level of academic knowledge was not being enhanced in the way it would have been" (p. 230). As a result, CLT implementation will not be successful in EFL settings if the administration does not support teachers in adopting CLT (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004).

2.6.2.5. CLT training

Among the various difficulties, the teachers' teaching inability is the one most related to classroom teaching effectively. So the most important thing that educational administrators should do is the teachers training (Liao, 2000). Many teachers in EFL settings should have in-service training particularly in CLT which might improve the teachers' methodologies of teaching (Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004). However, there is a lack of CLT training for EFL teachers which might be one of the barriers in adopting CLT in the EFL classroom teaching and learning. As some research projects found that lack of training in CLT was identified as a major difficulty in adopting CLT (Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Karim, 2004).

In relation to this, Gamal and Debra (2001) supported that most teachers in their study identified lack of CLT training as a barrier to successful implementation of CLT which is posing a problem in practising communicative language teaching in EFL settings. In Lao situations, teachers lack professional development in order to improve their English proficiency and teaching skills. This causes teachers in the department to lack confidence to facilitate communicative activities, and motivates their students to participate in CLT

classroom activities. As a result, the outcome of teaching English exclusively using CLT has not provided the expected results.

2.6.2.6. Funding

In adopting CLT into the classroom, it requires variable facilities to create teaching materials and teaching aids in order to motivate students to concentrate on communicative activities. On the other hand, the EFL classrooms lack facilities and equipment to support CLT activities. Rao (2002) supported this argument by stating that most educational institutions do not have enough financial resources to provide the audio-visual equipment, photocopiers and other facilities and resources that are required to support the dynamic teaching necessitated by communicative language teaching approach. In addition, Incecay and Incecay (2009) stated that most of EFL schools have a lack of funds to build an English usage environment in schools in order to motivate students and to improve their communicative competence.

2.6.3. CLT environment

Social interaction is another key element for learning a new language. It can motivate students to pay more attention on communicative classroom activities because they have a target to use it outside the classroom. On the other hand, learning English in the EFL settings, students lack motivation to communicate because they have less chance to use it outside the classroom. As Ozsevik (2010) argues, both ESL and EFL entail teaching of English to the speakers of other languages. However, the learning and teaching environment varies in ESL and EFL settings. Rao (2002) states that the significant differences between EFL and ESL included the purpose of learning English, learning environment, teachers' English proficiency and teaching experience, and the availability of authentic English materials (Ellis, 1996). Learning English for EFL learners is generally part of the school curriculum rather than a survival necessity (Ellis, 1996). Hence, it is usually only during class time that EFL students have exposure to English, so they are unable to test and practice strategies as easily (Ellis, 1996; Rao, 2002). In contrast, students in ESL situations have a strong motivation to improve their communicative competence in the classroom because they need to survive in English-speaking countries (Ellis, 1996; Rao, 2002; Mirdehghan et al., 2011).

In addition, learners in ESL settings generally have different native languages from their peers. This means that ESL learner's use of the target language becomes salient in interacting and making friends with classmates in and outside the language classroom

(Ellis, 1996; Rao, 2002; Jin et al., 2005; Mirdehghan al at., 2011). As Ellis (1996) points out that a culturally heterogeneous language classroom produces higher motivation and faster adaptation of learning strategies on the part of learners. Nevertheless, EFL learners almost always share the same native language with their classmates. As a result, they generally feel tempted to use their native language when they need to initiate a conversation in the language classroom (Anderson, 1993; Jin et al., 2005; Ozsevik, 2010; Mirdehghan al at., 2011).

A further distinction can be made between ESL and EFL contexts on motivational grounds. Motivation can be conceptualised as being either integrative or instrumental in second language learning. Integrative motivation refers to the desire to learn the target language for purposes of communication, identifying with the target language community, and having an interest in the target language culture (Ozsevik, 2010; Jin et al., 2005). Instrumental motivation, on the other hand, has to do with the desire to learn the target language for practical reasons, such as passing an exam or getting a high-paying job (Rao, 2002; Dong, 2007). It can be argued that successful second language acquisition depends on integrative motivation. Language learning in ESL settings is by and large considered to entail integrative motivation because learners in ESL environments need to function in the target language community. ESL teaching in such an environment is predominantly designed to help learners develop their communicative competence. In comparison, learners in EFL contexts are often instrumentally motivated to learn English. Students usually learn English either because it is a school requirement or they need to pass a certain university entrance examination (Gorsuch, 2000; Li, 1998; Liao, 2000).

Moreover, Ellis (1996) maintains that the role of the teacher in ESL settings is more of a facilitator, since a great deal of language learning will take place outside the classroom. In contrast, the teacher in EFL contexts is regarded as the sole provider of knowledge and experience in terms of the target language and its culture (Jin et al., 2005). This is mainly due to the fact that EFL is “a cultural island” for learners and they basically depend on their teacher to learn the target language and its culture (Mirdehghan al at., 2011).

Finally, Maple (1987) summarises the differences between teaching English as a second language (TESL) and teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) in the following table:

Table 1.Differences between TESL and TEFL

TESL	TEFL
Acquisition-rich environment	Non-acquisition environment
The teacher is usually a native speaker of English or fully bilingual	The vast majority of teachers are non-native speakers of English. The English proficiency of these teachers varies widely from fully bilingual to minimally functional
Students are more appropriate to have integrative motivation than in TEFL situations	Students are almost all totally instrumental in motivation. Most are studying English for their own need and for pleasure.
Students need English and usually perceive this need. It will be put to use immediately or in the near future for school, work or acculturation.	Most students do not see any need at all for English, at least while they are studying it although many see it as a "deferred need".
Students usually study in intensive programs such as 8 to 25 hours per weeks	Most students study only a few hours per week such as 2 to 4 hours per week, over quite a few years.
Class size is usually small, even in public schools (rarely over 25, often only 10 to 15 students per class).	Class size is usually larger, except in better private programmes. In public schools, more than 50 students is one class is not unusual.
Teachers assume that students want to assimilate or at least to become adjusted to the society of the English speaking country.	Teachers know that students do not want to become "mini-Brits" or "mini-Americans" becoming part of the L1 culture.
Most ELT texts are written with the ESL market in mind, therefore containing material and skills development for survival in the UK or US.	Using ESL texts for EFL means either deleting such culture-bound material or else teaching students things they will not need.

The native-speaker ESL teacher often plans curriculum and uses activities most appropriate to UK or US learning styles.	The EFL teacher must consider the students' learning styles when planning the curriculum and the methods to be used.

(Maple, 1987, pp. 47-48)

It can be seen that social interaction in the CLT environment plays a crucial impact on students' motivation in order to improve their communicative competence because they have a target to learn English, so that they would pay more attention to communicative classroom activities as well as grammatical sentence structure.

2.7. SUMMARY

A CLT approach plays a significant role and is necessary in learning a new language in both EFL and ESL settings. However, a large number of studies have shown that teachers faced various difficulties in the adoption of CLT in their classroom teaching. For example, EFL classrooms are still predominantly based on traditional approaches. The ideas of CLT are different from the educational values and traditions of many EFL settings (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998). Grammar-based examination instruction, large class size, and students' low proficiency have also influenced CLT practices. Low-English proficiency also deters teachers from using CLT (Li, 1998; Liao, 2000; Yu, 2001; Nunan, 2003; Littlewood, 200). This review of literature has confirmed a gap between national education policies and practices. The implementation of CLT has encountered problems and resistance in EFL classrooms (Ellis, 1996; Li, 1998; Nunan, 2003; Littlewood, 2007). Therefore, more research is needed on the CLT implementation in the higher education sector in Laos.

The next chapter outlines the methodology for conducting this research. Methods and issues around methods when gathering the data will be discussed.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The qualitative methodology is the most appropriate approach for this research project for exploring the understandings and attitudes of Lao EFL teachers who adopt CLT into their classroom practices and to investigate and understand the factors that help and hinder Lao tertiary teachers' implementation of teaching communicatively. This chapter will firstly present an overview of methodology, the rationale of the research methodology and the sample selection. The research method used for data collecting and the data analysis will be discussed in the following section. The following section, the reliability of the results will be examined with the ethical considerations. Finally, some of the limitations of the study will be raised.

3.2. METHODOLOGY

It is important to have a clear idea of which methodology is going to be used when making an initial decision to undertake research. This step helps researchers to design the research in a specific way so that the requisite data can be gathered and analysed in order to meet its purpose (Sekaran & Bougie, 2010). Leedy and Ormrod (2013, p. 4-5) support that research "methodology directs the whole research endeavour which controls the study, dictates how the data are acquired, arranges them in logical relationships, sets up an approach for refining and synthesising them, suggests a manner in which the meaning that lie below the surface of the data become manifest, and finally yields one or more conclusion that lead to an expansion of knowledge".

Burn (1994) defines research methodology as a systematic approach to problem-solving that involves on-going collection, analysis and interpretation of data while Davidson and Tolich (1999, p. 25) argue that "when we talk about methodology, what we are talking about is a certain order to of philosophical commitment". Leedy (1997, p.5) describes it as a process through which a researcher attempts to "achieve systematically and with the support of data the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem or a greater understanding of a phenomenon". In addition, Bryman (2012) reveals that educational research is a broader context of social research which is an academic approach to the study of problems of social significance that draws on the resources of the social sciences.

Moreover, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) state that the educational research is eventually concerned with not only improving educational practice, but also extending knowledge within research traditions and approaches. although, the issue of what counts as knowledge within a social science discipline, and what principles about knowledge building are appropriate, social research has been a much debated matter because of having many traditions and approaches to research (Cohen et al., 2007).

Social science researchers emphasise that when designing a research project, it is important to take ontological and epistemological issues into consideration (Bryman, 2008). Davidson and Tolich (2003) support this point, by arguing that questions about ontology and epistemology are philosophical questions which are central to social research.

3.2.1. Ontological issues

Bryman (2008) argues that ontological issues are concerned with the relationship between natural and social entities. The ontological issues deal with questions about what things exist in the real world (Davidson & Tolich, 2003). Ontological issues in the social sciences are considerations about "whether social entities is considered a reality external to social actors or as social constructions built up from perceptions and actions of social actors" (Bryman, 2012, p. 32). Similarly, Davidson and Tolich (2003) state that ontology as the theory of existence is concerned with social entities and the perceptions and actions of social actors and is linked with objectivism and constructivism. There are two competing ontological positions-objectivism and constructivism (Bryman, 2008).

Regarding objectivism, Bryman (2012, p. 33) states:

> *Objectivism is an ontological position that asserts that social phenomena and their meaning have an existence that is independent of social actors. It implies the social phenomena and the categories that we use in every day discourse have an existence that is independent or separate from an actor.*

In this position, social activities and their meaning are independent from social actors. There are not connections that could be found between social humans and their social activities (Dong, 2007).

Regarding constructivism, Bryman (2012, p. 33) states that:

> *Constructionism is an ontological position (often also referred to as constructivism) that asserts that social phenomena and their meaning are continually being*

accomplished by social actors. It implies the social phenomena and the categories are not only produced through social interaction, but are in a constant state of revision.

This research is aligned with the principle of constructivism which implies, social phenomena and their categories can be constantly revised through social interaction. CLT activities are considered as social phenomena which are meaningful because they are conducted by Lao teachers who teach English to Lao students. The communication between people can be seen as one of the most useful social interaction strategies.

3.2.2. Epistemological Issues

Bryman (2012, p. 27) states that "an epistemological issues concerns the questions of what is (or should be) regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline." In addition, Keeves (1997, p. 277) argues that "education research holds a unique position among the disciplines, in so far as it not only involves a body of knowledge drawn in part from many disciplines, but it also involves instruction in the processes by which knowledge is acquired, propagated, and used to influence change in the thinking of individual persons as well as change in the structures of society through social actions". Davidson and Tolich (2003) also define epistemological issues, as some kinds of assumptions about issues such as what things there are in the world, how we can know certain things and what counts as legitimate knowledge.

Similarly, Bryman (2008) points out two epistemological positions in his terms: positivism and interpretivism. He further states that the position that affirms the importance of imitating the natural sciences is invariably associated with an epistemological position as known as positivism (Bryman, 2012). Interpretivism is a term given to a contrasting epistemology to positivism. "It is predicated in the view that a strategy is required that respects that differences between people and the objects of the natural scientist to grasp the subjective meaning of social action" (Bryman, 2012, p. 30). In the table below Davidson and Tolich (2003, p. 27) present a summary of their views, showing the differences between research assumptions from the stances of positivism and interpretivism in social science.

Table 2: Summary of differences between research assumptions

	Positivism	**Interpretive social science**
Reason for research	To discover natural laws so that people can predict and control event	To understand and describe meaningful social action
Nature of social reality	Stable pre-existing patterns or order that can be discovered	Fluid definitions of a situation created by human interaction
Nature of human beings	Self-interested and rational individuals who are shaped by external forces	Social beings who create meaning and who constantly makes sense of their world
Role of common sense	Clearly distinct from and less valid than science	Powerful everyday theories used by ordinary people
Theory looks like	A logical, deductive system of interactions, axioms and laws	A description of how a group's meaning system is generated and sustained
An explanation that is true	Is logically connected to laws and based on facts	Resonates or feels right to those who are being studied
Good evidence	Is based on precise observations that others can repeat	In embedded in the context of fluid social interactions
Place for values	Science is value-free and values have no place except when choosing a topic	Values are integral part of social life: no group's values are wrong, only different

(Bryman, 2012, p.30)

Some researchers state that positivism emphasises the objective existence of natural laws that are stable and pre-existing (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Bryman, 2008). From these two researchers' opinions, Dong (2007) concludes that positivism has a tendency to discover the truth of social reality while insisting that nature is independent of human activities and

it tends to find out the laws of nature that humans could follow. Those laws of nature could be found and used to help people predict or control events in the future. It is suitable to apply this position when conducting natural science research (Dong, 2007).

In contrast to positivism, interpretivism or interpretive social science tends to discover or describe the meaning of human social activities (Dong, 2007). It insists that social activities are meaningful and conducted by humans, it is proper to take this position when conducting social research. Additionally, interpretivism emphasises that social action or activities are meaningful and understandable, so humans can learn knowledge from interpreting their meanings. It is clear to see that interpretivism respects the difference between social and natural research. It tries to understand the meaning of social activities and in this research, English teachers are social actors who create teaching activities.

3.2.3. The Relationship between the nature of theory and research

The relationship between the nature of theory and research is another significant issue for a social science researcher to take into consideration during the process of research design. Bryman (2008) applies two terms to describe the relationship between the nature of theory and research: a deductive approach when theory guides research and an inductive approach when theory is the outcome of research. In a deductive approach, some particular knowledge and hypothesis about the research topic have already come to the researcher before the research begins. In the end, the knowledge and hypothesis is confirmed or rejected by the outcome of the research.

In contrast to the deductive approach, an inductive approach involves a process of generalising information from the research data (Bryman, 2008). As Creswell (2003, p. 133) argues, "the researcher begins by gathering detailed information from participants and forms this information into categories or themes." Consequently, these themes or categories are developed into broad patterns, theories or generalisations that are then compared with personal experiences or with existing literature on the topic (Creswell, 2003). It is a process of generalising detailed information to form new information.

In this research, both deductive and inductive approaches have been used to apply theory in qualitative research. Before the research, the researcher already had some knowledge about teaching English to Lao tertiary students with ten years of English teaching experience in a higher education institution in Laos. This working experience makes the researcher feels that it is challenging to teach Lao tertiary students to communicate in

English and it tends to have various difficulties in implementing CLT into classroom teaching.

In addition, the researcher has used a wide range of literature to critique and identify the main issues within this research topic. All these sources of information have helped the researcher to form her own opinions and assumptions about the research topic. Consequently, on the basis of this knowledge and hypotheses, three research questions have been developed. During the research, the researcher has used the outcomes to test her opinions. When they were consistent with research outcomes, they were confirmed and reported in the findings chapter. When they turned out different from research outcomes, they were rejected and discussed in the discussion chapter.

In this thesis, the researcher implemented interviews as the main data collection method; when analysing data, the researcher categorised different quotes into categories and themes. The conclusions were drawn as the theory for further research. During the whole process of research, the researcher has used both deductive and inductive approaches to apply theory to develop the research. To summarise, this research has been defined as social science research that used interviews and support from documents that were available on CLT to collect qualitative data.

3.2.4. Interpretive approach

This research is defined as a qualitative study with an interpretive approach. Bryman (2008) argues that it places an emphasis on gathering data to interpret and understand social interactions, meanings and contexts in which people act. Punch (2005, p.15) discusses the issue of description versus explanation and he draws a contrast between them:

> *Description and explanation represent two different levels of understanding. To describe is to draw a picture of what happens, or of how things are proceeding, or of what a situation or a person or an event is like. Description is concerned with making complicated things understandable. To explain, on the other hand, is to account for: what happens, or how things are proceeding, or what something or someone is like. It too is concerned with making complicated things understandable, but on a different level. It involves finding the reasons for things, events and situations, showing why they have come to be what they are. Description is a more restricted purpose than explanation* (Punch, 2005, p.15).

By adopting an interpretive approach in this research, the English teachers' opinions about CLT will be described and interpreted in order to make those opinions and ideas understandable, so that people can perceive the meaning of their teaching practice and make an effort to help them with CLT in the future. In addition, policy-makers and tertiary institutions might not know what should be done to help those tertiary teachers to improve CLT without knowing and understanding those opinions. The results of this study will help English teachers to freely express their understandings and attitudes about CLT. Hence, tertiary institutions will know what kind of training that English teachers need the most to improve their CLT in their classroom, and what kinds of syllabi should be offered as guidance to English teachers on CLT.

3.2.5. Case study

For this research, a case study approach has been used in order to gain deep information. A case study can be referred to an individual, a small group, an organisation, community, or even a country (Punch, 2005; Richards, 2011). Merriam (1998, p. 3) also states that a case study can be defined as the "methods and techniques most suitable for collecting and analysing the data." Burns (1997) supports this, by arguing that case studies are used to gain in-depth understanding complete with meaning for the subject, focusing on process rather than outcome, on discovery other than confirmation. "You would use case study methods because they are deliberately designed to cover contextual conditions believing that they might be highly pertinent to your phenomenon of study" (Yin, 2003, p. 13).

In this thesis, English teachers from one single setting will be chosen. There are three main reasons why the researcher chose a case study for this research. First, it will be difficult to carry out a quantitative research because of the size and scope of the Lao tertiary system. Second, this setting is typical in a higher education institution in Laos and, so the researcher can draw useful recommendations in this research for other tertiary institutions which are similar to it. There are approximately 50 English teachers who teach English to about 4000 students. Lastly, a case study will help the researcher to gain in-depth information about those teachers' perceptions about CLT in their setting.

In this research, semi-structured in-depth interviews will be implemented as the main data collection method in order to survey the English teachers' attitudes towards adopting CLT in Laos, to investigate the possible barriers of CLT, and to identify the nature of applicable English teaching strategies they have applied useful in their teaching practice.

3.3. RESEARCH METHODS

The qualitative research design was applied because the aim of this study was to explore the understandings and attitudes of Lao EFL teachers on adopting CLT in their classroom practices and to investigate and understand the factors that help and hinder Lao higher teachers' implementation of teaching communicatively.

3.3.1. Pilot Study

It was very useful to conduct the pilot study because it provided opportunities to examine every single aspect of the survey. This included grammatical errors, wording and translation which can affect the result of the study (Collis & Hussey, 2009). Therefore, before conducting in-depth interviews, the researcher consulted with supervisor and associate supervisor of this research project and some colleagues within the researcher's previous workplace to give constructive feedback and comments in terms of the context, content and structure. This was to ensure that the questions covered all aspects of the research areas and objectives.

In order to avoid misconception of the concepts of the interview questions from English to Lao, the researcher consulted with a teacher who did research on students' communication skills so that the objectives of this research project were appropriately explained. Based on pilot respondents' feedback, unnecessary questions, non-response bias and ambiguous parts were removed and some questions were rearranged in order to make them to be coherence and cohesion. This was to get constructive feedback and accurate translation and to polish the contents of the questions before using them as prompts during face-to-face in-depth interview. As some researchers suggest, a pilot study can impact on participant response rate and representation (Collis & Hussey, 2009; Leedy & Ormrod, 2005).

3.3.2. Interviews

An interview is a focused debate among two or more people and using the interview in research can assist the researcher to gather valid and reliable data pertinent to the research questions and objectives (Cohen et al., 2011). The interviews focus on qualitative research in a specific field and they are concentrated on investigating interviewees' perspectives. This can support the research aim in a more useful way compared to using questionnaires (Bryman & Cassell, 2006). Interviews have a higher response rate than questionnaires because respondents become more involved and motivated; they enable more to be said about the research topic than is usually mentioned in a covering letter to a questionnaire,

and they feel more comfortable than questionnaire for handling difficulties open-ended questions (Cohen et al, 2011).

Cohen et al. (2011) also state that the interview is a flexible tool for data collection, enabling multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. In relation to this, Hinds (2000, p. 47) argues that interviews are used when "in-depth information is required; where the subject in potentially sensitive; the issues under examination would benefit from development or clarification". Therefore, interviews were considered the most suitable technique because the researcher wants to collect in-depth information on the research problem which otherwise cannot be achieved through the use of a questionnaire (Hinds, 2000; Cohen et al., 2011).

It is important to consider what types of interviews, for example, semi structured, structured, in-depth or group interviews to implement for the research in order to effectively answer the research questions and objectives (Stokee & Bergin, 2006; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2009; Bryman, 2012). In this research, semi-structured interviews were used. Compared with unstructured interviews, semi-structured interviews permit the researcher to have greater flexibility to arrange the questions, so that the participants can define their own experiences (Chang, 2011; Cohen et al., 2007).

In relation to this quality, Burns (1997) argues that rather than having a specific interview schedule or none at all, an interview guide may be developed for some parts of the study in which, without fixed wording or ordering of questions, a direction is given to the interview so that the content focuses on the crucial issues of the research. Bryman (2008) explains that the advantage of semi-structured interviews is that participants tend to be more open about their views of the world. He further argues that when doing a semi-structured interview, the structure has a list of questions or fairly specific topics to be covered, often referred to as an interview guide, but the interviewee has a great deal of leeway on exactly how to reply. The questions might not follow on exactly in the way outlined on the schedule, the questions that are not included in the guide might be asked as the interviewer picks up on ideas said by other interviewees (Bryman, 2008).

Question techniques and listening skills are important to any kind of interviews. Burns (1997) states that "considerable use of parroting and minimal encouragers will keep the informant conversing" (p. 245). Displaying empathy, acceptance, conversing respect, and creating an ethos of trust will the interviewee be able to enter a valid relationship with the researcher, in which they are willing to convey their real feelings, thoughts and emotions

(Burns, 1997). In this research, the researcher used accurate repetition of the informant's words to show that she was listening, understanding, and encouraging them to continue. In attending to the interviewees, the researcher tried to be an active listener, was interested and sensitive to verbal or non-verbal cues.

3.4. DATA COLLECTION

The scope of this research project focused on the understandings and attitudes of Lao teachers in adoption of CLT and factors that help and hinder Lao tertiary teachers' implementation of teaching communicatively. The research obtained information in one Lao tertiary education institution located in the researcher's hometown. The criteria for the selection of participants for this research project were Lao teachers who taught English language to Lao students in one Lao tertiary education institution.

The teachers who were participated in the interview mainly had a lot of teaching experience in the language department. After several contacts with the Dean and the Head of Department, permission was given to conduct the interviews and gather the documents. The primary data gathering for the research was collected in Laos which was distance from New Zealand. Initially teachers were contacted by asking and telephoning to get the approval to participate in this study. Finally, ten interviews were conducted.

3.4.1. Interview sample

Ten teachers were selected from one language department in a Lao tertiary education institution for in-depth interviewing. The initial selection were invited to participate from senior to junior English teachers in the Department, teachers who graduated from abroad and teachers who graduated in Laos, so that different point of views of the same topic and working environment were heard. Due to the busy time, a few participants refused the interview, and then they were replaced by other participants. In order to gain deeper understanding, native language "Lao" was used during the interviews. Each interview took approximately forty-five to sixty minutes. The interviews were organised and ten teachers were interviewed in September and October of 2012. The interview of this research was an individual face-to-face interview and the semi-structured interviews were used in order to fulfil the aims of this research project. Bryman (2012) recommends that the use of the interview topics is seen as allowing greater flexibility in the interview process. Therefore, this research, the interviews were discussed with topics rather than fixed questions and the most suited form of this research project.

An important consideration is that while conducting the interview, besides the verbal aspects of the interaction, non-verbal communication also affects the encounter both in obvious and subtle ways (Hinds, 2000). During the interview, note-taking was used about the interviewee's body language or eye contact when the topics or themes were given. At the end of the interview, each interviewee was asked whether they had anything to add to the interview that was not addressed by any of the questions or their responses. This was to avoid a situation where the interview failed to cover some important areas. Bryman (2012) suggests that interviews should be recorded and transcribed. Therefore, all interviews in this study were recorded by tape and then transcribed. After that the transcriptions were translated from Lao to English and sent out to participants to check and verify.

3.5. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis of qualitative research is a complex process which arises from the range and variety of the data and epistemological position adopted by the researchers (Newby, 2010). Qualitative data analysis involves "organising, accounting for and explaining the data, in short, making sense of data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 537). In relation to this, Davidson and Tolich (2003) support that analysis is about searching for patterns and regularities in the data collection. Data analysis occurs in cycle with data collection, so that process is recursive and dynamic (Bryman, 2008). In addition, Newby (2010) demonstrates that data analysis happens constantly through the life of any qualitative research projects and it can be broadly described practically which covers three consistent processes such as data reduction, data display and drawing conclusion and verification.

3.5.1. Interview Analysis

The interview data that were collected from the ten teachers was recorded and transcribed before being identified and transformed into categories. There are three data analysis procedures with interviews: categorising, coding and content analysis (Burns, 1997). The first step is that transcripts were read and re-read to start grouping them together. Meanings were categorised into groups which were made according to the research questions. According to Bryman (2012), qualitative analysis essentially begins with a series of codes which the essence of coding is the process of sorting the data into various categorised. The data from this study was formatted and coded that was used to analysis the main themes that address the research questions.

Coding is a crucial stage in the process of doing a content analysis and it is the first step in making sense of the information that the researchers have collected (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Bryman, 2012). Bryman (2012, p. 568) further explains that "coding entails reviewing transcripts and/or field notes giving labels (names) to component parts that seem to be of potential theoretical significance and/or that appear to be particularly salient with in the social worlds of those being studied".

The first stage of coding is line by line coding, whereby virtually every line in a transcript will have a code attached to it. This process means that the qualitative researcher does not lose contact with her or his data and participants' perspectives and interpretations in the study (Bryman, 2012). However, Burns (1997) argues that coding is a time-consuming activity because it entails the researcher classifying materials into themes, issues, topics, and propositions. Coding cannot just be done after the interview. Therefore, the researcher made notes before and during the interview. This process helped the researcher to identify the major themes. Content analysis was used to identify themes, concepts and meanings (Burns, 1997). The researcher read between lines to get real hidden meanings. Moreover, content analysis needs a coding system that relates to the theoretical framework or research question (Burns, 1997).

According to the research questions, the interview transcripts were categorised into the four groups by using long-table approach. Krueger & Casey (2000) suggest a low-technology but commonly used and efficient analysis strategy, the so-called long-table approach: cutting transcripts apart into different quotes. Krueger and Casey (2000) also argue that during the process of analysis, there are four factors deserving consideration. *Frequency* not only means how often something is said in the same group, but also reminds us that a really important insight might have been said only once in a series of groups. *Specificity* typically means when participants give more details in comments, they give more emphasis on the topic. *Emotion* could give away participants' feelings toward the topic. *Extensiveness* is different from frequency. It emphasises how many different people mention the same things.

Frequency focuses on how many times things are said. The final research report depends a lot on how much weight or emphasis is given to comments or themes (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Therefore, the main points of every interview for this study were summarised and

categorized into these four groups. Any viewpoints beyond these four groups were put into another one.

3.6. RELIABILITY AND VALIDITY

Merriam (1998) argues that all kinds of research are concerned with producing valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner. Validity and reliability will be utilised as criteria for judging the quality of this research design. According to Merriam (1998), internal, external validities and reliability are the most important aspects that a research designer should bear in mind. Bryman (2008) also argues that internal validity is concerned with the question of how one's findings match reality. Leedy and Ormrod (2013) further explain that the internal validity of a research study is the extent to which its design and the data it yields allow the researcher to draw accurate conclusions about cause and effect and other relationships within data.

In relation to this research, internal validity deals with the question of whether the findings have captured what is really about the factors affecting of CLT to Lao tertiary teachers. While Bryman (2012) and Leedy and Ormrod (2013) state that the external validity of a research study is the extent to which its results apply to situations beyond the study itself. In other words, it is concerned with the question of whether the conclusion of a study can be generalised to other contexts. To ensure the external validity of this research, the researcher has endeavoured to establish the typicality of the case.

3.6.1. Validity

"Validity refers to the issue of whether an indicator (or set of indicators) that is devised to gauge a concept really measure that concept" (Bryman, 2008, p. 151). In relation to this, Cohen et al. (2011) argues that validity is an important key to effective research. In a qualitative data validity might be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, and the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher (Cohen et al., 2011). It might also improve through sampling, appropriate instrumentation and appropriate statistical treatments of data (Bryman, 2008).

Moreover, Merriam (1998) argues external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of one study can be applied to other situations. This research is designed in the hope that the research findings could be typically for English teaching situations in Lao tertiary institutions so that English teachers' voices could be heard and understood. Therefore, the researcher selected the case which she thinks is a typical tertiary English teaching setting in Laos.

3.6.2. Reliability

As Punch (2005) argues, reliability is a central concept in measurement which is concerned with precision and accuracy. Reliability is replaced by the terms such as credibility, neutrality, confirm-ability, dependability, consistency, applicability, trustworthiness and transferability (Cohen et al., 2011). It is fundamentally concerned with issues of consistency of measures (Bryman, 2012). He further states that there are three prominent factors involved when considering whether a measure is reliable namely stability, internal reliability and inter-observer consistency (Bryman, 2012).

In relation to this, Punch (2005) supports that there are two main aspects to this consistency: consistency over time (stability) and internal consistency. Consistency over time is usually expressed in the question: if the same instruments are given to the same participants, under the same circumstances, but at a different time. Internal consistency relates to the questions that concern the extent to which the items are consistent with each other (Punch, 2005). This is called the internal consistency of a measuring instrument. In addition, reliability is concerned with the question of whether the results of a study are repeatable (Bryman, 2012, p.46). Therefore, the goal of reliability is to minimise the errors and biases in the study. To ensure the reliability of the study is to make many steps as operational as possible and conduct research as if someone is always looking over your shoulder (Yin, 2003).

This study adopted a method of data collection arising from the in-depth interview with ten Lao English teachers in a language department. Bell (2010) argues that reliability is the extent to which a test or procedure produces similar results under constant conditions on all occasions. Reliability is concerned with not only the consistency of the measure of a concept but also the question of repeating the results (Davidson & Tolich, 2003; Cohen et al., 2007; Bryman, 2012). Therefore, the strengths of the study were the reliability of results.

A further strength was that all participants who were Lao English teachers in the department who were willing to participate and express their views despite the time constraints they faced. This allowed for multiple voices to be heard. This is confirmed by Bryman (2012) who asserts that the main focus of qualitative research is studying people and viewing events and the social world through the eyes of the people in a study while Lincoln and Guba (2000) stated that with qualitative research, the researcher is able to permit readers to hear the exact words of the research participants.

3.7. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Social researchers acknowledge that ethical issues are vital for doing any research project because "research done on humans offers all sorts of benefits and burdens to all sort of people" (Wilkinson, 2001, p. 13). Wellington (2000, p. 54) also argues that ethics is an important aspect in all forms of research, but ethical consideration is "multiplied in education research, where people are studying people". Bryman (2008, p. 133) supports this point by arguing that "ethical issues cannot be ignored as they relate to the integrity of a piece of research and of the disciplines that are involved". He also states that the main focus of ethical issues is to ensure that people taking part in the research are protected from any possible harm including physical, emotional, mental and financial during the research process (Bryman, 2008).

According to several writers' suggestions, there are five common principles of the ethics that the researchers should take into account of doing any researcher namely: do no harm, all participation needs to be voluntary, preserve the anonymity and confidentially of participants, avoid deceitfulness, and analyse and report data authentically (Davidson & Tolich, 1999; Check & Schutt, 2012). The aims of the research and their role involved in the research must be explained to all participants, they should be voluntary in order to keep confidential and the informed consent must be signed by all of them (Davidson & Tolich 1999; Bouma, 2000; McNamee, 2002). Some writers further argue that the privacy has been guaranteed by ensuring that all data are kept in a secure place and the access is limited to those who have been disclosed as having access (Bouma, 2000; Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2011).

In this research, all participants were voluntary and they could withdraw at any time, their names, and the data that they reported and their institutions were kept confidential. The researcher also attached the granted permission letters from the Head of Department and the Dean of Faculty in order to conduct this study. The information sheet that included the aims of this study were explained and sent to all participants before conducting the interviews. Participant consent forms were required for this study. These consent forms also clearly informed that the data collected would be stored securely, confidentially and only used for this study, no participant personal contact detail were asked for. in the final section of the consent forms the interviewees were informed that if they had any concerns or queries regarding the nature of the conducting this research project to contact the researcher, Unitec Research Ethics Committee Secretary, or the researcher supervisors directly.

This research project was conducted in the researcher's home country 'Laos' where there are several tribes and different minority ethnic groups, so the researcher is aware of the on-going effects of ethnic position. As Bouma (2000) and Wellington (2000) argue, ethics plays a crucial role in education research and the researcher has to ensure that the research is ethical in its design, methods, data analysis, presentations and its conclusions. As a researcher, I was aware on these issues, so this research project is not on any tribe or ethic group involved. It only focused on the teaching approaches in the Department of a Lao higher education institution in order to explore their understandings of CLT, investigate the barriers of adopting it and identify the potential solutions to improve the implementation of CLT in this department. In addition, it may need further research in some areas that related to CLT. During this research no issues arose, nor were comments were made by any of the participants. A description of this research project and a completed application (Form A) were submitted to the Unitec Research Ethics Committee (UREC), New Zealand and approval was obtained.

3.8 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

All research has limitations associated with the process involved and this applies to this study as well. There are a number of limitations that have been identified and considered as constraints in the study. Given the fact that the scope of this research enabled data collection in Laos, especially in the tertiary institution's location, it was collected during several international conferences, which was not conducive for data-gathering. Significantly, primary qualitative data collection was done by in-depth interviews among English teachers, who were participating as facilitators of those conferences. The key challenge was identified as the point of making appointments with some teachers who the researcher thought would gain rich information refused the interviews.

Therefore, the researcher interviewed other teachers who had less teaching experience. It would be useful if the researcher could have conducted the interviews with only teachers who have a lot of teaching experience, as such results would have rich information. In addition, the research data could have been strengthened with the interviewing of senior managers and students so that could have shown other perspectives. Moreover, there was only one female teacher who volunteered to join the interview, so fewer female teachers' voices were heard. It would have been preferable to hear the voices of more than one female teacher on the perspectives of teaching CLT in the classroom. .

The researcher spent considerable time translating the interviews questions from English to Lao with appropriate meanings in order for the interviewees to understand the questions and to answer in Lao. For instance, some teachers perceived CLT as only speaking and listening so that before conducting the interviews, the researcher had to provide more information for them in order to gain understanding of the research topic. During the interviews, some teachers did not answer the questions as; they expressed what they wanted to say. The researcher had to repeat the question and persuade them to respond. As a result, a few interviews took one and a half hours to complete all of the questions.

3.9. SUMMARY

This chapter has provided a discussion of the complex nature of research in the social science field. It provided an overview of the methodology. This research used a qualitative paradigm to gather data to explore the teachers' perceptions of CLT and to investigate the factors that might hinder them in implementing CLT in the classroom teaching. A semi-structured set of interviews with ten teachers who teach English to Lao students in a Lao higher education institution was the chosen research method. The chapter concluded with discussion on reliability and validity of results and ethical considerations and how each related to the study.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter provides a description and analysis of the data that was collected in this research project. The purpose of this study is to investigate and understand the factors that affect Lao tertiary teachers' implementation of teaching communicatively using CLT. This chapter presents the results of analysis of the qualitative data gathered from the field research in the English department of a Lao tertiary institution, with 10 semi-structured, in-depth interviews guided by open-ended questions.

4.2. TEACHER BACKGROUNDS

All of the teachers who were interviewed had initially graduated from the same department as they were now teaching, where they were specifically trained to be teachers. Most of the teachers have master degrees from abroad, from a range of countries such as Australia, Canada, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand. The following teachers have been employed for more than ten years and commented:

> *Quite a long time of being a teacher here, I graduated in 1990s and I got my Master of Education from Japan. I teach several subjects and it is hard work to teach students, but I like it [TB].*

> *I got my master degree from Australia in Educational Management. I have taught both programmes BA and MA. I also teach a few subjects and I think I am not qualified enough to teach MA students… I mean Master teach Master, it should be Doctoral degree teachers lecture to Master students and I am now trying to get that degree [TJ].*

A few teachers gained their master degree by distance learning:

> *I went to a few countries for training. My master degree is by distance learning. I teach a few subjects, but my favourite subjects are General English (GE) and English for Specific Purpose (ESP). These two courses are mainly focused on four skills of using English [TD].*

The rest, like TF, have bachelor degrees with a lot of teaching experience:

I have nine years of teaching experience, but not in the Department. I was a teacher at a private English institution for five years, and then I moved to join the teaching team in the Department. It means I am new here. I have attended a few teaching training courses, but have never trained abroad. I teach a few subjects here such as General English, Reading and Grammar [TF].

TG has recently joined the Department teaching team:

I am a new teacher who just joined teaching team in the Department for a few years. Because I lack teaching experience, I faced many challenges and difficulties in my class in term of using and adapting new textbooks to fit the real situations [TG].

Teachers in the department teach English to Lao students who enrol to learn English and they also teach English for other students in other departments and faculties on the campus.

4.3. INVOLVEMENT IN CLT

The ten teachers interviewed for the study were trained in a range of different teaching methods in order to facilitate the classroom learning and to motivate students. As teachers in the department, they were trained with different approaches to English language teaching, predominantly grammar-translation, audio-lingual method and CLT. When they were students, they tried to apply those teaching methods during practicum time before graduating and becoming teachers in the department. For some, this training was a time of great tension, but also excitement of being called a teacher. They also stated that

It is still in my memory that the last semester of graduation, I had to learn English language teaching approaches and then I got three months for practising to teach high school students by applying the teaching methods that were trained. I was so nervous and excited of teaching at first time and so proud of being called a teacher. English teachers were famous at that time [TD].

I was so excited of being a teacher at the time and my first class of teaching. I could not control and manage my feeling. I could not follow what were planned [I meant I often mixed up…].it was also so stressed while I taught and there was someone observing, evaluating and giving scores. I did quite well during practicum I think [TG].

Some of the teachers stated that CLT was not new for them, as they were trained in this approach when they were students. But there is no official policy to use it, so most teachers use the teaching approach that they judge fits the particular teaching context.

> *For me this teaching approach is not new, it is an old teaching method, but it needs to be modified and upgraded all the time in order to improve our teaching and learning process. I used to be trained since I was a student in the Department. On the other hand, I cannot say which methods I applied in my class because there is no official policy to use which approach between CLT and grammar-translation teaching approach have to be applied in the English class teaching. Therefore, in my class both of them are used depending on topics and classroom situations [TA].*

4.4. INTERPRETATION OF CLT

All of the interviewees seem to understand the general concepts, the functions, the importance and the necessity to use CLT in their classroom English teaching. TA sees the importance of the students' roles in CLT activities and the teacher as a guide in CLT:

> *CLT refers to an interaction among students in the class and with their teachers. Students play crucial roles in the class by participating in any classroom activities. At the same time, teachers play the role as facilitators, assistants and consultants who guide them when students get struck and need helps. Students are often actively engaged in any tasks that teachers set [TA].*

While TI emphasised the importance of the students generating the teaching content, CLT cannot effectively apply if the curriculum still influences in the classrooms teaching. In the adoption of CLT into the classes, students play significant roles in those classroom activities:

> *CLT in English context, there is no curriculum or textbook in teaching and learning process, any topics and lessons depend on students. Students are the people who raise the issues or topics to discuss in the class. If any English schools based on teaching outline or follow the curriculum, CLT or students Centre cannot apply effectively. In order to adopt this teaching method, communicative approach should be applied in the classroom teaching which means using the language those students are learning to communicate and interact in the class. Teacher should adopt, adapt and modify any activities and topics in the textbook in order to apply communicative approach to increase their communicative competence [TI].*

In addition, some other teachers stressed the importance of learning based on the everyday use of English language because students would have opportunities to apply what they have learnt in the class to the real situation which could enhance their communicative skills:

> *This teaching method offers students feel free to express their ideas and exchange with their classmates and teachers, so that students have a chance to learn from each other and their teachers, they also learn from the real situations that they use in each day. This teaching approach aims for students to use English in their real life in order to practise and improve their communication skills [TD]*.

4.4.1. Teachers' evaluation of CLT

The ten interviewees were asked what they thought about using the CLT method. Most of them said that they found this teaching approach very helpful for students, because it gives opportunities for students to communicate and to interact with their friends and teacher in the class. Students felt free to express their ideas in the class:

> *It is good I think, students gain more communication skills than other teaching approaches because CLT gives them opportunities to express, share ideas and discuss with their classmates and teachers. When they have more chance to practise using English in the class, they might feel confident to use it in their real life. When it is often used, students will fluently communicate in English [TA**].***

> *CLT is very interesting and I am interested in this teaching method because it emphasises increasing students' communication abilities. In addition, it often challenges me that I have to find new teaching strategies and teaching aids to support my classroom learning [TF]*.

Furthermore, most of the teachers said that it is very important and necessary to adopt CLT in the English classroom learning because of the emphasis on communication. This teaching approach helps students to be self-manage in their learning and to be active learners who are confident to express and to engage in classroom activities:

> *It is very important to apply CLT in the English classroom teaching and learning because it can help students to be self-managing in their learning. They have to be prepared, organised before the class and need to be active and creative students who enjoy expressing their ideas in the class. Therefore, it can increase their skills of using English [TE]*.

After a few months of applying CLT in my class, I found that my students like it. Most of my students are actively engaged in the activities. Although what they expressed was incorrect I did understand what they want to communicate. I noted that they are more confident to communicate with me and their friends in the class. This might be a good start of learning. I often tell them that if "you want to be good at English using, you have to often use it …"[TH].

Moreover, most teachers argued that CLT is the most suitable teaching approach for students who are learning English as a foreign language because it offers students more opportunities to communicate in the class, so that they can build their communicative skills by practising and applying what they have learnt to their real situations:

For my perspective CLT or communicative teaching approach is suitable for students who learn a new language as a second or foreign language because it gives them more opportunities to practise using English. Students might apply what they have learnt in the class to their real life using which can improve their communication competence [TB].

Some teachers preferred CLT particularly in comparison with a grammar-based teaching method. For example, TD noted that CLT not only motivates passive students with low English proficiency to improve their communication skills, but also improves their interactions in the classroom:

In learning a new language, there are no right or wrong ideas, so learners can express whatever they want to say by using English. I can see that this teaching approach also motivates low English proficiency and passivity to try to communicate with their classmates and ask me when do not understand. It is often not correct, but I do understand get context of what they want to say [TD].

I teach a few subjects which can apply both CLT and grammar-based teaching methods. On one hand, most of my students seem to be bored when a grammar-translation teaching approach is often applied. As I noted their reactions, most of them are often quiet, be good copiers and note-takers while some of them often walk out of the class. I know it is not fun. Not only them, but also me, I'm so tired to talk, talk and talk. It is stressed if there is only this teaching method used in the classroom. On the other hand, my students are prepared, creative and so excited to present in communication topics [TA].

But this teacher also noted some concerns in the adoption of CLT into the classroom. Because of the diverse range of English proficiency and the low English proficiency, some students might not benefit with the adoption of this teaching method into the classes. Another concern was the limited time of CLT in the classroom because teachers had to complete the department curriculum teaching outline, so there was a limited learning outcome.

> *According to my teaching experience, any teaching methods have strengths and weaknesses, so does CLT. It has both positive and negative impact on students' learning which depends on the situations and students' English background. In cultural situations, I think it is quite tough to apply CLT in the classroom teaching and learning because communication activities need time to organised and complete. In addition, there are several subjects to teach and time is fixed for those subjects. For instance, four or six hours per week and per subject, so to adopt communication teaching method is time-wasting. It might take at least three or four weeks to complete each task. If we spent more time on it, we cannot complete the teaching outline that is set in each semester [TC]*.

4.4.2. Students' response to CLT

Most of the teachers argued that many of their students who have a medium to high level of English proficiency are ready to apply CLT. They seem to enjoy communication activities because they can engage in a conversation pool to practise their English and to improve the communication skills. TD felt that these students excelled using CLT because of the everyday tasks they chose:

> *Some of my students who have capacity to catch up what teachers express prefer teachers to often organise speaking tasks, groups work and pair work. I noticed that these students are actively engaged, expressed and exchanged their ideas with their classmates and me. When speaking tasks were organised, for example the topics would be about customer services in the bank, company or restaurant, these students sometimes went to the restaurant or bank to observe the progress and to get the ideas. These students intended to prepare and was so excited to present. Sometimes they can do more than I expect [TD]*.

On the other hand, some of the teachers said that those students with a very low or no English background seemed to prefer a grammar-based teaching approach because they do not have enough English proficiency and are less confident to participate in the group

activities. While the traditional grammar-based teaching method is teacher and book-centred, these students were happy to be good listeners and copiers:

> *I used to teach Oral communicative skill subject which is very interesting and useful. As I mentioned, this teaching method has both negative and positive impact on my students' learning. CLT might properly apply to students who have English proficiency. However, it might not work effectively with students who do not have a good background of English. For example, if I often used communicative teaching approach in the classroom, these students felt they were on another planet where different language was used to communicate. These students were often quiet and good listeners who were good at copying. When I assigned them to share the ideas in the class, they often said I cannot or just keep quiet.*

This teacher felt that this difference particularly showed in group work, where most of the students who had low English proficiency did not enjoy engaging in any class room tasks. These students sometimes skipped the class when their group presented or they were often assigned to answer the questions or share ideas in the class:

> *In the group work, they have never shared any ideas with friends […just said no ideas]. When their group would present, they sometimes skipped the class. I think if this teaching method continues using with them, it sometimes affects their class attention that impacts on their grades [any students who often are absent "20% of the class" cannot sit the examination…]. To help them to understand and catch up with their classmates, their mother tongue is often used to explain the tasks. Therefore, I strongly believe that communicative teaching approach does not fit with students who have very low or no English proficiency [TC].*

Other teachers argued that most of their students preferred English native speaker rather than Lao teachers to organise and run communication activities. Students strongly believe Lao teachers do not have enough English language skills to facilitate these activities. If they can get English native speakers to manage the communication tasks, they hear an original accent and their communication skills will rapidly improve.

> *I combined teaching with an English volunteer teacher and I found that students felt pleased and humorous in learning with him. Students were so excited and actively engaged in classroom activities and were hardly ever absent. Whereas my class most students were not enthusiastic to study, they sometimes did not complete*

their homework. Some students often skimped the class or were absent [I mean they are passive…] [TD].

4.4.3. Students' motivation to communicate in English

Most of the teachers who were interviewed said that the two major learning outcomes that every student hopes to gain after graduation are good grades and knowledge. TF also stated that giving students' scores in any classroom activity was the most motivating factor and the best encouragement for their students to participate in class activities, group work, pair work, as well as homework:

> *For my students, giving scores is the most motivating encouragement them to learn and communicate English in the class. If there are no scores for their participations, it means less or no attention on participating in any class activities and communicating in English. You know their slogan is "learning is for knowledge and skills while testing is for scores [TF].*

Some of the teachers stated that they felt pressure to give their students' scores for personal motivation to pass the final examinations because it was a part of the institution's regulation that twenty per cent of the total score of a semester was based on their class attendance and activities participation. The remaining mark allocation was thirty per cent from the mid-term test and fifty per cent was from the semester examination. As teacher C and H mentioned:

> *Giving students' scores of any classroom participations, class activities and homework, it is not only teacher feel pleased to give them score to motivate them to learn English, but also school regulation that 10%-20% of semester's score is from students' class attention, homework, and class activities, 30% from mid-term assessment and 50% from the semester assessment [TC].*

> *I felt pressure to help my students to pass the final semester examination by giving them scores in any classroom's participation, homework and having a few mid-term tests to help them to correct scores in order to pass the final semester examination. Giving scores not only motivates students who have a range of English background to improve their communication skills, but also students who are passive and have low English proficiency to try to communicate and participate in the class activities. I noted that these students tried to complete homework that was given in order to correct scores that could help them not to fail [TH].*

While other teachers stated that scores or grades did not evaluate their communication language skills, some students perceived grades as more important than using English language. As a result, these students tried to cheat while on the examinations and some students tried to ask for scores from the teachers:

> *It is true that giving scores is the most motivating and encouraging for students to learn and communicate in English. I think it can motivate them in the short term and these practices, some students might value grades more than using English skills. Their aims of studying English is just getting good grades and passing the examination. They will lose their interest in English learning if they are not good at the examination. As a result, in order to get good grades, most of my students were trying to get higher grades [not studying hard, but try to cheat on the examination …]. I can argue that examinations or scores are leading our students to learn English in order to pass the examinations instead of learning communicative skills [TJ].*

> *Most of the students hope to get better grades while some teachers are not strict enough while they are being proctors, so that some students have a chance to copy and cheat from many sources such as textbooks, friends, mobiles in the examinations. As a result, their grades cannot evaluate their English using skills. As a few research studies found there was only 20-30% of students' grades can evaluate their English using skills when students graduated from the Department [TI].*

4.5. BARRIERS TO IMPLEMENTING CLT

Most of the teachers said that adopting CLT into the classroom teaching and learning requires several things to support the teaching and learning process such as facilities, technology as well as qualified teachers and active students. On the other hand, all teachers who were interviewed in the Department faced many difficulties in the adoption of CLT into their English classroom teaching:

> *A communicative teaching approach requires colourful of teaching aids in order to motivate and support teaching and learning progress. However, there are many challenges and difficulties in adopting CLT in the classroom teaching and learning in the department such as teaching skills of teachers, students' English proficiency, entrance selection process and teaching outline [TA].*

There are many difficulties that impede me and my colleagues in adopting communicative teaching approach in the classroom such as students, teachers, facilities, educational system, English-use environment and other factors that prevent us to apply this teaching method in our classrooms. Due to these difficulties, grammar-translation teaching approach is often applied instead of CLT and mother tongue is often used in order to help students to understand and catch up the contexts of learning [TI].

4.5.1. System barriers

4.5.1.1. Entrance selection

Most teachers commented that the entrance examination process creates difficulties for teaching and learning. Because the placement test system was not applied in order to evaluate students' English skills and quota students[1] were accepted, the levels of students were mixed. The teachers confronted difficulty to prepare the teaching materials to match the mixed range of students. Some students' particularly with low English proficiency also had problems engaging in the classes and catching up with their classmates:

There is an examination organised in order to select students for many faculties and departments in the university. Also there are many subjects are examined [Lao language, mathematics, physic, geography, English…]. In addition, some students have gained entry by quota system and the placement test is not applied to group students' levels of English. As a result, most of the students who have gained entry into the Department have low English proficiency and mixed levels. These students are very difficult for teachers to teach and apply CLT. Some students also face difficulties catching up with friends and teacher in the classroom. If only English is tested and only students who have passed the entrance exam are accepted. Students in the department might have a variable range of English proficiency, so that it might be easier to apply communication teaching approach [TB].

4.5.1.2. Syllabus factors

Most of the teachers stated that the university English syllabus teaching outline has definitely had an influence on the adoption of CLT into the classrooms because there was only one examination format for the final semester, so students should be on the same page

[1] Scholarship students who did not pass the entrance examination were accepted to study in the Department

by following the teaching outline. They said that they cannot spend longer time on CLT activities which were not included in the examination format:

> *The same textbooks are used in all classes at each level and only one examination format is examined a cross whole year. Therefore, teachers have to following the teaching outline, for instance, four or five chapters should be completed in each semester. It is wasting time to apply communication teaching approach, so that to complete the department's outline, a teacher-centred teaching method is often applied in my class. Communication topics are often skipped because it takes a lot of time to prepare, practice and present [TE].*

> *I have got six hours per week for this subject and I have to finish at least five to six chapters in semester one. I sometimes have to jump the communication activities in order to save time and to complete the teaching outline. If every communication task is organised, I might not complete the teaching outline and my students cannot catch up with friends in the examination. They do not definitely feel happy about it too [TG].*

Some of the teachers noted that the Department's syllabi are based on grammatical linguistics rather than communicative knowledge. They further stated that grammar rules were mainly taught in the Department rather than other skills like speaking, listening, reading and writing. On the other hand, listening and oral communication subjects were cut off from department's syllabi. Due to the syllabi being more focused on grammatical knowledge, both teachers and students have to work on sentence structure. Hence, these teachers identified the syllabi as one of the other difficulties in the adoption of CLT into their classroom:

> *If communicative skills and grammar knowledge being taught in the Department are compared, it is obvious that grammar is more focused in the Department. For instance, grammar is taught in a few subjects such as Language Practice [LP] (year 1-4), ESP (year 2-5), Writing (year 1-5), Reading (year 2 and 3). In addition, grammar is also separately taught, tested from year 2 to year five and included in the leaving exam format. However, communication skills like listening and speaking activities are often jumped and cut off from the examination formats TD].*

The other teachers suggested that that there were a few courses that should be cut from the curriculum because some of these subjects were lectured in Lao while others were not related to communication skills. They indicated that they would like to see some of these subjects replaced by listening and oral communication subjects which could enrich students' communicative competence:

> *According to my teaching experience, only four skills should be learned and focused in the English course. However, there are several subjects that I think they are not related to four skills such as Lao, Asian, Western Literature, Lao politics, philosophy… these courses should be cut off from the curriculum and then replaced by oral communication and listening subjects which can improve students' communicative competence [TI].*

> *I think there are a few subjects should be cut off such as Literature, politics, philosophy, Law… it is enough for them to learn these subjects in high school. Then add more time on four skills of English using like listening and speaking subjects [TH].*

4.5.1.3. Examination format

Most of the teachers noted that in a few courses' examination content, sentence structure covered the main part of the examination format (40%) reading and vocabulary parts were considered as the second important component of the exam format (25%) and writing (10%). On the other hand, the listening and oral communication sections were cut off from the examination content and reading and writing which were key elements of communicative skills were considered the least important of the exam content. They further commented that the examination format can influence students' attitudes to learning communication skills:

> *Generally the examination format of LP and ESP include four skills of English using such as speaking, listening, reading and writing. However, listening and speaking sections which are key elements of communication skills are cut off from the examination format and then replaced by grammar part. Beside these, other courses' examination format, sentence structure is also emphasised by having a separate section. These cause students to pay less attention to communication skills. Being university students, scores are the most important for them, so that only skills that will be tested are focused to learn [TD].*

4.5.2. Student Barriers

4.5.2.1. English proficiency level of students

Most of the teachers stated that because some quota students gained entry into the institution, students have different levels of English language competency. They noted that the different level of English proficiency was one of the other main barriers to the adoption of CLT into their classes. They faced difficulty in preparing class teaching materials to cover different students' levels in the same class. They also stated that a communicative teaching approach would not effectively apply to the students with low English proficiency:

> *There are only one third of students who passes the entrance examination in each class, while others are quota students who often have very low English proficiency and no English background. According to my teaching experience, communicative teaching approach does not effectively apply to these students. They do not understand what I and their classmates are talking about. Some of these students just start English alphabet, how can they listen and speak. Communication skills do not mean only speaking, but also included listening, reading, writing skills and meaningful understandings. [They are blind… when communicative approach is applied]. Therefore, in my class, Lao [language] and teacher-centred approaches are often used in order to help my students to understand the context and to bit by bit build their communication skills [TC].*

> *How the factories produce the high quality products if the raw materials are not standard that definitely affects the products' quality. I strongly believe that standard raw materials produce quality of products. [Students act as raw materials and students' outcomes act as products]. If only students who pass entrance examination students are accepted to study in the Department, with five years progress, their English skills particularly communication skills will be definitely improved. However, most of the raw materials in the Department's factory are quota students who have very low English proficiency. Therefore, the outcomes of students graduating from the Department are inefficient which cannot meet the needs of employers. As a study found, the graduates from the Department cannot effectively use English both in their daily and work life [TA].*

Some of the teachers stated that there are many different dialects and tribes in Laos. For some students, Lao is not their mother tongue and these students have to translate twice

from their mother tongue to Lao and then to English. They also noted that these students might have a limited both Lao and English vocabulary, so they were either less confident to use English or Lao to communicate with classmates and the teachers in the class. This limitation of vocabulary for some students in the class could be one of the other difficulties in adopting CLT into an English classroom in the Department:

> *Language vocabulary might hinder some of my students who have to translate their own language that is used at home such as Mong or others to official language "Lao" and then to English. This can be one of the other factors that causes these students have low English proficiency. When English is used in the class, these students faced difficulties to communicate with friends and teachers. On the other hand, the aim of leaning a new language means translating any language to a mother tongue, so they need to understand and translate. Translation skills need vocabulary. When students have a limited vocabulary, it might affect their English proficiency [TI].*

> *Generally when students do not know how to express in English, they ask me in Lao, so I can help. This academic year, one third of my students are Mong who are not good at Lao or English. It is very hard for me to communicate and help them when they cannot imagine in Lao. I noted that when they are mixed in with other students, they do not feel comfortable to engage the groups' activity [TH].*

4.5.2.2. Range of English skills

The classes have a mixed range of students who have passed the entry examination and who have gained entry by the quota system. Consequently, these students have a varied range of English proficiency and the teachers commented that a mixed level of students is very difficult to teach. These teachers also noted that the textbooks and the examination formats were the same, so the teachers confronted difficulty in balancing, teaching materials and tests. These teachers further stated that if they focussed on their students with low English proficiency, the other groups of students were bored and often walked out of the classes or skipped the classes. While a focus on the students with a high level of English proficiency resulted in other groups not catching up and participating in the class activities, these students were perceived as passive students who did not want to develop their communicative skills:

> *Because of mixed levels of my students, I do not know how to prepare my teaching materials…. If low English proficiency group is focused, other groups felt asleep*

[noisy…other topics are discussed]. In contrast, if another group is focused, low English proficiency group cannot catch up. This is difficult for me to be balanced [TB].

If English is used to communicate in the class, students who have a range of English proficiency will make progress. These students enjoy learning, while low English proficiency students are very quiet and perceived as passive students. If those with low and no English background students are focused, other students will be bored and often walk out of the class. Therefore, for me, I have to use both language English and [main language] to communicate with them which took a lot of time in each task and so tired [TC].

4.5.2.3. Cultural factors

Most of the teachers stated that national culture has a huge impact on national students' learning style and behaviour. When they were at home, their parents teach them to be well behaved by obeying and listening to parents. If any child expressed their ideas, she or he would be perceived as a naughty child and was not in favour in the family. When they were at school, parents and teachers expected them to be good students by listening to teachers and following the school's regulations:

According to Lao culture, if any child in the family who does not follow parents or adults and often express his or her ideas which are against parents, she or he will be perceived as a naughty child. [Being good children, they should obey their parents and respect adults…]. I am one of the other parents who expect my children to be good boy or girl by listening what I am telling, doing what I suggest and respecting adults. I do not know… I cannot accept if my son or daughter will be aggressive on me, do not respect adults and say or do whatever she or he wants. I prefer my children to be good at studying as well as nice behave at school too. It is still part of our culture [TE].

Because of those cultural practices, most of the teachers stated that most of their students were good listeners and note-takers. They did not enjoy sharing and expressing themselves during the class activities. However, these teachers further noted that for some students 'being quiet' did not mean they did not understand the tasks, contexts and teachers' explanations as on the paper exams these students did very well and got very good grades. It is culture that impacts on their learning styles and behaviours. If they were judged from Western perspectives, they seem to be passive without communication skills.

*At a few weeks of my teaching, I thought most of my students were not good at English communication because they were quiet while they were asked to share ideas in the class. During this time, Lao often applied in order to help them to understand the contexts. On the other hand, on the exam paper, some students did very well if compared to their reactions in the class. Some students are very good at using English. They properly communicate with me and understand the context of the lesson. They get the correct answer if they are asked or assigned to do the homework, but they do not enjoy expressing ideas while they are learning in the class. Therefore, I argue that national culture has huge impacts on national students' learning behaviours which contrasted with communicative teaching method that required students to be active engaged in the class activities [TH]***.***

For some students, quiet or less participation in classroom activity does not mean they have low English proficiency. Some students are not good at communication, but they get good grades of the exam's results. I think it is part of Lao culture that teaches them to be good listeners and observers. The cultural practice not only impacts on students' learning behaviours, but also influences teachers' behaviour. For example, some teachers sometimes cannot accept students who have a range of English proficiency. These teachers might think that they are the teachers, and students have to listen to what they said. For me, being a teacher does not mean I have to know everything, I sometimes learn from my students [TJ].

4.5.3. Barriers for Teachers

4.5.3.1. Low levels of English language proficiency

Some of the teachers stated that their own limited English proficiency might be a barrier in using CLT in their classroom. These teachers reported that they have never been to an English speaking region in order to improve their communicative skills. They also said that they faced difficulty in the adoption of CLT into their classes, so they often skipped the communicative tasks. Some like TE and TF also commented that they did not have adequate teaching skills to facilitate the communication activities in the textbook:

I think I do not have enough teaching skills to facilitate and modify CLT activities in my classroom. Um…Yes, I used to learn what CLT is when I was students. Since I have been a teacher here, I have never particular trained how to use CLT in teaching. In addition, I have never been to an English-usage country that might improve my English communication skills. I do not have wide range of language to

support my teaching. I am sometimes ashamed when my students asked and I did know or could not give them the answers. I often gave them the answers for the following days. You know some words or slang words, I sometimes had to ask English native speakers and I sometimes forgot. I think teachers in the Department should go for training in the English usage countries or the countries where CLT is successful used in their classroom in order to observe and learn from them to apply and improve our teaching and learning process [TE].

When I found the communication topics that I do not have enough information about them, I often jumped and moved to the next topics. For instance, describing the living style of Americans or the conversation about transportation in Britain. How I facilitate my students while I cannot imagine and do not have information about it. Instead of discussing transportation in English, Lao transportations were discussed which could not motivate my students. They expected to listen and watch something new and modern. I think teachers in the Department lack of consistency professional training [English language teaching methods] which can improve and update our teaching styles [TF].

4.5.3.2. Personal income

Many Lao teachers need to supplement their teaching income by taking on additional jobs. Most of the teachers stated that income issues might mean that only the most motivated teachers to pay more attention on their teaching or applying CLT in their classroom teaching. These teachers further commented that they had a high cost of living while their salary was not enough to support their living in the big city so that they had to do extra jobs to pay the bills:

If I have enough stipends to support my living and family, I will not teach in other private English institutions. Then I will have enough time to prepare teaching materials, searching information to support my teaching and doing the research to improve the teaching and learning progress. You know I have been working here more than fifteen years, but I get only $150 per month while things are so expensive […school fees, food and bills might cost around $300 or more in each month]. If I get about $ 500 or more, it will be better. I will not have to do extra work and will have more time for my teaching [preparing teaching materials...]. If compare teaching and learning progress to a factory, teachers will be described as engines in the factory that really need enough and quality oil [salary] to make them run

smoother and faster to produce standard products [students' outcomes]. If these machines lack oil or not enough oil, how these engines produce standard products to serve society [TA].

Does income affect the quality of teaching and learning English in the Department? If I were asked this question, I will say definitely yes and other teachers will say so except a few teachers who are in middle class. These teachers might argue that income is not the point. They can say because they have a lot of money. They do not think about the bills or school fees of their children. They do not have to teach in other private schools. Therefore, these teachers have enough time to prepare the teaching materials. Money is not important, but it is necessary for our livings. For me, I cannot live without it; I have to earn to survive and better live [TE].

Due to low income while high living costs, most of the teachers stated that they have to teach in a few private English institutions or get extra jobs in order to comfort their livings. This issue could create a workload for these teachers so that they did not have enough time for preparing teaching materials. While CLT required more time to prepare which directly impacts on the implementation of CLT:

I know that being a good teacher should spend more time on preparing materials of teaching and do extra reading in order to gain extra information to support teaching and learning progress. In my situation, I worked at least 6-8 hours per day which was about 30 to 35 hours per week. This amount of working time made me so tired…, so that I do not have enough time to prepare teaching materials and concentrate on my teaching [TB].

It is more than 30 hours per week that I spend my time on teaching. I do not have enough time for myself, and for my teaching [I do not have enough time for writing lesson plan and prepare teaching materials…]. My teaching experience helps me a lot in order to facilitate my class and answers my students' questions [TE].

A few teachers stated that income generally impacts on teachers' performances in the class. For some teachers, on the other hand, money cannot motivate them to be good teachers who are always prepared for their teaching. Being unprepared and unorganised were their habits and these teachers had never accepted their weaknesses. When students complained about their teaching, they have never learnt from other colleagues who were successful in their teaching in order to improve their teaching styles:

I think sometimes money is not the point to motivate teachers to pay more attention to their teaching progress. In the MA programme, for example, it is about $20-25 per hour, but not many teachers volunteer to teach. To teach at this level, teachers have to be good at preparing in terms of teaching materials and themselves. I think this is the point some teachers are not good at preparing and creating their teaching materials so that students often complain about these teachers [TJ].

I do agree with teacher J that income is not the point for some teachers in the Department. These teachers do not love learning in order to gain more knowledge and teaching skills to support their teaching progress. Even the organisation pays him or her as much as they require they still do not be prepared. It is your job, responsibilities and you should do your best [TI].

4.5.3.3. Consultation for decision-making

Some teachers noted that decision-making by senior managers was made with a lack of consultation with the teachers in the classrooms. They also reported that their bosses often announce "anyone can talk, share or give feedback for the improvement", but in fact, those comments were not taken into account. These teachers further stated that they were often convinced to follow the plans that were made by senior managers. As TB and TJ experienced:

Off the top of my head, Lao administrative system is top-down decision meaning that it is without sharing ideas from teachers who have been working in real situations. In theory, anyone can give feedback in order to improve, but in practice, you can talk, share.... The grassroots teacher's feedbacks like me are never accepted. Even the Head of Department who often interrupted me or other teachers express their thinking in the meetings, the boss often said they have their plans ... [TJ].

It is obvious that the grassroots teachers do not have opportunities to take part in reforming educational policy which we should be involved in. For example, at each meeting in the department, the bosses will have a policy document to announce and influence teachers to follow. I have never shared my ideas in the school policy that my voice should be heard [TB].

A few teachers said that administrators are sometimes biased. Some teachers who were actively engaged in teaching and working or 'talking the walk' were not acknowledged.

However, some teachers who were good at 'talking the talk' were recognised and encouraged. This leads to most of the teachers not being motivated in their teaching which includes the implementation of CLT:

> *It is sometimes not fair for some teachers who are qualified and enthusiastic in teaching and working are not recognised and without encouragements. On the other hand, some teachers who are good at making the bosses pleased being recognised and considered in some positions that they should not be. For instance, my assistant should not be in this position because he is so unorganised, often doesn't complete his jobs and leaves the office without informing me. Another example, an officer who often lost students' and teachers' documents each academic year this person gets the Certificate of Active Working. Not only me, but also many teachers who are good at teaching and office working are not recognised. I have never got that Certificate. It does not mean I am jealous of those people, it is just not fair for staff in the same organisation [TI].*

4.5.4. Teaching Environment

4.5.4.1. Facilities to support CLT

All teachers stated that in the adoption of CLT into the classrooms, the schools have to subsidise appropriate facilities. In the Department, on the other hand, they noted that there is not enough technology and facilities to support the adoption of CLT in the English classroom teaching, these teachers have to use whatever they have to support their teaching. They said that sometimes they have to skip some activities or postpone to the next day which is very annoying and leads to ineffective teaching and learning processes:

> *In order to adopt CLT in the classroom English teaching, it requires a lot of colourful teaching aids to support and motivate students to pay attention on their learning. On the other hand, the Department does not have adequate facilities to support the adoption of CLT in the classroom teaching and learning English. For example, there is no microphone in the lecture room. There is no lab room for listening sessions, so tapes are instead used, but still not enough. I often owed my students for the next days when tape will be available. Not only me, but also students felt annoyed that they have to wait and wait [TF].*

> *There is no photocopier for teachers to copy the classroom activities. If any teachers want to do it, they have to pay themselves. Some teachers sometimes*

charge students that they often complained, so that most teachers skipped doing it. In addition, there is only one LCD in the department which there are a few teachers have opportunity to use it in their classrooms [TD].

4.5.4.2. Class size

All teachers noted that most of the classes in the Department are a large size which causes difficulties in organising groups and oral communicative activities. They also stated that their students had to divide into eight to ten groups when communicative activities were organised and it took quite a long time to complete each activity. They further reported that they could not motivate all students to concentrate on studying particularly students at the back rows. This factor might therefore be one of the other barriers that hinder CLT in the classroom teaching and learning in the Department:

According to the large amount of students in my class, I have to divide my students into two big groups if I want to organise group work. First group will be formed to be three or four groups in order to easy in facilitating and monitoring and it might spend about two or three weeks to organise and present their works. So do the second half of the class. By doing this, I found it was so time-wasting. If one class can divide into two classes, it might be better in terms of teaching and organising the pairs and groups works [TC].

In my personal perspectives, in learning a new language, fewer students can learn effectively than many because students need more interaction. 15 to 20 students would be suitable numbers to make sure each student has chance to say something in the class. On the other hand, there were about 35 to 45 students in each class in the DoE. I think these numbers are very difficult to organise, facilitate and manage the classroom activities. Some students [particularly passive] do not have the opportunity to say an English word in the class [TI].

4.5.5. English Usage Environment

4.5.5.1. Demand for English

Some teachers reported that there is generally a high demand for employees who are good at using English in Laos. Most of the students study at least two fields while English is not their main course. English is learnt because it helps them to get a better job. There is also a limited job market for students who only learn English as their main field:

Laos is the member of ASEAN and next year, Laos will be member of World Trade Organization (WTO) which is English is only the language for communicating. In 2015, Laos will also be Asian Economic Community member (AEC), so English users are more required in the labour market [TA].

Due to high demand of English users in the society, English is learnt as fashion. For instance, job requirement is an accountant [the criteria of all applicants: must qualify in accounting and computer using skills. If any applicants can communicate in English will be special considered….]. Most students strongly believe that if they get a certificate or diploma of English, they will get a good job. In addition, there are a few jobs for students who only learn English such as teachers, translators and tourist guides which are not favoured. As a result, each student at least studies in two fields which are English and another is their main field. Naturally, the main field should come first, so that some students often pay less attention to learning English [TB].

4.5.5.2. English interaction in the wider community

Most teachers reported that there is no English interaction in the Lao community and families, so that English is learnt as a foreign language which is used only in the classroom. If English is used outside the classroom, it would be great because students would have opportunities to apply what they have learnt to the real contexts. This environment would help students to rapidly improve their communicative skills which could also support their learning in the classes. Some interviewees felt that this issue might be another barrier of using CLT in the classroom teaching and learning:

If English is used everywhere outside the classroom, it will definitely motivate them to improve their communication skills. However, in the Lao situation, there is no English interaction in the society, and families, so that only their mother tongue is used outside the classroom. In addition, English native speakers come to Laos as tourists and some for business where there is less opportunity for students to communicate with them. From my perspective, CLT will be effective applied where English is learnt as a second language where there is an English interaction in society and families [TG].

In addition, some teachers stated that if the school can organise events where English is used such as English speaking, singing, writing or reading contests, it might be great strategy to motivate students to learn English. However, the Department or university does

not have the budget to organise these English usage activities to build an English usage environment at school which could be used to encourage students to practise using English language. These teachers further stated that if the teachers in the Department want to organise these activities, they had to write a proposal to several organisations to gain support. This environment could be considered as one of the other barriers in the adoption of CLT into English classrooms in this setting:

> *If school can organise the English usage activities, it might be the great opportunities for students to practise using their English and it might be the most encouraging this for students to learn English for communication. On the other hand, the school or department does not have budgets to organise these activities. If teachers in the department organise these events, teachers have to write a proposal to raise the funds from many organisations and international schools like US assembly, Vientiane College and others. This is very difficult to happen. Only one English-speaking contest was organised during the time I have been worked here for ten years. Students were so excited and intended to join in [TH].*

4.6. SUMMARY

This chapter presented the key findings of qualitative data analysis collected through the face-to-face in-depth interviews among Lao teachers who have taught English to Lao students in Laos. The raw data were coded and analysed to generate the core themes and patterns, which represented the most relevant to this research's objectives. In the in-depth interviews, the questions were designed to explore participants' attitudes and understandings of the concepts of CLT and to investigate the potential barriers when f adopting CLT in their classroom English teaching.

The next chapter will discuss the themes and patterns that have emerged from these data as well as the interpretation derived from the data analysis. The key findings within the scope of the relevant literature will be discussed with empirical evidence and supports.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter Four presented the findings from collected data and analysed the data results. This chapter reviews the findings of the interviews and reviews these findings in relation to the research literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The purpose of this study has been to explore the understandings and attitudes of teachers who teach English in higher education in Laos and investigate the barriers they face in implementing CLT into their classroom teaching. Teachers interviewed for this study identified a number of issues that relate to the adoption of CLT in their classroom teaching: traditional teaching methods still dominated in the classroom teaching, the power of examinations in influencing teaching methods, the lack of training to implement CLT, low English proficiency of teachers to facilitate CLT activities, students' low of English proficiency, class sizes, and the lack of facilities to support the adoption of CLT. These main findings will be discussed with reference to the literature reviewed earlier. The implication of this study's results and recommendations will conclude this chapter.

5.2. MAJOR FINDINGS

The ten higher educational English teachers interviewed for this thesis were asked what they thought about using the CLT method in their classes. All of them were interested in this teaching approach which was very helpful for students, because it provides opportunities for students to communicate and to interact with their friends and the teacher in the class. Most of the teachers also reported that it was very necessary to adopt CLT into EFL classroom learning because of the emphasis on communication. Some teachers in this research project preferred CLT particularly in comparison with a grammar-based teaching method because it not only motivated passive students with low English proficiency to improve their communication skills, but also improved their interactions in the classroom. On the other hand, all teachers in this project reported that they are encountering difficulties during the implementation of CLT into their classes.

The four major issues raised by the Lao higher educational teachers included: misconceptions of CLT, partial implementation of CLT, teachers' inadequate English proficiency and lack of CLT training. The problems created by the students were: students'

low English proficiency, students' learning styles and behaviours, and lack of motivation to develop communicative competence. Other issues related to the educational system were: the power of the examination, class size, and insufficient funding to support CLT.

Another unexpected concern was the lack of consultation with the Ministry of Education and also with the senior managers of the institution. Also, a personal concern raised was that teachers had to take on additional teaching responsibilities to ensure an adequate personal income. These issues identified were perceived by the participants in the study as the main barriers in the adoption of CLT into their classrooms.

5.2.1. Difficulties Faced by the Teacher

5.2.1.1. Misconceptions of CLT

All the teachers in this research project were interested in the communicative teaching approach or student-centred learning because they felt that it could motivate their students to use English in the classes which could improve their communicative competence. Only a few teachers in this project had a good understanding of CLT. As they reported, CLT is an approach that emphasises interaction among students and teachers in order to develop students' communicative competence through communicative activities which informs group work, pair work, games and so on. In these activities, English language was used to communicate which includes listening, speaking, reading, writing and also sentence structure in order to produce meaningful messages. Communicating successfully refers to passing on a comprehensible message to the listeners.

These understandings were also supported by several researchers. They argue that CLT views language as a vehicle for communication and communicative competence including grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence (Liao, 2000; Ying, 2010). In addition, CLT holds the view that language learning should not only emphasise the grammatical structure of the language, but also focus on language use in real-life situations (Liao, 2000; Ying, 2010). Furthermore, in the classroom settings, CLT requires more than just attention to strategies for presenting the sentence structure and the functions of language, but CLT requires more involvement of the learners in a dynamic and interactive process of communication (Savignon, 2002).

Overall, Ying (2010) suggests that language should be learned through the use of a target language and practical communication, particularly, through the communicative activities. Communicative activities refer to the classroom activities that provide a genuine

information gap and make it possible for language learners to communicate with the target language in CLT approaches (Liao, 2000). Some common forms of communicative activities are role play, interviews, information gap, games, language exchanges, surveys, pair work and learning by teaching. The aim of using these activities is to enhance learners' communicative competence (Ying, 2010). Menking (2001) argues that mastering a second or foreign language is not the result of listening to an instructor who tells the students what to do and how to do, but rather, a communicative approach, it is the result of students actively trying to listen, speak, read and write with meaningful message.

On the other hand, most of the interviewees in this study appear to have superficial understandings of CLT. For them, CLT means an interaction among students in the class and with their teachers and students needed to be actively participating in any classroom activities while teachers acted as facilitators, assistants and consultants who guide students. These teachers also reported that communicative activities only refers to speaking and listening tasks while none of these teachers in this study mentioned communicative activities could be in forms of writing, reading as well as there was the involvement of sentence structure which was the key element of communicative competence.

In addition, most of them stated that in learning a new language, fluency should be the focus rather than accuracy. According to these researchers' definitions of CLT in the previous paragraphs, most of the teachers in this study misunderstood the conceptions of CLT into their classrooms.

These findings were supported by other research that showed that teachers and students understood that communicative activities simply meant speaking and listening skills. Jin, Singh and Li's (2005) study found that most teachers and students in an English-major college in China reported that CLT means teaching only speaking and listening that without grammatical competence. As a result, both teachers and students in their research put the stress on speaking and listening skills. In relation to this, Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) conducted the research on the views and practices of CLT by Japanese second language in-service teachers. These teachers reported that for them, CLT means group work and pair work that only related to speaking.

Most of the teachers in their study understood that there was not grammar involved in communicative activities while some teachers in this research project did not directly mention grammar usage in the communicative activities (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). To

support this result, Li (1998) also found that Korean secondary school English teachers defined communicative activities as group work and pair work which only focused on speaking and there was no grammar involvement. These are also similar to Gamal and Debra's (2001) findings that Egyptian teachers perceived communicative tasks as speaking activities. The teachers in their research did not refer to the involvement of sentence structure which is also one of the key elements of communicative competence.

5.2.1.2. Partial Implementation of CLT

All of the teachers in this study reported that the department's syllabi are based on grammatical linguistics rather than communicative knowledge. Grammar rules were mainly taught in the department rather than other skills like speaking, listening, reading and writing. On the other hand, listening and oral communication subjects were removed from the department's syllabi. Due to the syllabi there was more focus on grammatical knowledge than the other skills and both teachers and students definitely had to concentrate on sentence structure.

Not only the department's syllabi emphasised grammar, but also teachers in this study have persevered in using a grammar-based teaching approach in classes rather than the recently-introduced CLT approach. They have done this because they faced a number of difficulties in applying CLT into their classroom teaching such as inadequate facilities and classroom environment. Most of the teachers in this research stated that only about thirty per cent of CLT was applied into their classrooms while seventy per cent was still teacher-centred.

Another difficulty in applying communicative activities reported by the interviewees was the students' learning style and behaviour because they have found that Lao students tend to be good listeners and portray passive behaviour while learning. For instance, they are usually quiet and wait for the teachers to call for an answer to the questions. The teachers who are not aware of the importance of the students' cultural background often feel frustrated in applying CLT into their classes. As a result, they turn to a traditional teaching approach. According to students' learning styles, communicative teaching methods can't be effectively applied. Therefore, traditional teaching approaches were identified as a main difficulty in adopting CLT into their English classrooms in a Lao higher education context.

This finding is supported by some researchers who note that although the school policies and school curricula shifted from traditional teaching methods toward a communicative teaching approach in a variety of EFL contexts, most of the teachers persisted using traditional practices in their classes (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999; Gorsuch, 2000; Gamal &

Debra, 2001; Incecay & Incecay, 2009). Sato and Kleinsasser (1999) interviewed and observed ten public school Japanese teachers in ten different high schools and discovered that grammar was more central in their teaching rather than CLT. Although most of these teachers said that they used role-play, games, group work, pair work and simulations, classrooms observed for this study were mainly teacher-fronted, grammar was mostly presented and there were a few interactions seen among students in the classroom (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

Another research finding with similar results is the study by Gorsuch (2000) that was also conducted in Japan of 884 Japanese senior high school EFL teachers who were employed full-time in both private and state vocational and night high schools. The findings of this research found that most of the teachers still favoured more traditional teaching approaches over a communicative teaching method. This is also similar to Gamal and Debra's (2001) research that studied Egyptian English teachers and found that there were only a few teachers in this project who sometimes applied CLT into their classes while the rest still used a teacher-centred approach in their classes.

According to the gathered data for this study, it could be noted that when CLT was first introduced into the department's classes, it was put into practice for a few academic years. It could be argued that most of the teachers changed from the traditional grammar-translation teaching method into a student-centred communicative teaching approach. However, because of teaching conditions, students, teachers, the testing system, most of the teachers who had adopted a CLT approach into their classes confronted difficulties and became less motivated to continue. As a result, oral communicative and listening subjects were cut off the department's teaching curriculum. Meanwhile communicative activities and listening tasks that are covered within other subjects are often skipped with a return to the prevailing grammar-translation teaching methods.

These significant findings were also supported by Penner (1995) who argues that it was very difficult for EFL teachers to change the classical traditional approach of language teaching that was used for a long time and adopt the modern teaching approach that was just introduced to them. In relation to this, several researchers also conclude that both teachers and students in EFL classrooms are still under the pressure of grammar-based teaching and learning, which is imposed during their earlier education and also identified as a major difficulty in the adoption of CLT into EFL settings (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999;

Gorsuch, 2000; Gamal & Debra, 2001; Menking, 2001; Musthafa, 2001; Incecay & Incecay, 2009).

5.2.1.3. Teachers' English Proficiency

Most of the teachers in this study stated that in order to adopt CLT into the classes, teachers need to have English teaching knowledge and skills in order to modify the textbooks and facilitate their teaching of students. Some of the teachers further commented that to implement CLT effectively, the teachers need adequate teaching skills. For instance, the students cannot enhance their English proficiency if the tasks were too easy or too difficult for them. Teachers have to make sure that every student obtained opportunities to speak in the class in order to improve their communicative skills.

On the other hand, some of the teachers in this research project reported that sometimes they had inadequate teaching skills to integrate CLT into their classes. These teachers also stated that they might be good at other skills, but not with speaking skills. Although most felt confident that they were good at grammatical knowledge, vocabulary, reading and writing, they reported that their speaking and listening skills were inadequate to organise and facilitate the communicative activities in their classes. As a result, some teachers in this study identified English proficiency of teachers as another barrier that apparently prevented some teachers from adopting and implementing CLT into their classes.

This finding is similar to a few previous research studies also conducted in EFL settings that English proficiency of teachers were identified as a major difficulty in the adoption of CLT into EFL classrooms (Penner, 1995; Li, 1998; Musthafa, 2001). All participants in Li's (1998) research reported that most of the Korean teachers in this research project needed CLT to be implemented because their students' oral proficiency was inadequate and the teachers hoped that CLT would help their students to improve their oral English. Most of the teachers stated that they were confident to teach grammar, reading and writing while they were inadequate in English speaking and listening skills to facilitate the communicative activities in their classes. One participant in this study commented that "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?" (p. 686). Li's study also surprisingly found that even respondents who spoke English fluently and communicated well through their English were less confident to apply CLT into their classes. They further reported that their low strategic and sociolinguistic competence in English would also prevent them from adopting CLT into their contexts.

Another recent study that explored Taiwanese junior high school educators' perspectives on the implementation of CLT and had similar findings to this research's result was the study by Tsai (2007). Most of the teachers in this study also reported that they had limited English speaking skills to organise and modify communicative tasks in their classes which were identified as a constraint for adopting and implementing CLT in their context (Tsai, 2007).

Musthafa (2001) also explored Indonesian English teachers' perceptions of CLT and investigated the issues around CLT in both junior and senior high schools in Indonesia. Most of the Indonesian teachers in this research pointed out that traditional teaching approaches were used in their classes for several years, so it was not easy for teachers to change from grammar-based teaching method to CLT. They also reported that they had insufficient English speaking to conduct communicative activities in their classes. Therefore, Musthafa (2001) concluded that teachers' lack of English proficiency as a factor that inhibits the adoption of CLT in Indonesian English classrooms. In relation to these findings, it could be argued that many non-native English speaker teachers in EFL settings were highly proficient in sentence structure, reading, and writing while they claimed that their spoken skill was not sufficient to adopt and adapt CLT into their English classes (Penner, 1995; Li, 1998, Musthafa, 2001; Tsai, 2007)

In relation to these findings, a few teachers in this study also reported that teachers' English proficiency was not a major difficulty in practising and adopting CLT in Lao higher education. The lack of support from the administration and the lack of professional training particularly in CLT were identified as one of the difficulties in the implementation of CLT in the Lao higher education context.

5.2.1.4. Lack of CLT training

Most of the teachers in this research reported that in order to adopt CLT into their English classrooms, teachers needed to be trained to update their teaching skills to facilitate and create communicative activities in the classrooms. On the other hand, most of the teachers stated that they lacked professional development and especially CLT training. Since then, the CLT training has never been organised in this department while they have never been abroad in order to observe how CLT was successfully and effectively applied in other international EFL contexts. As a result, most of the teachers in this study preferred to teach grammar subjects as well as focusing on sentence structure rather than communicative activities. Nine of ten teachers in this project suggested that teachers should be consistently

trained. In other words, on-the-job training or in-house training should be organised in order to deal with current issues that happen in each semester and to update and encourage teachers to use it in their classes. Therefore, a lack of CLT training was identified as another barrier in the adaptation and implementation of CLT into a Lao tertiary education setting.

The most significant findings of this research was also reported by some studies that showed the EFL teachers lacked CLT training and this was identified as the main difficulty in the adopting and implementing of CLT into EFL classes (Li, 1998; Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Gamal & Debra, 2001; Karim, 2004). As several Korean English teachers reported in Li's (1998) study, they learned CLT when they were studying at university while a few teachers said that they learned about CLT at a teachers' conference. These teachers also stated that they did not quite understand how it worked and tried it a few times when they became he teachers. All of the Korean English teachers in this study named lack of training as one of the main obstacles they faced in applying CLT into their contexts.

The result of this study was also similar to Burnaby and Sun's (1989) project where most of the Chinese teachers noted that they had a lack of professional development while CLT was applied into their classes. They also stated that it was not easy to adopt a communicative teaching approach to students who were non-English majors. Several of those teachers were concerned that the kinds of work they had to do to prepare and give lessons to learners with relatively low levels of English proficiency were not valuable to them professionally.

They also felt that their own level of academic knowledge was not being enhanced in the way it would have been. For example, some teachers noted that since they were the teachers in a tertiary institution, there's always a limitation to improving their communicative teaching method. If they continue to teach there, their English communication teaching skills would go down because they did not have opportunities to develop and improve their communicative teaching skills. Thus, most of the teachers in this research identified a lack of CLT seminar or training as a difficulty that prevented them to apply CLT into their classes.

Another similar finding was from Musthafa's (2001) study that many Indonesian teachers of English had a lack of training in methodology of communicative teaching English. Therefore, most of the teachers in his research sometimes tend to use their mother tongue to carry out and explain their communicative English lessons in the classrooms except

greeting students before the sessions get started. Lack of training in CLT was also supported by Bangladeshi English teachers as a major challenge in adopting CLT (Karim, 2004). These teachers indicated that they needed more CLT training to develop and implement CLT techniques. Overall, Bangladeshi English teachers needed training in understanding and developing CLT techniques. It could be seen that most of the teachers in this study also need CLT training which could enhance their English teaching skills particularly CLT into EFL settings while the lack of CLT training for EFL teachers was identified as a difficult in the implementation of CLT.

5.2.2. Difficulties related to students

5.2.2.1. Student's diverse levels of English

Most of the teachers in this study reported that in the entrance examination not only English, but also other subjects that were not relevant to English skills were tested for selecting students into the department which could impact on the teaching and learning process. In addition, the participants in this study reported that many quota students were accepted and the placement test system was not used to group students according to their level of English proficiency. Therefore, the students were mixed with a wide range of levels in English proficiency.

Most of the teachers stated that the mixed range of students was encountered for teaching CLT and preparing teaching materials. These teachers also noted that many students in the department had low English proficiency and they faced difficulty to organise and facilitate communicative activities. One of the teachers said that CLT would not effectively apply to students who had a low English proficiency. Therefore, low English proficiency of students was identified by most of the teachers in this study as one of the others factors that was a barrier to adopt CLT into their classes.

This finding was supported by Tsai's (2007) study, when all ten Taiwanese educators stated that grouping students with diverse English proficiency levels into one class was a barrier to effective CLT teaching. All of them noted that CLT can only be successfully adopted into a class with students who had higher English language proficiency. One of the teachers explained that students with low English proficiency could not comprehend the English spoken by their teachers or classmates, nor could they communicate with each other. Therefore, all the Taiwanese educators identified low English proficiency of students as one of the main difficulties in applying CLT into their classes. In relation to these findings, Li's (1998) project also found that all of the respondents in his research

reported that one important difficulty preventing them from applying CLT was their students' low English proficiency. These teachers noted that their students did not start learning English until they entered middle school 'Grade 7'. As a result, they usually had a limited English vocabulary and English language structure. Due to their English proficiency, most of the teachers in this study stated that they found it very difficult to conduct any oral communicative activities with their students. Thus, most of the Korean English teachers in this project concluded that due to students' low English proficiency they encountered difficulties in trying the CLT method in their classes.

5.2.2.2. Students' Learning Style and Behaviour

Most of the teachers in the research noted the Lao tradition and culture, which often teaches children to be good listeners and to respect adults all the time, had a huge impact on students' learning styles and behaviours. The teachers in this study reported that most of their students tend to be passive if compared to Western teaching methods that required students to be actively engaged in any classroom activities. Most of them also stated that these students often relied on teachers and textbooks and emphasised a memory learning style. A few teachers in this study stated that for some students quiet or less participation in the class activities did not mean they had low English proficiency, but these students did very well on the paper test. These students might not be good at speaking, but were good at sentence structure. As a result, most of the teachers in this study indicated that the learning style and behaviours of their students was also identified as one of the barriers that hinder teachers to implement CLT into their classes.

This issue was also reported by Rao's (2002) project that investigated of 30 Chinese university students on the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their classrooms. Most of the students in this study reported that traditional learning styles and habits had prohibited most of the Chinese teachers in this study from being actively involved in communicative activities. As they have been in school for at least 12 years, during this time, they have become accustomed to a traditional language teaching style, which dominated is by a teacher-centred, book-centred approach and an focused on rote memory. Most of the students in this study said that they were taught to behave traditionally in classroom the first day they went to school. Since then, they have started forming their own learning habits, which have brought them more or less success so far. They thought that it was so difficult to change their classroom behaviours at university English classrooms. Some of the students suggested that to make

communicative activities in EFL classes feasible in China, language teachers should change their teaching approaches from kindergarten.

In addition, this issue was echoed by Incecay and Incecay (2009) who also investigated the perceptions of 30 Turkish university students on the same topic as Rao (2002). Most of the students in their research also reported that the traditional learning behaviours and styles they had practised for more than ten years prohibited them to be active engaged in communicative activities and were perceived as passive students. They further stated that it was not easy for them to forget their traditional learning styles and habits which are full of teachers and book-centred approaches and then an applied new teaching method that has just been introduced.

Moreover, this finding was also found in Burnaby and Sun's (1989) study that observed Chinese students' learning styles and behaviours. Most of the teachers in their research stated that from a Western point of view, most of their students were passive because they did not enjoy participating in communicative activities in the class. They really feared making mistakes and lacked the confidence to express themselves in less than perfect English.

5.2.3. Difficulties Caused by the Educational System

5.2.3.1. The power of examinations

Most of the teachers in this research noted that examinations had a huge impact on students' learning in the department. Students have 70% of their final grade based on exams and tests, which could motivate students to focus on the skills that required in the examination format rather than communicative skills that the examination-format, did not cover. These teachers also stated that these examination formats were mainly based on traditional grammar-based test items while the listening and oral communication sections which are key elements of communicative competence were cut off from the examination format in this department.

Because of these assessments, the teachers in this project reported that only grades or scores were motivating for their students to participate in any class activities and communicate in English in the class. Most teachers in this study also felt that their students valued more the grades which helped them to pass the exams rather than their communicative competence. It is not surprising therefore that the examination format created a difficulty for the implementation of CLT into the classes.

This major finding has also been echoed by studies that were conducted in other countries that showed that the examination of grammar-based and appropriate assessment instruments of communicative competence was another major difficulty in implementing CLT into EFL classes (Li, 1998; Gorsuch, 2000; Musthafa, 2001; Rao, 2002; Karim, 2004). All respondents in Li's Korean research (1998) reported that the university entrance examinations were mostly grammar-based examinations rather than communicative tasks which was one of the other significant limitations to adopt communicative activities in Korean secondary English classes. They also stated that they were under pressure to help their students to do well on the tests by devoting valuable class time to teach test-taking skills and drilling students on multiple-choice grammar items. They further noted that this type of exam had strongly influenced the way that English has been taught in South Korea.

One teacher in this research reported that as soon students started middle school, they had a clear goal in mind to pass the National University Entrance Examination as well as teachers to help their students to succeed in the examination. However, the examination format mostly covered sentence structure and reading, both teachers and students were interested in grammar while communicative activities were left behind.

The result of Li's study was also similar to Gorsuch's (2000) research that most of the Japanese English teachers also noted that the university entrance examination format was grammar-based exams. This type of exam impacts on both teachers and students to be more emphasised on sentence structure than communicative skills which the exam did not cover. As a result, most of the English teachers in these studies identified grammar-based exam as one of the other obstacles in implementing of CLT into their classes.

In relation to these studies, the majority of Indonesian English teachers in Musthafa's (2001) research also noted that the nationwide English language examination format in Indonesia's secondary and high schools was commonly dominated by questions that were form-focused and presented in a multiple-choice format, which did not allow divergent thinking. They further stated that this type of test could be counterproductive because it sent the wrong message to their students of English who misconstrued the tests as an encouragement to think that good at grammar is the only way to take care of it as they want to develop their English and pass their exams. Therefore, a grammar-based examination was identified as a hindrance by most of the teachers in this study in applying CLT into their classes. In the similar setting, Karim (2004) found that these factors were also identified by the majority of the Bangladeshi EFL teachers' opinions about the traditional

grammar-base exams as a difficulty in adopting and practising CLT into Bangladeshi context.

Not only EFL teachers, but also students in these settings perceived grammar-based exam as a barrier to improve their communicative competence in their English classes. This statement was supported by Rao's (2002) research that found that twenty-eight of thirty Chinese students in his study identified the content of examination that mainly focused on sentence structure preventing them from practising their communicative skills. Rao (2002) concluded that although Chinese students were more aware of the importance and necessity of communicative skills, the students in this project still focused more on grammar knowledge than other skills because all of the language tests were grammar-based. One student reported that passing examinations and getting good grades were the most important requirement of being students, so she would like to work hard on grammar which would help her to pass the exam.

To sum up, Hasan and Akhand (2009) state that the prevailing examination system is another problem for the CLT. It is more achievement-oriented rather than performance-oriented. It emphasises the grades and positions other than the issues of fluency (Hasan & Akhand, 2009). Therefore, invariably the teacher becomes the "facilitator of examination rather than of linguistic or communicative competence" (Hasan & Akhand, 2009, p. 51). Besides, the examination format encourages cramming on which students tend to rely too much (Hasan & Akhand, 2009). In a Lao situation, most of the teachers stated that the content of the exams were also based on the grammatical sentence structure. As a result, most of their students played more attention on it because it could help them to pass the exam and get good grades. This type of test was also considered as the barrier to English teachers in Lao higher education to adopt and implement CLT into their classes.

5.2.3.2. Class size

The majority of the teachers interviewed in this study identified 'large class size' as a difficulty in practising and adopting CLT in Lao tertiary education. They further stated that large classes bring difficulties to both teachers and students. It is difficult for teachers to give students' individual attention with the students sitting at the back. All teachers noted that most of the classes in the department were a large size where there were at least 30 students in each class. These numbers of students were very difficult to organise for group work, pair work, games that related to oral communicative activities. This factor was

considered as one of the barriers that hinder CLT in the classrooms in Lao higher English classes.

These findings were well supported by other international studies that also found the large classes as one of the other difficulties for the adoption and implementation of CLT in EFL contexts (Burnaby & Sun, 1989; Li, 1998; Mustafa, 2001; Gamal & Debra, 2001; Karim, 2004). The significant of this finding was also reported by Burnaby and Sun's (1989) study that investigated the views of 24 Chinese teachers of English on the appropriateness and effectiveness of Western language-teaching methods for use in Chinese situations in a University in Beijing. Most of the Chinese teachers in their study noted that many Chinese university English classes, particularly those for non-English majors, had from 50 to 70 students and met for only about three hours a week. These large numbers of students caused difficulty for the Chinese teachers in using communicative teaching methods.

In relation to this factor, Gamal and Debra (2001) also identify large class size as one of the difficulties for successful implementation of CLT. Hui (1997) also discovered that China has a very large English learning population. the crowded classroom leaves hardly any room for free communicative activities such as information-gap or problem-solving tasks, especially those which require moving around or passing messages to another (Hui, 1997).

Rao (2002) and Karim (2004) also support this statement by arguing that classrooms may also be inconvenient due to the large number of students and immovable desks and chairs which hinders the maximum students' participation and successful implementation of communicative activities like role-play, group work and games. As a result, the majority of the teachers in their studies identified large classes as one of the major difficulties in adopting CLT in China and Bangladesh. Furthermore, the teachers in Li's research found that 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 (Li, 1998).

Musthafa's (2001) research also found that majority of teachers in his study faced difficulty with classrooms which were commonly packed with about thirty to forty students and with a crowded curriculum, many teachers cannot afford to provide well-designed, meaningful exercises for students to use on a one-to-one learning basis. According to the

results of these studies, large class sizes were4 identified as one of the other difficulties in applying and practising CLT into EFL settings as well as Lao English classes.

5.2.3.3. Insufficient funding

All of the teachers in this study reported that the institution or department did not have enough funds to provide the teaching equipment to support the CLT adoption. They also stated that there was inadequate technology and facilities to support the adoption of CLT into the English classroom teaching in the department. There was no laboratory which was a key element of listing activities, so tapes were instead used in order to run this task while sometimes there were not enough, they often had to postpone to the next day when a tape was available to them. In addition, there was no photocopier in the department, these teachers further stated if they wanted to organise the extra activities, small tests or midterm tests that needed to copy, they had to pay themselves or charge the students and many complained. Due to this insufficient equipment, therefore they had to use whatever they have to support their teaching and as a result, communicative activities were often skipped.

This factor was classified as a barrier in the adoption of CLT into English classes in Lao higher education English classes. This crucial finding was also reported in Rao's (2002) research that most educational institutions in China did not have enough financial resources to provide the teaching facilities such as audio-visual equipment, photocopiers, projectors or sources that were required to support the CLT implementation into their English classes.

Most of the respondents in this research also complained of sharing the costs involved in the communicative activities in the class. As one student in this project mentioned "our extensive reading last semester, our teacher always asked us to pay for the photocopied materials for communicative activities in class because the university did not provide it for the department and then there was so much complained from us, since then, the teacher stopped providing us with any authentic reading or extra communicative materials this semester" (p, 97). It could be seen that insufficient finance in order to provide the facilities to support the teaching and learning process would hinder the implementation of CLT into the classes of this study.

In relation to this result, Li's (1998) study also found that most of the South Korean English teachers perceived insufficient funding as a constraint in the adoption of CLT into their English classes. They further stated that to apply CLT into English teaching, certain equipment and facilities had to be in place and extra funding was needed to obtain resource

books, materials for communicative activities. When there was no funding or not enough, it was very difficult to implement CLT. According to one teacher interviewed, when the teacher needed to copy materials or introduce extra communicative activities for students, the extra budget required was not available. Therefore, most of the teachers in this study reported that most of the communicative activities were often avoided in their classes.

5.2.4. Difficulties from CLT

5.2.4.1. Lack of CLT interaction

Most of the teachers in this project reported that there was no English interaction available in either their community society or families to encourage the students to keep using it outside the school because English is learnt as a foreign language in Laos. They also commented that if English is spoken in the community where English was learnt as a second language, it would motivate students to develop their communicative skills because their goals of learning English was to communicate outside the classes.

On the other hand, these teachers further stated that not only was there no wider English usage outside the classes, but also neither the school or the department created an English speaking environment by organising any events or competitions that English was used such as reading, writing, speaking or English singing contests which definitely motivated students to improve their communicative competence. Therefore, most of the teachers in this research identified a lack of CLT interaction as the other difficulty for them to adopt CLT into their classes.

This key finding was also supported by other studies that CLT interaction in an EFL situation contrasted with an ESL situation. This was considered a barrier to the implementation of CLT so that the students could develop their communicative skills (Li, 1998; Musthafa, 2001; Rao, 2002; Jin et al., 2005). To support this finding, all South Korean English teachers in Li's (1998) study compared the differences between EFL and ESL by reporting that the Korean situation was totally different from the ESL environment where most of the teachers were mostly native English speakers who were fluent in English and had enough facilities to support the adoption of CLT.

In Korean English classrooms on the other hand, most of the teachers were Koreans had a low English proficiency. In addition, students in ESL settings usually had a very supportive learning environment and had opportunities to communicate in English both in and outside the classes while for Korean students, the classroom was the only place to practise their English.

In relation to this study, most of the students in Rao's (2002) study reported that they lacked motivation to develop their communicative competence because English was also learnt as a foreign language in China which was only used in classes. These students further stated they learnt English just because they wanted to pass the exams and get good grades. As this student stated, in China, where most of the students did not expect to use English outside the classrooms while students in an ESL situation, could hear and speak it outside the classes. In addition, in the ESL classes, teachers were mostly native English speakers who were not only fluent in English, but also good at organising their classes in a communicative way. However, this student further commented that this supportive learning environment outside and inside the classes, was unavailable for EFL students, so it was considered as the difficulty to adopt CLT into their classes.

Musthafa's (2001) study found that most of the teachers noted that the absence of visible social interaction of the English language outside the classrooms failed to motivate students to pay more attention on communicative activities in the classrooms. This result also found by Jin et al., (2005) that both teachers and students in their study noted that the lack of CLT interaction had a huge impact on the adoption of CLT into Chinese English classes because english only was used in the class. Chinese learners could not access a convenient English learning environment outside the class which significantly would motivate them to improve their communicative competence.

According to the results of these studies, it could be seen that CLT social interaction plays a crucial role in adopting CLT into EFL classes because it could motivate students to develop their communicative skill, so lack of CLT interaction could be identified as the difficulty in the adoption and implementation of CLT in EFL settings as well as in Lao higher education English departments.

5.3. RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has discussed findings from gathered data and analysed data results from chapter four. The following section will present the recommendations and further research opportunities of this area.

Fruitful implementation of any teaching methodology is not to do only with the ELT practitioners, but also the authority concerned and administrative bodies also have a significant role to play. This study provides both theoretical and practical implications for teachers, educators and policy-makers to implement CLT in Lao higher education setting.

All of the Lao English teachers in this research project stated that they faced several difficulties in the adoption and implementation of CLT into their English classes. Therefore, through this research project the participants have highlighted some ideas that may be considered by the authorities.

First and foremost, the findings of the study suggest a need to offer adequate in-service training for teachers to practise CLT. As indicated by most of the participants of the study, qualified teachers should have knowledge and skills to implement CLT. In addition, most of the teachers stated that training applied practices, rather than lectures and theories, were more beneficial to them. Moreover, some of the teachers stated that colleagues' support helped them to generate useful teaching ideas. As suggested by Fang (1996, p. 59), rather than simply providing teachers with more theoretical knowledge, educators should assist teachers to "understand how to cope with the complexities of classroom life and how to apply theory with the constraints imposed by those realities".

Second, the findings of the study suggest a need for Lao students, teachers and school administrators to adjust their educational values if CLT is to be implemented. Rather than focusing on the traditional grammar-based teaching approach which aims at developing test-taking skills, students' communicative competence should be motivated, encouraged and improve.

Finally, the implementation of CLT should recognise not only the teacher's effort, but also the teachers' voice, incorporating it into educational policies and practices. Some practical recommendations in relation to classroom constraints are listed below:

- That adequate funding and resources should be provided to promote successful implementation of CLT in the higher education institution.
- That the entrance selection process should be reviewed. It is recommended that only English language should be tested and only the students who passed the exam should be accepted, while the quota students should take an English intensive course in preparation for the entrance examination. Then the placement test should be applied in order to group students in classes according to their English proficiency levels.
- That English teachers should receive adequate training before being appointed to a CLT teaching position.
- That the CLT class size should be reduced to levels that accommodate CLT English teaching.

- That administrators work pro-actively with the teachers to create a learning environment where English usage is prevalent to enhance staff and students' communicative skills.
- That textbooks and teaching approaches should be regularly evaluated to see the achievement of students and the improvement in teaching.
- That the examination format should be reviewed and changed from a grammar-based exam to one that is consistent with CLT.

5.4. FUTURE RESEARCH OPPORTUNITIES

This qualitative research provides a foundation for further research on CLT and many other areas related to this teaching approach. The further research should interview both graduates and current students over a two year time span to gain their perceptions of communicative language teaching. The research could further refine the conceptual model of CLT in Lao setting. Further research could focus on quantitative studies to analyse and test the conceptual model via survey questionnaires. This is because there is a lack of literature on how each variable and components that make up the CLT relate to each other. Thus, it would be an interesting topic for in-depth studies to see the function of each attribute of CLT in Lao higher institution English classrooms.

5.5. RESEARCH SUMMARY

This research, supplemented by a review of current literature, has raised issues in regards to the communicative language teaching (CLT) in a Lao higher education institution. The challenges faced by both staff and students during the implementation phase have been summarised in this final chapter. The research has shown clear implications and recommendations have been made for the Ministry of Education, Senior Managers of Higher Education Institutions and for the Deans of Higher Education Institutions.

The research conducted in Laos has shown similar findings to other international research reviewed.

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APPENDIX



Appendix 1: Qualitative Research for In-depth Interview Questions

1. What is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in your opinion?
2. How interested are you in CLT? Why?
3. How long have you been teaching English using CLT?
4. How did you teach English before CLT?
5. How important do you think it is to teach communicative English to your students?
6. Could you describe some successful experiences of motivating your students to communicate English?
7. Is there anything you think has hindered you from teaching your students to communicate in English?
8. To what extent do you think the syllabi are based on grammatical linguistics or communicative knowledge? Can you give examples?
9. What is your opinion on the relation between teaching English using CLT and teaching English using a grammar-based approach?
10. Are you aware that the syllabi require English teachers to teach communicative English skills? Why?
11. In what ways do you think the CLT or the university English teaching syllabi have influenced your teaching?
12. What do you think is the greatest and most important challenge for our English teaching syllabus and policy makers to notice?
13. Would you like to make any other comments about teaching CLT?

Appendix 2: PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Title: ***"The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an English Department in a Lao Higher Educational Institution: A Case Study"***

I have had the research project explained to me and I have read and understood the information given to me. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered.

I understand that I do not need to be part of this research project if I wish not to. Participating in this research is voluntary and there are no obligations attached.

I understand that everything I say will be confidential and all information I provide will not identify my name or be reported back to my organization as individual feedback. The only persons who know that I have said will be the researcher and her supervisors.

I understand that the in-depth interview will be recorded then transcribed by the researcher and I can ask the researcher to give me a copy of the transcript of my interview to check. I also can ask the researcher to send me a copy of the finished research document.

I have had time to consider this research in detail and I give my consent to be part of this research project.

Participant signature:

Date:

Project Researcher:

Date:

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2012-1077.This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 22 August 2012 to 22 August 2013. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary by phone: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome**.**

Appendix 3: INFORMATION SHEET

My name is Hongkham Vongxay. I am currently enrolled in the Master of Education in the Department of Education at Unitec Institute of Technology in Auckland, New Zealand. I am seeking your help in meeting the requirements of research for a Thesis course which forms a substantial part of this degree.

The title of my research project is*: **"The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an English Department in a Lao Higher Educational Institution: A Case Study"***

The primary purpose of my research project is to explore the understandings and attitudes of Lao EFL teachers on adopting Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their classroom practices in order to better understand the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative English teaching activities in their classroom teaching practice. In addition, the overall aim in this research is to investigate and understand the factors that both help and hinder Lao tertiary teachers' implementation of teaching communicatively, and aims to attempt to fulfil the gap in the literature on this topic.

I will be collecting data using an interview schedule and would appreciate being able to interview you at a time that is mutually suitable. The interview will take about one to one and a half hours to discuss a number of questions in relation to the topic. I will also be asking you to sign a consent form.

Neither you nor your organisation will be identified in the Thesis. I will be recording your contribution and will provide a transcript (or summary of findings if appropriate) for you to check before data analysis is undertaken. Collected data will be securely stored on a computer at Unitec for five years and then will be disposed and no longer used after five years. However, I acknowledge that the completed thesis of this research project might be used as a source of knowledge and for future studies, but none of these has been identified as this stage.

I hope that you will agree to take part and that you will find this participation of interest. If you have any queries about the project, you may contact my supervisor, Assoc Prof, Dr. John Benseman, at Unitec Institute of Technology by either by email: jbenseman@unitec.ac.nz or telephone, +64 9 815 4321 Ext 8736

UREC REGISTRATION NUMBER: 2012-1077.This study has been approved by the Unitec Research Ethics Committee from 22 August 2012 to from 22 August 2013. If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Committee through the UREC Secretary by phone: 09 815-4321 ext 6162). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome**.**