Parnaz Kianiparsa

Communicative Language Teaching in Different Countries

Teachers' and Students' Subjective Theories on CLT Concerning Cross-Cultural Awareness in Germany, Iran, the Netherlands, and Sweden

Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen
Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Fachverlag

Communicative Language Teaching in Different Countries

Parnaz Kianiparsa

Communicative Language Teaching in Different Countries

Teachers' and Students' Subjective Theories on CLT Concerning Cross-Cultural Awareness in Germany, Iran, the Netherlands, and Sweden

Cuvillier Verlag Göttingen
Internationaler wissenschaftlicher Fachverlag

Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über http://dnb.d-nb.de abrufbar.

1. Aufl. - Göttingen: Cuvillier, 2015

Zugl.: Augsburg, Univ., Diss., 2015

Nonnenstieg 8, 37075 Göttingen

Telefon: 0551-54724-0

Telefax: 0551-54724-21

www.cuvillier.de

1. Auflage, 2015

Gedruckt auf umweltfreundlichem, säurefreiem Papier aus nachhaltiger Forstwirtschaft.

ISBN 978-3-7369-9074-6

eISBN 978-3-7369-8074-7

Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a teaching approach which was first introduced in the late 1960s in the US and UK and shifted the focus of language teaching from language awareness to language use and function. CLT aims to make students communicatively competent in terms not only of linguistic, but also socio-linguistic and strategic competence. CLT is seen as one of the approaches which can help learners develop their skills, knowledge, and abilities for effective communication, resulting in its worldwide application in different contexts. However, from the outset, there was no clear agreement about its principles and techniques, and teachers faced problems in describing and applying it. Consequently, CLT has been broadly examined and investigated in different teaching contexts, especially EFL settings. However, there are only a few studies which explore the appropriacy and cultural components of this approach in international contexts. This study was therefore designed to explore upper-secondary school teacher and student attitudes and beliefs towards: (1) the implementation of CLT and their English classes and (2) the inclusion of cultural and intercultural aspects in the principles of CLT and as a result their English classes, with a focus on the development of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC), as determined by current foreign language teaching policy in many countries.

A sample of 83 EFL teachers and 1049 students was chosen in Germany, Iran, Sweden and the Netherlands, and a mixed method approach was used to collect perceptions of CLT and its cultural components through questionnaires for both teachers and students, and semi-structured interviews and two open-ended questions (teachers only) for qualitative data. SPSS for Windows was used to calculate frequencies, percentages and run Chi-Square tests to compare the opinions of the respondents in each country. The information collected from the teachers' interviews and open-ended questions was codified, categorized, and examined using conventional content analysis.

It was found that teachers have a favorable attitude towards using CLT in their classrooms, but face some difficulties in implementing it because of contextual factors such as student learning styles and proficiency, national examinations, curricula and time constraints. European teachers felt that CLT was an appropriate approach, while Iranian participants had the opposite opinion. It was revealed that teachers have some misconceptions of the principles of CLT, and students still have a positive attitude towards teacher authority

and the constant correction of errors by their teachers. With the exception of the Dutch, students in this sample had positive attitudes towards their English classes. As for the second aim in this study, the majority of teachers believe that CLT focuses mostly on the culture of the target countries, i.e. Anglo-American contexts, and that it can help students develop intercultural awareness by considering their native culture, fostering positive attitudes towards, and understanding others, creating a sense of curiosity, and making students think critically. Students, excepting the Dutch, thought along similar lines.

The findings of this study also provide some implications for administrators, policy makers, curriculum and test designers as well as EFL teacher education for developing a better perspective towards the implementation of CLT and the integration of culture into language teaching in the classroom. Likewise, suggestions for further research are provided.

Key words: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Teachers' and Students' Beliefs, EFL Contexts, Intercultural/Cross-Cultural Awareness

Zusammenfassung

Der kommunikative Ansatz ist eine Lehrmethode, die erstmals in den späten 1960er Jahren in den USA und Großbritannien eingeführt wurde und dadurch verlagerte sich der Schwerpunkt des Sprachunterrichts vom Sprachbewusstsein zur Sprachverwendung und Funktion. Der kommunikative Ansatz zielt darauf ab, dass die Schüler kommunikativ kompetent werden, nicht nur bezüglich ihrer linguistischen, sondern auch ihrer soziolinguistischen und strategischen Kompetenz. Dieser Ansatz wird als einer der Ansätze betrachtet, die den Lernenden helfen können, ihre Fertigkeiten, ihr Wissen und Können für eine effektive Kommunikation zu entwickeln. Aus diesem Grund wird er weltweit in verschiedenen Kontexten angewandt, aber dennoch gab es von Anfang an keine klare Vereinbarung über seine Prinzipien und Techniken, und die Lehrer wurden mit diesem Problem bei der Beschreibung und der Anwendung dieses Ansatzes konfrontiert. Infolgedessen ist dieser Ansatz weitgehend in verschiedenen Unterrichtskontexten, insbesondere im Bereich Englisch als Fremdsprache, untersucht worden, aber es gibt nur wenige Studien, die die Angemessenheit und kulturellen Komponenten dieses Ansatzes im internationalen Kontext erforscht haben. Diese Studie wurde daher entwickelt, um die Einstellungen und subjektive Theorien der Lehrer und Schüler, die in der Oberstufe unterrichteten und lernten, in Bezug auf (1) die Durchführung des kommunikativen Ansatzes und ihres Englischunterrichts und (2) die Einbeziehung von kulturellen und interkulturellen Aspekten in den kommunikativen Ansatz und demzufolge in ihren Englischunterricht, zu erforschen. Der Schwerpunkt lag hierbei auf der Untersuchung der Entwicklung von interkultureller Kommunikationsfähigkeit, die in vielen Ländern ein sehr aktuelles Ziel im Fremdsprachenunterricht darstellt.

Eine Stichprobe von 83 Englischlehrern und 1049 Schülern in Deutschland, dem Iran, den Niederlanden und Schweden wurde ausgewählt und eine gemischte Forschungsmethode wurde verwendet, um Einblick in die Wahrnehmung des kommunikativen Ansatzes und seine kulturellen Komponenten durch Fragebögen für Lehrer und Schüler, und semi-strukturierte Interviews und zwei offene Fragen (nur Lehrer) zu gewinnen. SPSS für Windows wurde verwendet, um Frequenzen und Prozentsätze zu berechnen. Außerdem wurden Chi-Quadrat-Tests durchgeführt, damit die Meinungen der Befragten in jedem Land verglichen werden können. Die durch die Lehrerinterviews und offene Fragen gewonnenen Informationen wurden kodiert, kategorisiert und mit der konventionellen Inhaltsanalyse untersucht.

Die Ergebnisse zeigten, dass die Lehrer, trotz einiger Schwierigkeiten (z.B. Lernstile und Fertigkeiten der Schüler, nationale Prüfungen, Lehrpläne und Zeitdruck), eine positive Einstellung gegenüber dem kommunikativen Ansatz in ihren Klassenzimmern hatten. Europäische Lehrer hatten das Gefühl, dass der kommunikative Ansatz ein geeigneter Ansatz sei, während die iranischen Teilnehmer gegenteiliger Meinung waren. Es zeigte sich, dass es bei den Lehrern einige Missverständnisse bezüglich der Grundsätze des kommunikativen Ansatzes gab, und die Schüler immer noch eine positive Einstellung zur Lehrer Autorität und der ständigen Korrektur der Fehler durch ihre Lehrer hatten. Mit Ausnahme der niederländischen Schüler, hatte in dieser Stichprobe die Mehrheit der Schüler aller anderen Nationen eine positive Einstellung gegenüber ihrem Englischunterricht. In Bezug auf das zweite Ziel dieser Studie glaubt die Mehrheit der Lehrer, dass der kommunikative Ansatz hauptsächlich auf die Kultur der Zielländer, d.h. angloamerikanische Kontexte fokussiert ist, und er den Schülern helfen kann, ein interkulturelles Bewusstsein durch die Berücksichtigung ihrer eigenen Kultur, positive Einstellungen gegenüber den anderen, Fremdverstehen und ein Gefühl der Neugier zu entwickeln. Die Schüler, mit Ausnahme der niederländischen, sind ähnlicher Auffassung.

Die Ergebnisse dieser Studie geben einige Implikationen für Administratoren, politische Entscheidungsträger, Lehrpläne und Test Designer sowie für die Lehrerbildung bezüglich der Umsetzung des kommunikativen Ansatzes und der Integration von Kultur in den Sprachunterricht im Klassenzimmer. Ebenso werden Anregungen für weitere Forschung gegeben.

Stichwörter: kommunikativer Ansatz, subjektive Theorien der Lehrer und Schüler, interkulturelles Bewusstsein, Fremdsprachenkontexte

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I wish to express my deepest gratitude to my first supervisor, Prof. Dr. Engelbert Thaler, and my second supervisor, Prof. Dr. Christiane Fäcke, for their help, encouragement, constructive comments, and suggestions during the course of this study.

I should particularly like to thank Prof. Michael Byram, whose in-depth responses to my open-ended questions shed more light on the results obtained in this study.

I would like to extend my thanks to all schools, teachers and students participating in this study, without whose help and cooperation it would not have been possible to conduct the research, and my colleagues in the chair of TEFL at Augsburg University who offered their support in one way or another to help me in this endeavor.

My thanks are also due to the native speakers of Dutch, German and Swedish for the translation of the student questionnaires, Mr. Rob Raabe for proofreading the whole work as well as Ms. Stephanie Bajor and Ms. Stephanie Schaidt for proofreading the German sections and English translations.

I am especially grateful to the Graduate School, Prof. Dr. Gabriele Bickendorf and Dr. Stefan Hartmann, the international office, Dr. Sabine Tamm, as well as Women's Affairs Officer, Prof. Dr. Sabine Schwarze, of Augsburg University whose generous financial support helped me to carry out my study.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my family and my best friend Sara Vali for providing all their support and encouragement during the course of my studies, without which I could not have accomplished this research successfully.

Dedication

To my beloved parents, Sedigheh & Ali

To my dear brother, Bahman

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Graphs

Abbreviations Used

ALM (Audiolingual Method)

CBI (Content-Based Instruction)

CC (Communicative Competence)

CLT (Communicative Language Teaching)

DM (Direct Method)

EFL (English as a Foreign Language)

ELF (English as Lingua Franca)

ELT (English Language Teaching)

ESL (English as a Second Language)

FL (Foreign Language)

GTM (Grammar-Translation Method)

IC (Intercultural Competence)

ICC (Intercultural Communicative Competence)

L1 (First Language)

L2 (Second Language)

Non-NS (Non-Native Speaker)

NS (Native Speaker)

SL (Second Language)

TBI (Task-Based Instruction)

TBLT (Task-Based Language Teaching)

Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1. Background

The concept of language teaching methods has a long tradition in the field of English Language Teaching (ELT), and it has been affected by the rise and fall of different methods throughout its development (Richards & Renandya, 2002). One of the most conventional approaches or methods of Foreign Language (FL) and Second Language (SL) teaching is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which was developed during the 1960s and 1970s based on Hymes' (1972) and Canale and Swain's theories (1980) of language teaching, referred to as "Communicative Competence (CC)".

Following the drawbacks of the Audiolingual Method (ALM) as the dominant teaching method in the mid-1960s, a new tendency taking into account the functional and communicative aspects of language took hold in the field of language teaching and led to an emphasis on communicative rather than structural proficiency (Richards & Rogers, 2001). Thus, language teaching basically focused on a theory of language as communication with the goal of promoting what Hymes (1972) calls Communicative Competence. Hymes proposes this term as a reaction to Chomsky's theory of "Competence." According to Chomsky (1965, as cited in Brumfit & Johnson, 1979), the purpose of linguistic theory is to describe the abilities of the speaker to enable him/her to use grammatically correct sentences in a language. However, Hymes believes that this view of linguistic theory is totally superficial and suggests that linguistic theory should be seen as part of a general theory embracing communication and culture. Hymes states that in order for a speaker to be communicatively competent, she/he should know how to use the language appropriately in different situations (Wilkins, 1976; Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983; Richards & Rogers, 2001; Saville-Troike, 2003). In other words, the term CC refers to the learner's ability to use the target language linguistically and contextually in an effective and appropriate way (Usó-Juan & Martínez-Flor, 2008).

Hymes' theory of CC was developed by other theorists as well. Two of the best known were Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983), who broadened the concept of CC into four different competences, i.e. **grammatical competence, sociological competence, dis-**

course competence, and strategic competence. These theories were the origin of the Communicative Approach or CLT in the history of language education. Considering these four competences, CLT can be defined as a kind of method that aims at the development of language acquisition, at the same time fostering expression, understanding and negotiation of meaning (Kumaravadivelu, 1993). Thus, as Brown (1994) states, its main goal is to promote learners' communicative competence before linguistic competence by focusing on pragmatic, genuine, and functional use of the language while emphasizing fluency to make the students meaningfully involved. Within this framework, CLT has the following features:

1. Language is a system for the expression of meaning.
2. The primary function of language is to allow interaction and communication.
3. The structure of language reflects its functional and communicative uses.
4. The primary units of language are not merely its grammatical and structural features, but categories of functional and communicative meaning as exemplified in discourse (Richards & Rogers, 2001: 161).

The proponents of CLT believe that the main aim of language teaching is to promote learners' abilities to communicate with others, and to reach this goal, it is necessary to avoid overemphasizing grammar and formal structure (Widdowson, 1978; Littlewood, 1981). They claim that the main problem for learners is their inability to use the language appropriately (Widdowson, 1972). According to Littlewood (1981), many features of language learning can be realized through natural processes, which happen when the learner tries to use the language for communication. In other words, CLT was developed at that time to solve the problem of learners who may be grammatically competent, but are not able to communicate appropriately in different situations (Johnson, 1979). Thus, this approach went against the previous methods, which focused on structural/grammatical instruction, since, as Brumfit (1984: 27) says …

> […] language cannot be thought of solely as a system of formal elements without taking away its major functions. A description of language which is independent of its function is unlikely to have much value to teachers and students who are concerned with developing a capacity to exploit the functional possibility of a language.

In summary, the Communicative Approach or CLT suggests that target language-based communicative competence is necessary for FL learners to participate entirely in the target language culture. In order to make language learners communicatively competent, the tar-

get language culture and the native speakers are among the most important elements. Learners are supposed to acquire structural knowledge of the target language and at the same time be able to use these forms in various social situations appropriately, coherently, and strategically effectively. Hence, learning a FL means acquiring new cultural knowledge and views, reflecting those of target language culture and its speakers (Widdowson, 1994; Alptekin, 2002; Najafi Sarem, 2010).

Considering the principles of CLT, there is no doubt that in learning a second or a foreign language, beside linguistic knowledge, learners should be able to use various ways or strategies to communicate appropriately with others through the target language. However, the implementation of CLT is not easy as there is a need to understand the concept of communicative competence in diverse instructional settings (Kamiya, 2005; Celce-Murcia & Olshtain, 2005). According to Wesche and Skehan (2002: 208), communicative classrooms generally have the following characteristics:

1. Activities that require frequent interaction among learners or with other interlocutors to exchange information and solve problems;
2. Use of authentic (non-pedagogic) texts and communication activities linked to "real-world" contexts, often emphasizing links across written and spoken modes and channels;
3. Approaches that are learner-centered in that they take into account learners' background, language needs, and goals and generally allow learners some creativity and role in instructional decisions.

To realize these features, CLT may be structured around or comprise …

1. Instruction that emphasizes cooperative learning such as group and pair work;
2. Opportunities for learners to focus on the learning process with the goal of improving their ability to learn language in context;
3. Communicative tasks linked to curricular goals as the basic organizing unit for language instruction;
4. Substantive content, often school subject matter from non-language disciplines, that is learned as a vehicle for language development, as well as for its inherent value (Wesche & Skehan, 2002: 208).

Matching these features to different teaching contexts may not be a simple task for the FL teachers and practitioners since they always face some practical challenges which should be overcome before applying this approach. These challenges are …

- difficulties with classroom management, especially with large classes, and teachers' resulting fear that they may lose control;
- new organizational skills required by some activities such as pair or group work;
- students' inadequate language proficiency, which may lead them to use the mother tongue (or only minimal English) rather than trying to 'stretch' their English competence;
- excessive demands on teachers' own language skills, if they themselves have had limited experience of communicating in English;
- common conceptions that formal learning must involve item-by-item progression through a syllabus rather than the less observable holistic learning that occurs in communication;
- common conceptions that the teacher's role is to transmit knowledge rather than act as a facilitator of learning and supporter of autonomy;
- the negative 'washback' effect of public examinations based on pencil-and-paper tests which focus on discrete items and do not prioritize communication;
- Resistance from students and parents, who fear that important examination results may suffer as a result of the new approach (Littlewood, 2013: 5).

For example, in her survey on teachers' attitudes in the Asia-Pacific region, Butler (2011: 36) suggests some challenges in the implementation of some approaches like CLT and Task-Based Language Learning (TBLT) which include …

> (a) conceptual constraints (e.g., conflicts with local values and misconceptions regarding CLT/TBLT);
> (b) classroom-level constraints (e.g., various student and teacher-related factors, classroom management practices, and resource availability);
> (c) societal-institutional level constraints (e.g., curricula and examination systems).

Likewise, Scollon (1999) says that although the tenets and practices of CLT may seem to be natural in the West, some of them do not conform to the Chinese context and are in contrast with traditional beliefs and attitudes about teaching and learning in China. In a similar vein, Ellis (1996) poses questions about the compatibility of CLT with Vietnamese learners,

who believe in social uses of language since in Vietnam knowing and using the suitable linguistic forms in interpersonal interactions is extremely important.

Aside from these contextual factors, in some cases, reports even indicate a lack of success of this approach due to the inefficiency of the teachers themselves. For instance, in her study of 101 local secondary school teachers of English in Greece, Karavas-Doukas (1996) finds out that there are some problems concerning teachers' misunderstanding of the very nature of CLT. Her results reveal that even when using communicative textbooks, teachers are willing to go back to their old ways of teaching based on the traditional teacher-centered practices. CLT principles are rarely followed by teachers in the classroom and only limited traces of these principles have been found in syllabuses, lesson plans, and contents (Sze, 1992; Anderson, 1993; Ye, 2007; Christ & Makarani, 2009). This serves to highlight the importance of teachers' beliefs about language learning and teaching in influencing their decision making processes (Johnson, 1994; Richards, 1998).

Therefore, in spite of the popularity of CLT, several issues regarding this approach have been raised in view of its cultural imposition and appropriateness in different contexts (Tanaka, 2009), its lack of attention to the integration of culture in language teaching as well as the consideration of the native culture of the learners in the process of teaching the language (Crozet & Liddicoat, 1999). It has been suggested that although CLT tends to focus on norms of social interaction in a socio-cultural community, i.e. native speakers in the target culture, it does not pay attention to the varieties of interactional norms between socio-cultural groups (Laopongharn & Sercombe, 2009). In other words, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners should not only be communicatively competent in different situations, but they should also have the "ability to relate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts" (Bennett, Bennett, & Allen, 2003: 244). Therefore, the goal of FL teaching should be to: (a) help the learners to gain language and communicative competence and (b) develop Intercultural Competence (IC) since language and communication are two significant components of culture (Wei & Xiao-mei, 2009). As Wei (2005: 56) states, language is considered both as a means of communication as well as a culture. Language and culture cannot be considered in isolation.

Nowadays, because of the concept of globalization, the relationship between culture and language has become more and more important, and the goal of language learning has been shifted towards cultural learning and competence in serving multilingual communities and

global society (see Fantini, 1995, as cited in Fat, 2004). In a globalized world, people must be provided with the knowledge and skills to behave appropriately in a specific culture (Committee for Economic Development, 2006). However, communicative competence or CLT fails to consider the lingua franca status of English due to its strict faithfulness to Native Speaker (NS) norms within the target language culture. Today, English as an international language is considered as a common medium between many people in international interactions. In such situations, much communication in English includes non-native speaker-non-native speaker interactions. Therefore, teachers should try to make students ready for the encounters with not only the native speakers in English speaking countries, but also with the non-native speakers who speak English as a second or foreign language (Najafi Sarem & Qasemi, 2010). According to Mendes and Moreira (2005: 1) …

> Economic Internationalization as well as cultural globalization, increased mobility and ease of access to information constitute cultural and communicative challenges in today's world. The inevitability of encounter with otherness and the multiplicity of interactions this provokes, in which diverse discursive communities are constituted, place culture and communication at the centre of a fundamental process of redefinition of individual and social identities.

The concept of globalization and its effect on our interactions with others has a great influence on the nature of teaching and learning languages. Consequently, language learning should not only aim to develop communicative competence in a FL, which helps a learner to act linguistically, socio-linguistically, and with pragmatic appropriateness in a FL (Council of Europe, 2001), but also, it should consider Intercultural Competence (IC), which is "the ability of a person to behave adequately in a flexible manner when confronted with actions, attitudes and expectations of representatives of foreign cultures" (Meyer, 1991: 138). This definition enlarges the concept of CC to include IC. According to Byram (1997: 42), a successful interaction does not result from an effective exchange of information, which was the goal of CLT, but from "the ability to decentre and take up the other's perspective on their own culture, anticipating and where possible, resolving dysfunctions in communication and behavior." It is a way of increasing learners' capability to discuss meanings across languages and cultures and make them ready for living in this globalized world (Ho, 2009). From this international point of view, the NS is not considered as an ideal norm anymore, and is now replaced by a new model called the intercultural speaker (Kramsch, 1998). This means that a language learner should act as a kind of mediator between two cultures, interpret other in-

sights and viewpoints and examine taken-for-granted opinions and perceptions in his/her own society. Thus, CC is combined with IC to make ICC (Byram & Zarate, 1997).

In summary, nowadays, as Sercu (2005: 1-2) says …

> Bringing a foreign language to the classroom means connecting learners to a world that is culturally different from their own. Therefore, all foreign language educators are now expected to exploit this potential and promote the acquisition of intercultural competence in their learners. The objective of language learning is no longer defined in terms of the acquisition of communicative competence in a foreign language. Teachers are now required to teach intercultural communicative competence.

1.2. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Many factors paved the way for the motivation of this study, such as the importance of promoting ICC in language teaching, the popularity of CLT in language teaching classrooms, language teachers' opinions towards the strengths and weaknesses of CLT in view of cross-cultural awareness and its appropriateness in EFL contexts, and a lack of comparative studies concerning cultural and intercultural elements in CLT.

It is believed that teachers' beliefs and opinions can have a crucial impact on the selection of techniques, activities, and methods and even the application of a method in the classroom (Al-Mekhlafi, 2011). For example, Larsen-Freeman (2000: X) states …

> Any method is going to be shaped by a teacher's own understanding, beliefs, style, and level of experience. Teachers are not mere conveyer belts delivering language through flexible prescribed and proscribed behaviors; they are professionals who can, in the best of all worlds, make their own decisions.

According to Bandura and Sercu (2005), studies about teachers' beliefs have shown that teachers' insights have a direct influence on their teaching practice in the classroom. Teachers' individual and inherent theories of learning can be revealed in their day-to-day teaching. For example, "a language teacher who believes in the value of direct correction of oral mistakes will not wait until after a pupil has finished speaking to remark on any mistakes the pupil has made. A teacher who does not believe in the value of group work will prefer pair work, individual work, or whole class work to group work" (Bandura & Sercu, 2005: 75). Therefore, these theories and perceptions can strongly affect the way a teacher evaluates the new instructional goals and techniques (Henderson, 2002, as cited in Sercu, et al., 2005). Accordingly, teachers' ideas about CLT and its implementation in their classroom can be dif-

ferent as well. It has been suggested that since the concept of CLT is a Western idea and method, it may not fit into other contexts, especially EFL classrooms in non-Western cultural environments. Furthermore, there are a lot of misunderstandings regarding its theory and practice among EFL teachers. An overview on the literature of language teaching indicates that EFL teachers' attitudes, beliefs and practices towards CLT are different from each other based on how they understand its concept in their own contexts. The available evidence reveals that teachers often have deficient and inaccurate perceptions of the concept of CLT, and there are significant differences within teachers' understandings of CLT and between teachers and researchers (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006).

In a similar manner, Karavas-Doukas (1996: 187) states that "the few small-scale classroom studies that have been carried out seem to suggest that communicative classrooms are rare. While most teachers profess to be following a communicative approach, in practice they are following more traditional approaches." Moreover, Savignon (2002) confirms the fact that what teachers say does not often correspond to their classroom practice. These studies suggest that teachers may sometimes have to replace and modify the principles of the methods in order to adapt them to their own contexts and especially the needs of their learners since, as Mitchell (1994) suggests, in modern language teaching, the main concerns are to consider the needs and interests of the learners and to smooth the progress of learning. Within this framework, learners' opinions about teaching methods and approaches can also be effective in language education since as Savignon (1997: 107) maintains, "if all the variables in L2 acquisition could be identified and the many intricate patterns of interaction between learner and learning context described, ultimate success in learning to use a second language most likely would be seen to depend on the attitude of the learner." Thus, learners' perspectives towards learning cannot be overlooked, especially when there is a disparity between teachers' beliefs and learners' beliefs (Schulz, 1996). This discrepancy is also important in the context of instructional practices; for example, in a study by Savignon and Wang (2003: 283) on learners' views towards the instructional practices at their schools in Taiwan, the results show that there is "a mismatch between the needs and preferences of English language learners in Taiwan and their perceptions of instructional practice. Instructional practice in secondary schools is described as generally form-focused in nature;" however, "an analysis of attitudes toward English teaching and learning in general shows learner preference for a meaning-based approach." Thus, learners' perception about the effective-

ness of communicative practices in language learning should be considered as an essential factor in making pedagogical decisions (Savignon & Wang, 2003).

Against this background, although the Communicative Approach or CLT was adopted and disseminated by publishers, applied linguists, and language specialists all over the world, teachers did not always find it easy to apply, due to some contextual factors in different environments (Borg, 2009). In some situations, it was even considered as "cultural imperialism" since the focus of this approach and its accompanying materials is mostly on Britain and the United States of America (USA), where it was developed. Consequently, it is believed that the learners are obliged to accept and follow some practices and habits from these two countries instead of the 'correct ones' in their own contexts. This may hinder the establishment of a critical dialogue with the other culture (Richards & Rogers, 2001). In today's world, the purpose of language teaching is to encourage students to interact with other people and respect them. The aim, as Byram (1997) says, is to help the learners to become critical thinkers. Byram, Gribkova, and Starkey (2002) insist that teachers have a duty to develop this competence in students as much as knowledge about culture. To do so, teachers should pay attention to the students' own culture as well. In other words, the learners' native language and culture need to be considered and valued, while a positive attitude and feeling is encouraged towards the target culture (Peterson & Coltrane, 2003). Similarly, Clark (1990: 7, as cited in Agudelo, 2007) says that "competent teachers understand that positive self-concept and positive identification with one's culture is the basis for academic success."

On the other hand, in spite of the recommendations of European and national curricula for language teaching, language education and teachers are still focusing on the development of linguistic competence. However, knowing about grammar rules, vocabulary, and cultural information are not enough to help non-native speakers negotiate and interact in the FL. Additionally, native or native-like fluency alone will not suffice to make the non-native speakers communicate with people from other cultures successfully either. Unfortunately, studies indicate that cultural dimensions of language teaching are still not considered as important as the linguistic ones (Byram & Risager, 1999; Sercu, 2005). Language teachers continue to consider culture as subjects such as literature, geography, and arts. Although these kinds of cultural information are significant, there are other similarly essential components of culture that should be taken into account in SL and FL classrooms. Subjects such as literature, geography, history and arts are often considered as "civilization" or "big C" cul-

ture as opposed to the group of “little c” culture, which refers to the less visible and tangible elements, and are not usually taught as separate subjects in schools. However, Bennett (1997: 16) correctly states that “to avoid becoming a fluent fool, we need to understand more completely the cultural dimension of language.” In this sense, as Crozet and Liddicoat (1999) suggest, two important issues should be considered in any language teaching method: (1) the important link between language and culture and (2) the attention to the self and others, i.e. the local culture of the students and the target culture. These two concepts lead us to the development of ICC, which is considered as a crucial competence in today’s world.

Aside from this significant role of culture in language teaching, the contextual appropriateness and constraints of a teaching method also has an essential place in every setting. A method which can be successful in one environment may not necessarily be beneficial in another (Bax, 2003). As a result, before applying a method in a specific context, the first points to be considered should be the identification of key aspects of the setting and the implementation of a context analysis (Bax, 2003).

There have been many attempts to introduce the concept of CLT into EFL contexts either based on EFL countries’ own programs or through international projects. On the whole, such attempts have not met with great success (Brindley & Hood, 1990), and applying CLT has often proved challenging (Kirkpatrick, 1984; Sano, Takahashi, & Yoneyama, 1984; Gonzalez, 1985; Valdes & Jhones, 1991; Anderson, 1993; Ellis, 1994, 1996; Chick, 1996; Shamin, 1996). This raises several questions, for example: why is it sometimes difficult to use CLT in the EFL classroom? Is this approach appropriate for EFL contexts? Some experts believe that teachers’ perceptions about CLT and its norms can have a determining effect on its ultimate success or failure in a particular context (Kelly, 1980; Markee, 1997).

Because of the change in the goal of language learning towards cultural learning and competence, and the problem of EFL teachers in implementing CLT in their own contexts, a study into the cultural appropriateness of CLT to EFL learners and its claims of development of cultural awareness among them can shed light on the strengths and weaknesses of this approach in terms of incorporation of IC and its compatibility with different contexts, especially European ones. While many studies have been conducted into the appropriateness and implementation of CLT in Asian contexts, there is a lack of research concerning this issue in Europe, which may result from the idea that CLT is a Western Method and so fits easily into West Europe. However, some principles of this approach may not match such settings

due to some external limitations with regard to institutions and the learners' expectations or learning styles. In this vein, teachers' and learners' opinions—as two of the main factors in language classrooms—about this approach and its cultural elements can help researchers discover the advantages and disadvantages of CLT in this regard. For instance, in a study of students' beliefs in Hong Kong, Maclennan (1988: 66, as cited in Evans, 1997) finds that students support "a fairly authoritarian, structured approach" and expected "very little autonomy in relation to their learning." Maclennan concludes that "it appears likely that a discrepancy does exist between the students' preconceptions and expectations and the view of the teaching-learning situation held by teachers using a communicative approach" (Maclennan, 1988: 69, as cited in Evans, 1997). Likewise, concerning teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the psycholinguistic procedures in language learning, Mitchell (1988) states that many teachers still follow their traditional opinions and assumptions about language teaching in classroom: "for example, the provision of grammar explanations, and the correction of pupils' formal errors, were justified by many on the ground that they make a direct and significant contribution to the pupils' internalization of the target language system" (Mitchell, 1988: 45).

Hence, the purpose of this research is: **first**, to investigate teachers' ideas about: (1) the strengths and weaknesses of CLT regarding stimulating IC among their EFL learners, (2) the views of CLT towards the target culture and the learners' own culture, and finally (3) the applicability of CLT in their own context—where English is not considered as the first or second language of the society, and **second**, to explore EFL learners' attitudes towards their English language classrooms in view of the principles of CLT and cultural/intercultural issues. To achieve these aims, seven questions are posed to start the study. The questions are as follows:

Research Questions:

- What are the opinions of EFL teachers towards applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their own countries?
- According to EFL teachers, how does CLT give insight into the target language culture[1](s)?

[1] For pragmatic and methodological reasons, "target language culture" here means British and/or American cultures, where British culture refers to the culture of English people in England. In this way, Scottish and Welsh cultures are excluded and treated as other cultures in order to specify the scope of research in terms of target cultures/countries in CLT.

- From the perspective of EFL teachers, how does CLT pay attention to the concept of Intercultural Communicative Competence (ICC)?
- What are the EFL teachers' perceived problems in terms of presenting the target culture or other cultures[2]?
- When facing problems, what are the main strategies of EFL teachers in solving students' intercultural problems?
- What are the opinions of EFL learners about their English classes based on their needs and interests?
- What are the opinions of EFL learners about cultural and intercultural aspects of their English classes?

1.3. Scope of the Study

In this section, two important issues about the scope of the present research will be discussed in depth. The first issue deals with the delimitations and refers to those features which are controlled by the researcher to "limit the scope and define the boundaries of [the] study" (Simon, 2011: webpage), and the second is concerned with the limitations considered as external factors beyond the researcher's control which reduce the scope of the study.

1.3.1. Delimitations

The subjects used in this study are EFL teachers and students at the upper-secondary school level in the countries of Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, and Iran. The participants were chosen from the upper-secondary school level since according to the educational systems in the countries mentioned above, it was easier and more logical to compare the results at this level (see Chapter 3, Section 3.1). Additionally, the scope of this work was constrained to Bavaria in Germany since each German state has different curricula for teaching English at their schools, and this may cause difficulty in comparing the findings of the other three countries with Germany. To avoid this problem, the focus was on Bavaria in Germany.

Due to the main foci, the linguistic aspects of CLT, which was considered as one of the variables, were discussed only marginally and up to the point which is relevant to the concerns of this research. Moreover, this study was limited to teachers' and learners' opinions in general, and no attention was paid to the concept of gender differences in order to nar-

[2] "Other cultures" here means the cultures of countries other than England and America (US).

row down the scope of the current research. Thus, one must be cautious when drawing general conclusions.

1.3.2. Limitations

Like all other human endeavors, this research is not without its shortcomings. One of the limitations encountered in the study was the number of schools in each country. This research is limited to 14 schools—Germany (3 schools), the Netherlands (3 schools), Sweden (4 schools), and Iran (4 schools)—and their English teachers and students at upper-secondary school level who agreed to participate in this project. In addition to schools, the number of teachers in the Netherlands, which is lower than other countries, was also among one of the limitations. The sample size did not consist of an equal balance of teachers in the countries mentioned above. This may be due to the lack of some of the Dutch teachers' and schools' interest to participate in such studies. One of their main reasons was their shortage of time and their heavy workload during the school year. Therefore, no generalization can be made regarding the results in these four countries. The ideas and opinions were limited to the scope of this research, and as a result they are not representative of the teachers' and students' opinions in each country.

A further limitation was related to the school system in Iran. In the Iranian educational system, CLT is not applied as a teaching approach at state schools; thus, teachers and students who were teaching and studying at such schools could not be selected as subjects in this study. The subjects were chosen from private English institutes where CLT is used as a teaching method. As a result, the number of Iranian students is smaller than in the other countries since private institutes do not have the same number of students as in state schools. However, the students' (upper-secondary) level was controlled in this setting in order to have a comparative view towards the findings obtained. In other words, those students who were studying at the upper-secondary school level were also selected as the subjects in the English institutes.

1.4. Structure of the Thesis

On the whole, this work consists of five different chapters. The first chapter, entitled Introduction, includes: (a) a general overview on the origin of CLT and its characteristics and problems, (b) a brief background about the necessity of teaching culture and emergence of

ICC, and (c) a glimpse into the aims, research questions, limitations, delimitations, and abbreviations used in this study. Following this section, the second chapter—a Review of Literature—which includes two sub-sections, i.e. CLT and Culture, tries to provide a perspective and overview of the main foci in the work, i.e. CLT, culture teaching, and ICC reviewing the related literature. The method, participants, instruments, and data analysis procedures are presented in detail in the following chapter. Chapter 4 then goes on to deal with results, discussions, and interpretations, and finally the conclusion as well as future research suggestions complete chapter 5.

Based on this structure, in the next chapter the literature will be reviewed in terms of CLT, culture and language, and ICC, which constitute the focus of the present work.