

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SELECTION OF TEACHING  
METHODS IN AN EFL CONTEXT

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A THESIS

Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages - Master of Arts

2017

## **ABSTRACT**

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This study investigates the factors influencing the selection of English language teaching methods in a Nepalese EFL context. The Secondary Education Curriculum (grades 8, 9, and 10) of Nepal developed by Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education, prescribes communicative language teaching (CLT) in an English language classroom. However, in most of the cases, teachers experience difficulties in implementing learner centered teaching techniques due to several factors prevailing inside and outside the classrooms. Therefore, sometimes they practice methods other than CLT to teach English.

This study surveyed those aspects, influencing the teachers' selection of teaching methods in a Nepalese EFL setting. It also explored the perceived difficulties of English language teachers in the course of implementing CLT along with the strategies that the teachers have been practicing to overcome the existing problems in their English classrooms.

The data were obtained online from the English language teachers in Nepal by employing a questionnaire and a semi-structured Skype interview guideline as research tools. The information collected was reviewed and analyzed quantitatively as well as qualitatively. The findings of this research will help the policy makers and program developers in the Ministry of Education, Nepal to better understand the existing school level English language teaching (ELT) situation.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the English language teachers in Nepal who participated in this research study and provided me with valuable data without which this study would not have been possible. I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to my thesis supervisor and my professor Dr. Paula Winke for her constant guidance and advice throughout my MA TESOL journey and throughout this study. I am thankful to my academic advisor and my professor Dr. Charlene Polio, the second reader of my thesis, for her suggestions on the draft of this document. I acknowledge the direct and indirect support that I received from my professor Dr. Debra Hardison throughout the MA TESOL program and firsthand information from her on research methodology.

I am thankful to the College of Arts and Letters for providing me with the fund for this study. I will not miss this opportunity to thank my husband, Ram for his great support and for creating a favorable study environment throughout my MA TESOL program. My hearty thanks go to my son, Abhi for all his patience during my study. I would like to remember my inspiring and encouraging family members and friends for their direct and indirect support during my stay in the U.S.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES .....	vi
LIST OF FIGURES .....	vii
INTRODUCTION .....	1
CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW .....	2
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) .....	2
Barriers to CLT .....	3
Large Classroom .....	6
Washback .....	9
Teacher Cognition .....	11
Selecting Appropriate Methodology .....	14
Factors Influencing the Selection of Teaching Methods in an EFL Context .....	15
Research Context: ELT Situation in Nepal .....	18
Introduction .....	18
ELT Curriculum .....	19
Student Assessment .....	20
Teacher Preparation .....	20
CLT in the Context of Nepal .....	21
Research Questions .....	22
CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY .....	23
Method .....	23
Participants .....	23
Tools .....	23
Procedure .....	25
CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION .....	26
Factors Influencing the Selection of Teaching Methods in Nepalese EFL Context .....	26
Problems Perceived by the Teachers in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching .....	32
Strategies Practiced to Overcome the Problems .....	36
CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY OF RESULTS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION .....	38
Summary of Results .....	38
Discussion .....	39
Recommendations .....	40
Conclusion .....	42
APPENDICES .....	44
Appendix A: Questionnaire .....	45
Appendix B: Semi-structured Online Interview Guidelines .....	50

REFERENCES ..... 51

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1: Background Information of the Participants of the Study.....	24
Table 2: Problems Experienced by the Teachers in a Large Size Classroom.....	33

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1: Factors Influencing the Selection of Teaching Methods in Nepalese EFL Context.....	27
Figure 2: Problems Perceived by English Language Teachers in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching.....	32

## INTRODUCTION

The school level (Grade 1-12) curriculum of Nepal introduced English as a compulsory foreign language in 2001, and it has been compulsory since then. The curriculum prescribes communicative language teaching (CLT) as a method to teach English. A syllabus has been designed with an intent to develop communicative competence among the learners. The textbooks and teachers' guide are prepared, and the teachers are trained so as to achieve the goals of CLT. Despite the government initiatives most of the teachers are still unable to practice CLT in a real sense as they are influenced by several contextual factors (Adhikari, 2010; Karki, 2014, Khatri, 2010). The curriculum may not always be implemented in the way the curriculum designers intended (Orafi & Borg, 2009).

Although teachers in several Asian-Pacific countries (Chang, 2011) and East-Asian countries (Littlewood, 2007) have tried to employ CLT in a foreign language classroom in recent years, researchers have reported that a gap exists between ELT policy documents and the real practice of teaching and learning of English. This policy-teaching gap has been identified by the authors of several studies (Cook, 2010, Hu, 2005; Roy, 2016; Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006; Zhang & Liu, 2014).

Teaching English in an EFL context, especially in inadequately equipped and under-resourced classrooms where the learners have minimal exposure to English, is a demanding task. Teachers are required to consider the classroom reality and are guided by contextual factors around them while trying to implement CLT (Roy, 2016). Internal and external aspects such as classroom size, availability of authentic resources, technology, the national assessment system, teacher training and education, and teacher's beliefs have a strong influence on how the teacher performs inside a classroom (Jafari, Sokrapour, & Gutterman, 2015; Mustafa, 2001). Unfortunately, most influencing factors are beyond the teachers' control, so the teachers find it really challenging to overcome the problems created by the external factors. In this study, I investigate the factors exerting a significant impact on instructional practices in compulsory English classrooms in Nepal.

## CHAPTER 1: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative language teaching, a language teaching method that has attracted the attention of teachers and educators all over the world, has become a buzzword frequently mentioned in the field of second and foreign language learning (Brown, 2007; Liu, 2015). Scholars around the world have been involved in discussing, reviewing, and improving CLT since its conception, while many textbooks have been written and syllabi designed based on this method (Ju, 2013). As noted by Mitchell and Myles, (2004, p. 3) CLT is a dominant language teaching method in many parts of the world because communicative competence is the goal of foreign language learning.

Hymes (1971) employed the term *communicative competence* in reaction to the notion of *competence* that Chomsky proposed (Liu, 2015; Savignon, 2007). Hymes (1971) wrote that, - “being able to communicate requires more than linguistic competence; It requires communicative competence – knowing when and how to say what to whom” (as cited in Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011, p.115). The communicative method considers fluency as an important dimension of communication, and learning as a process of creative construction involving trial and errors. CLT comprises the effective characteristics of other pre-existing methods (Brown, 2007). According to Lee and Van Patten (2003, p.10), one of the significant changes introduced by CLT is the role of an instructor from a “drill leader” to “an opportunity provider” for communication.

CLT provides students with more opportunities for language practice and ensures their active participation in language learning, involving them in activities such as pair work, group work, role-plays, information gap tasks, and language games. Constant learner and teacher motivation is likely to determine the success of CLT and will compensate for several limitations of this approach to language teaching (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) provide the following characteristics of CLT:

1. Authentic language should be introduced whenever possible.

2. The target language is vehicle for classroom communication.
3. Games are important because they have certain features in common with real communicative events- there is a purpose to the exchange.
4. Having students work in small groups maximizes the amount of communicative practice they receive.
5. Errors are tolerated and seen as a natural outcome of the development of communicative skills.
6. Students' accuracy as well as fluency is evaluated.
7. The teacher acts as a facilitator in setting up communicative activities and as an advisor during the activities.
8. Students work on all four skills from the beginning.

### **Barriers to CLT**

Once the education authorities adopt CLT for the foreign language curriculum, they become keen to know what teachers understand about CLT and how well the teachers have incorporated this approach into their foreign language teaching already (Razmjoo & Riazi, 2006). Communicative competence has been the goal of foreign language learning, and CLT has been considered as a dominant language teaching method, in many parts of the world as noted by Mitchell and Myles, (2004, p.3). However, CLT's relevance in the foreign language teaching context, especially in inadequately equipped, crowded classrooms driven by grammar- based tests, has been questioned by many researchers. Although the past few decades witnessed the development and popularity of CLT in the world, and even though several countries have widely adopted a communicative curriculum, the implementation aspect of CLT in some countries cannot be considered satisfactory (Eroz & Azamat, 2016; Ju, 2013). As a result, CLT has been accused of being a method developed by native speakers and one not able to suit foreign language-teaching contexts.

Most foreign and second language teachers are aware of CLT and of their personal roles in supporting a communicative classroom. But on the other hand, several studies (Abe, 2013; Chang, 2011; Cook, 2010; Liu, 2015 ; Orafi & Borg, 2009; Roy, 2016; Zhang & Liu, 2013) have shown that foreign language teachers are often unable to implement CLT satisfactorily for various reasons. Most of these studies were conducted in a Chinese EFL context. These studies were related to the implementation of CLT and focused on the challenges encountered by teachers in the foreign language classrooms and the perception of the teachers as well as the students towards communicative language teaching.

Butler (2011) identified several challenges encountered in Asian contexts while teachers try to implement CLT. Butler categorized those challenges as (a) conceptual constraints (e.g., conflicts with local values and misconceptions regarding teaching learning) (b) classroom-level constraints (e.g., various student and teacher-related factors, classroom management practices, number of students, and resource availability) and (c) societal- institutional level constraints (e.g., curricula and examination systems). According to her, in large classes of often unmotivated learners, there is an avoidance of English. She summarized that in an EFL setting, CLT's incompatibility with public assessment demands, and its conflict with educational values and traditions, act as powerful barriers to CLT in East Asian education systems.

Ellis (1996) pointed out a few reasons for which CLT is often not very successful in EFL settings, while it is successfully implemented in ESL settings. According to him, ESL is integrative, in the sense that it is designed to help language learners function in the target-language speaking community with little or no curricular demands or pressure of examinations. On the contrary, EFL is a part of a rigorous school curriculum and, therefore, is influenced by several contextual factors such as school management, national curricula, assessment requirements, teachers' language proficiency, and the availability of teaching resources. The unsuccessful implementation of CLT can be most often attributed to these factors in those contexts. Ellis also examined the role of the teaching-learning culture, particular pedagogical practices, and teacher-student relationships in the implementation of the communicative approach to

language teaching in the Eastern and Western contexts. As he summarized, CLT may not be suitable in a context, unless it is culturally familiar and accepted.

Liu (2015) presented four possible reasons behind the failure of CLT in China: 1. Students misconceive CLT. They think that CLT does not guarantee sufficient grammar knowledge and that is in contrast with their goal of learning English, that is, to pass standardized grammar-based examinations. 2. The communicative activities performed inside the classroom have little resemblance with the situation they encounter outside the classroom. 3. Students are unable to maintain the balance between communicative competence and linguistic competence 4. There is a lack of authentic materials available to Chinese students in an EFL situation, and those materials are needed for CLT tasks and activities. Similarly, Hu (2002) identified sociocultural factors as the most influential barriers to the adoption of CLT in the Chinese classroom. Those factors included a Chinese culture of teaching and learning grammar and vocabulary, and a traditional perception about the roles and responsibilities of teachers and students, which resembles a more Socratic method of learning (which is when the teacher holds the knowledge, students receive the knowledge, and only teachers ask individual question in class). These factors are in conflict with CLT in several respects.

Nishino and Watanabe (2008) discussed the inhibiting role of contextual factors in the implementation of communicative approaches in the Japanese classroom. According to them, less exposure to the English language, the Japanese tradition of teacher-centered instruction, and English sections of high school or university entrance exams focusing on reading comprehension and a large number of (30 to 40) students in public secondary schools may not be the optimal conditions for communicative approaches. Some classroom, school, and society related factors, such as long entrenched national exam systems, large-size classrooms, lack of authentic resources, and school management/environment can be barriers to implementing CLT effectively in an EFL context (Eroz & Azamat, 2016).

Despite all these challenges observed in many EFL setting, ELT practitioners are still striving to successfully implement CLT in the hopes that ELT situation will improve in their respective countries

(Li, 1998). As put forward by Ju (2013), challenges such as cultural conflicts and teacher training in the application of CLT in certain countries are continually discussed and CLT will not perform satisfactorily in a language classroom unless it is combined with the characteristics seen in such countries. These characteristics, according to Ju, are things like large-sized teaching environments (that is classroom with 60 or more students), educational backgrounds that do not include training in CLT, teaching culture in which more Socratic methods are the norm, and the test systems that are set at the national level and include the learning of language as object.

The large classroom and negative washback are often perceived as major barriers to CLT in an English classroom.

### **Large Classroom**

There is no common understanding of how many students form a large classroom. According to Ur (2005), the idea of *large* is relative and the concept of *large class* differs from one context to another. Ur further wrote that in some private language schools a group of 20 students may be considered large, in other settings a classroom with 40 to 45 students may be taken as a large class, whereas in some places a class beyond 100 students may be considered to be a large classroom. The practitioners from different pedagogical contexts define a *large classroom* in distinctive ways. Therefore, even within the same country, teachers' perception of *large class* may differ based on the educational context and the level (Shamim, Negash, Chuku, & Demewoz, 2007). As exemplified by Shamim et al., a large class in the Western contexts such as the United Kingdom or in the United States may be considered small by both teachers and students in most teaching learning contexts in Africa, and thus a large class can vary from 24 in the United States elementary school to up to 150 in an African classroom.

A class can be considered large when the teacher finds it challenging to address the needs of the individual student due to their number present in the classroom (Charleston, 1976). As stated by Benbow, Mizrachi, Olive & Said-Moshiro, (2007), a classroom can be called a large classroom if the student-teacher ratio exceeds 40 to 1 and in such classrooms, conditions are common, particularly in the

developing countries, where the student number in the class reaches upto 100 or beyond that. Teachers around the globe are facing several challenges while attempting to teach in overcrowded classes.

According to Sharndama (2013), a large class is one that has more students than the recommended class size, more students than learning materials and physical structures, prevents the teacher from working as expected, and hampers students' learning.

The teacher's performance and the students' learning is severely affected in extremely overpopulated classrooms (Sharndama, 2013). The teacher has to spend valuable class time in controlling the noise and student disruptions rather than focusing on teaching learning activities in the large classes. In such crowded classes, the individual student is buried (Abioye, 2010) in the sense that the teacher tries to interact with the students from diverse sociocultural background and learning abilities using the same instructional technique because it is difficult for the teacher to provide for the individual learning needs and aspirations of each student, and all at the same time. Although the students are highly motivated to learn a language, inadequate learning materials, and over-crowded classes may contribute to creating an unfavorable learning environment.

Throughout the world, and especially in the developing countries, English language teachers have been dealing with the large classes (Watson, 2006). The situation is similar in the classrooms of Nepal. The class of 40 to 50 students seems common in the government-aided schools in Nepal (Adhikari, 2010). Large classes do not exist accidentally in the Nepalese and in similar other contexts. As Sharndama (2013) noted, financial constraints, lack of space, materials, and qualified teachers compel the government and school administrators to run large classes where the teachers have no training in how to use methods other than the lecture method, with little emphasis on collaboration, exploring, and sharing of ideas. Although large classes are disliked, such classes certainly exist in many EFL settings and educators cannot get rid of this problem easily (Nan, 2014).

Khatri (2010) pointed out that large multilevel classes is one of the major challenges to ELT in Nepal where the majority of classrooms consist of mixed level students with different needs and learning styles. This type of heterogeneity is likely to enrich classroom interaction on one-hand and challenge the

teachers' resourcefulness on the other. Dealing with a large class is not an easy task for a teacher. Ives (2000) presented a list of challenges that the teachers experience in such class.

1. Management of the paperwork: handing out, collecting, and recording tests and other assignments, make-up work
2. Management of distractions: talking, late arrivals, early departures
3. Perceived anonymity of the students: difficulty of learning names, of taking attendance, of getting students to come to class, of getting students to participate in class, of getting students to do assignments in a timely manner
4. Lack of flexibility in class activities: difficulty in varying activities, in doing group work, in enhancing critical thinking and writing skill
5. Diverse background and preparation of the students.

Similarly, Ur (2005) described that it is difficult for teachers to handle disciplinary problems, correct written work, keep students motivated, ensure effective learning, find suitable materials, track individual progress, and ensure participation. These are the major challenges for teachers in a large class. In a study about Thai teachers' perception about large classes, Jimakorn & Singhasiri (2006) found that teaching the large classes was perceived as a challenging job by teachers as they experienced difficulty in several aspects such as maintaining a relationship with their students, monitoring students' activities and progress, and giving feedback and assessments. The teachers find it challenging to be familiar with the students and to address the mixed ability students (Nikam, 2016; Ramjibhai, 2012).

Practitioners have suggested some strategies to cope with the above-mentioned problems that a teacher may encounter in a large classroom. Khati (2010) recommended creating a collaborative working atmosphere, providing a variety of works, and making all students involved in various activities appropriate for different levels as some of the alternatives that the teachers can try out in a large heterogeneous class. Likewise, Harmer (1998) suggested the teachers use student leaders as one of the strategies to manage an overcrowded classroom. Although the job of teaching a large language class is

demanding, pedagogical planning, preparation, proper classroom management and handling, and monitoring of students' behavior can help (Nikam, 2016). While large classrooms seem to be an unavoidable feature of the developing countries, teaching and learning in such contexts can still be improved by building the capacity of the teachers and school leaders to cope with this environment (Benbow et al., 2007).

### **Washback**

Studies emphasizing the uses, impact, and consequences of tests in educational, social, political and economic contexts is common (Shohamy, 2001). Several studies carried out in the area of language testing (Khaniya 2005, Luxia, 2005; ; Qi, 2005; Smith, 1991; Wall, 2000; Wall & Alderson, 1993; Winke, 2011;) have discussed the impact of examinations on teaching, learning, and broader social context. The influence that the tests exert on teaching and learning is referred to as *washback*. Following Alderson & Wall (1993), the term “washback” that refers to “influence” of a test on teaching and learning, is commonly used in language teaching and testing literature. Washback as described, functions as the powerful determiner of what happens in the classroom, and the teachers and learners do things they would not necessarily do because of the test.

Khaniya (2005, p. 56) viewed washback as an “inherent attribute of examination” that can influence the teaching and learning methods. He further wrote that the concept of washback which originally had negative connotations, later emerged as “washback validity” which is considered to be one of the most important criteria for a good examination. As noted by Xie & Andrews (2013), among the studies carried out on washback, many of them stressed the detrimental impacts of the standardized language tests on teaching and learning. She noted an excessive practice of testing that restrains the classroom goal of improving language ability.

When important educational and professional decisions such as admission, graduation, employment, or promotion are made based on test results, such tests are considered high-stakes tests (Muñoz & Álvarez, 2010 ). The impact of a high-stakes test is so influential that the test result is

considered a determiner of the test taker's life chances (Crooks, 1998). The results of high-stakes tests such as public examinations, large-scale standardized tests, or the external examinations reach far beyond the classroom and are used for policy purposes: assessing educational equity; providing evidence on school and effectiveness; allocating compensatory funds to school districts; evaluating effectiveness; accrediting school districts; classifying students for remediation and certifying successful completion of high school (Airasian & Madaus, 1983).

Test results are the tools that exert serious influence not only on the individuals but also on the programs because important decisions about the education system and the program are made based on the test results. These decisions have either negative or positive impact on the administrators, teachers, and students (Shohamy, Donitsa-Schmidt & Ferman, 1996). Due to this fact, these tests most often determine the teachers' preferences and the content covered in the classroom. The research evidence suggests that teachers select the content areas to be discussed in the classroom and the teaching learning activities based on the test tasks (Khaniya, 1990; Smith, 1991).

Because the reputation of the teachers and the schools can be strengthened or weakened with the publication of test results, there may be negative consequences such as test anxiety in the classroom (Wall, 2000). Following Abioye (2010), although only the students take tests, the teacher is also being tested by such tests in the sense that the aim of the test is to assess the extent to which the student achieved the instructional goals. This is one of the main reasons why teachers want students to perform their best in the tests; because the test scores are used to evaluate the teachers.

Nearly 27 years ago, Khaniya (1990) stated that in Nepal, the external examination (SLC) administered at the end of grade 10 had a great influence on English language teaching and learning. Although the curriculum has been revised multiple times and the SLC examination has now been replaced by SEE (Secondary Education Examination) in Nepal, the test impact on classroom practice still remains unchanged. According to Hamp-Lyons (1997), when a test of communicative competence includes a high portion of decontextualized grammar, teachers may be more concerned with the grammar topics instead of helping their students improve their language proficiency. This is what Luxia (2005) referred to

*teaching to the test content* where the teaching content centers on what the teachers believe is measured by the test, allowing a negative washback to be realized.

Smith (1991) carried out a qualitative study on the effect of external testing on teachers in the elementary schools in Arizona. The interview data revealed that the teachers were anxious regarding their students' performance in an external examination and its consequences. They considered their student's low performance in such examinations as a matter of shame and guilt. The classroom observation showed that this sort of test anxiety resulted in teaching to the test as teachers were found discarding the content areas not tested by the tests. Smith used the term *narrowing of curriculum* to describe this practice. A well-designed test facilitates good teaching while a poorly designed one tempts teachers and learners into test practices that ignore the long-term learning goals (Green, 2013). A good examination is required not only to remain neutral (not exert a negative influence) but also to exert a beneficial influence on teaching and learning. Therefore, it would be wise to use exams in such a way that they contribute to enhancing learning achievement (Khaniya, 2005, p. 57).

### **Teacher Cognition**

Research interest in language pedagogy has now shifted from an observable teacher behavior to a focus on language teachers' thinking, beliefs, planning, and decision-making process (Fang, 1996). Following Richards (2008), teacher cognition, an important component of foreign and second language teacher education, comprises the mental lives of teachers, how these are formed, what they consist of, and how teachers' beliefs, thoughts and thinking processes shape their understanding of teaching and their classroom practices. Borg (2003) defined teacher cognition as “what teachers think, know, and believe and the relationships of these mental constructs to what teachers do in the language-teaching classroom” and “an inclusive term to embrace the complexity of teachers' mental lives”.

The act of teaching is much more than delivering the knowledge and skills to the learners. As Richards (2008) described, teaching from the perspective of teacher cognition, is a complex cognitively driven process influenced by the setting of the classroom, instructional goals, the learners' motivations,

learners' participation, and the teacher's management of critical moments during a lesson. The terms *teacher cognition* and *teacher belief* have been found used synonymously in the available literature.

Beliefs are the consciously or unconsciously held propositions serving as a guide to one's thought and behavior (Borg, 2001). They are the best indicators of the decisions teachers make in their profession as well as the strongest factors through which we can predict their teaching behavior (Pajares, 1992). According to Basturkmen et al. (2004), beliefs are the assertions that the teachers make about their ideas, thoughts, and knowledge and are expressed as evaluations of what should be done, and what is preferable. All the teachers hold their own beliefs regarding education, teaching, learning, schooling, their profession, their students, subject matter, and their roles and responsibilities (Borg, 2003).

As described by Richards (1998), the belief system that is constructed over time is a primary source of teachers' pedagogical practices and is comprised of the information, attitudes, values, expectations, principles, and assumptions about teaching and learning that teachers have. Several factors contribute to form a teacher's beliefs. The determining role of teachers' beliefs in instructional practices in a language classroom has been well documented (e.g. Pajares, 1992; Sato & Kleinsasser, 2004; Borg, 2006; Li, 2013). The belief system that the teachers hold has a *filtering effect* (Clark & Peterson, 1986, p. 283) on the instructional decisions they take and the activities they perform. Such a belief system is shaped by a number of factors including schooling, professional coursework, contextual factors, and the classroom (Borg, 2003). Another important source of origin of teacher beliefs is experiences from teacher education programs (Vibulphol, 2004).

Among the beliefs that the teacher possesses, some are found to be relatively stronger than the others. Kane, Sandretto and Heath (2002) claimed that the ease with which a teacher can change his or her beliefs is related to the strength of those beliefs; the stronger the beliefs of the teachers are grounded in their personal experience, the more highly they are resistant to change. A number of studies have been carried out to find out the impact of teachers' beliefs on their classroom practices and the degree of correspondence that exists between the teachers' beliefs and their classroom performance (e.g. Andrews, 2001; Canh, 2011; Ezzi, 2012; Nishino, 2008; Phipps & Borg, 2009; Yook, 2010; Zheng; 2013).

The studies have come up with mixed results regarding the degree of consistency between language teachers' beliefs and the teachers' real classroom practices. As noted by Zheng (2013), the relationship between the beliefs and classroom practices vary from being consistent to very inconsistent because the teachers' claim of using communicative approaches are often not supported by observations of their practice.

As described by Tamimy (2015), it has always been a thought-provoking question why there exist the discrepancies between what teachers believe to be appropriate for language teaching and their actual performance in their classes. This topic has been challenging enough to attract researchers' attention in the area of teacher cognition. Contextual factors play a significant role when it comes to putting the beliefs into practice (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Zheng, 2013).

Tamimy (2015) carried out a case study in an Iranian context to investigate the reflection of teachers' beliefs in their classroom practices and traced the factors impeding the transfer of beliefs into practices. He interviewed five EFL teachers to identify their beliefs about language teaching and also observed their classroom practices. The study clearly showed the inconsistencies between the teachers' beliefs and real class practices. Teaching experience was observed to be the dominant factor affecting the degree of inconsistency. The teachers reported socio-culturally heterogeneous learners, lack of resources, time constraint, and washback as the other factors impeding the transfer of their beliefs into practice in an EFL classroom.

Borg (2003) reviewed 64 studies about teacher cognition published between 1976 and 2002 and came up with the conclusion that the reviewed studies were largely qualitative. He also identified two curricular areas: grammar and literacy instruction were emphasized by most of these studies, and most of the studies were carried out in an ESL context with small group of motivated adult learners. Borg urged the researchers for further research in school settings (primary and secondary) and in difficult circumstances where languages are taught by non- native teachers to large classes of learners. Borg also suggested researchers investigate the role of contextual factors that shape what language teachers, do. Similarly, after reviewing 15 studies carried out in the area of teacher cognition, Basturkmen (2012)

concluded that there exists more consistency in the belief and classroom practices of more experienced teachers than novice teachers.

### **Selecting Appropriate Methodology**

The literature available on language teaching and learning offers insights on several methods and techniques, however, selecting the most appropriate ones among them may be somewhat daunting (Waters, 2009). According to Adamson (2004), despite the claims of proponents of some methods, there is no consensus among the practitioners on the best or right way to teach a language. Individual differences of the learners and specific learning context make teaching unique each time. Highlighting the uniqueness of each learner, teacher, and the learning context, Brown (2007, p.18-19) suggested that in absence of a single method to guarantee the success, it is the responsibility of a teacher to understand this uniqueness and select an appropriate method or methods.

Holliday (1994, p.68) described that a potentially appropriate and culture sensitive English language teaching methodology is continually adaptable to whatever social situation emerges. The key issue debated over the century regarding the selection of language teaching method is the balance of grammar and communication in a language classroom. (Liu, 2004). Language teachers sometimes are found to be strictly inclined to a particular ideology at all the circumstances.

Larsen-Freeman & Anderson (2011, p.228) reminded teachers that the methods themselves are decontextualized because they deal with what, how, and why, but say little or nothing about who/whom, when, and where. Therefore, is not wise to pick up one method as a super method. Littlewood (2007) also emphasized the idea that no single method is designed to suit all the teachers and the learners in all the contexts. Different methods are designed to suit specific contexts. Thus, language professionals need to be sensitive to sociolinguistic context and the learners and select the methods that complement the social reality (McKay & Rubdy, 2009, p.23). In a similar vein, Bax (2003) claimed that context and contextual factors are high priorities for many teachers and material developers.

Liu (2004) stated that one who aspires to be a good language teacher needs to know what has or has not worked for whom in what context. According to Nguyen, Warren, & Fehring (2014), it would be wise to determine teaching or a method after having a good understanding of how the learners learn, instead of searching one ideal method. There are claims and arguments going on for each of the methods because no single method can address the needs of all the learners in all the contexts. For these reasons, it seems appropriate to adapt the methods and make sure that the teacher and the student play an active role in choosing them, sustained by continuous motivation (Mitariu, 2016).

### **Factors Influencing the Selection of Teaching Methods in an EFL Context**

Language teachers' selection of a particular teaching method or practice over the others in a foreign language teaching context is influenced by several factors. Research studies on teaching English in foreign language learning context (e.g., Basturkmen et al., 2004, Zheng & Borg, 2014) have come up with the finding that in most of the cases, the choice of teaching methods and strategies is generally shaped either by teacher cognition based on their own experience, or contextual factors such as curriculum, classroom setting, interest of language learners, time pressure, assessment system, and availability of the resources.

Most teachers teach as they do because of their belief that the methods adopted are effective for their purpose (Hayes, 2009). For example, some teachers may still prefer and practice traditional methods like the Grammar-Translation method because of their belief that this method can be useful and appropriate for certain groups of learners. Their own language learning and teaching experience, cultural values of the society, as well as the constraints and opportunities surrounding them help shape such beliefs.

Teaching decisions are likely to be strongly influenced by the contextual factors as well. Ur (2013), mentioned that some key factors underlying teaching decisions include the nature of the target learner population, expectations and/or demands of stakeholders, upcoming examinations or assessment procedures, and the individual teacher's own preferences, strengths, and weaknesses. One of the

contextual factors often been mentioned by the researchers (e.g. Chang, 2011; Liu, 2004; Zheng & Borg, 2014) to have a strong influence on classroom practices, is the examination system prevailing in an EFL context.

The mismatch between what the curriculum intends to develop and what the examination system intends to assess creates a real confusion among the teachers and constrains their choices of teaching methods. Green (2013) maintained that an inclination with test formats leads to tedious, less effective classroom activities. There has been a wide discussion about teachers' perception about implementing learner-centered instructional practices, and the problems experienced in an EFL context. Adhikari (2010) conducted a study on Nepalese English language teacher's perception of CLT and its implementation in Nepalese secondary schools using questionnaire and interview as data collection tools. The study revealed that secondary school English teachers in Nepal have a basic understanding of CLT and they are enthusiastic about implementing CLT in English language classes but they are constrained by the factors such as very limited in-service training, large classroom size, limited teaching materials, and excessive teaching hours assigned to them.

In an attempt to find out English language teaching trends and practices in Southeast Asia, Renandya, Lee, Wah, and Jacobs (1999) conducted a survey in which a sample of 212 English teachers from 10 Asian countries participated by responding to a set of questionnaire. The participants' responses indicated that although the Asian English teachers were moving towards learner-centered approaches to teaching, their assessment practices remained somewhat traditional.

Hu (2005) carried out a study about contextual influences on instructional practices in a Chinese context with an objective to investigate English language teaching practices and the factors influencing those practices in secondary-level classrooms. A sample of 252 Chinese secondary school graduates completed a questionnaire on various instructional practices. Analyses of the data revealed that instructional practices in EFL classrooms are fundamentally subject to contextual influences. Communicative language teaching was practiced to some extent in socioeconomically developed regions of the country whereas traditional language teaching practices still existed in the less developed areas.

This difference in instructional practices was shaped by various economic, social and contextual factors.

Chang (2011) carried out a similar study to explore the factors affecting the instructional practices in Taiwanese college level English classes. The analysis of the data collected from eight teachers from two universities in southern Taiwan through an interview as a research tool revealed the factors influencing EFL teachers' instructional practices. Implementation of CLT in Taiwanese college English classes was found to be promoted or hindered by local situational factors related to teachers, students, and the educational system.

Similar findings were reported by the study carried out by Nguyen, Warren, & Fehring (2014) on factors affecting English language teaching and learning in higher education in Vietnam. The analysis of the data about classroom practices collected from eight classroom observations at HUTECH University in Vietnam explored several factors hindering the quality of English teaching and learning. The factors included: insufficient time for communicative activities, large class sizes with mixed ability students, teachers' limited ability in classroom management, time management and lesson preparation, and limited use of teaching aids and technology.

The study on secondary level English teacher's beliefs in the context of curriculum reform in China by Zhang and Liu (2014) employing questionnaire and interview as research tools, described how the psychological construct, "teacher's belief" is shaped by the contextual factors such as learning culture, curriculum reform, high-stakes testing, and school environment. It further described the influence of teacher's belief about foreign language teaching upon the selection of instructional practices in English language classrooms. Both traditional and constructivist beliefs were found among the teachers.

Thus, as the literature shows, the selection of language teaching methods in several EFL contexts is influenced by various factors. Among those factors, washback, teacher cognition, and teacher's experience are the most discussed ones.

## **Research Context: ELT Situation in Nepal**

### **Introduction**

English is increasingly used as the main lingua franca, overtaking Nepali, in crucial sectors like tourism, trade and business, education, science and technology, and most other economic sectors (Giri, 2011). English has a long history as the language of Western education and it remains important for the development of science, technology, and modernization in Nepal (Eagle, 1999). Although it is not an official language of Nepal, English is taught as a primary foreign language in the schools from Grade I to Grade XII and as a compulsory subject up to the Bachelor level in different universities of the country.

The English system of education was introduced into Nepal during the reign of the late Prime Minister Jung Bahadur Rana after his visit to England in 1851 (Report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission, 1956). Since then, people in Nepal have been learning English as a foreign language for career advancement, personality development, and to gain access to the world body of knowledge. After Nepali, English is the most widely used language in Nepal (Giri, 2014). The goal is that through learning English, learners will develop the confidence to communicate effectively in speaking, listening, reading and writing English that will enable them to participate actively in a global society (Secondary Education Curriculum, 2014).

The private schools in Nepal are English-medium schools where all the subjects except Nepali are taught in English whereas most of the public schools are Nepali medium schools where all the subjects except English are taught in Nepali. It has been suggested that even the poorest parents wish to enroll their children at the English medium schools that cost them much more than they can afford compared to the free government schools (Bhattarai, 2006). The growing ambition of parents to send their children to English medium schools has made the public schools start English as a medium of instruction starting from Grade 1 (Tin, 2014).

## **ELT Curriculum**

The Secondary Education Curriculum (2014) document has information about the English instruction that is carried out in the schools. Twelve years of education (8 years of Basic, 2 years of Secondary, and 2 years of Higher Secondary) forms the school level educational structure of Nepal. The Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) under the Ministry of Education is in charge of developing, updating, and revising the school level (grades I –X) curriculum whereas the Higher Secondary Education Board (HSEB) develops the curriculum for grades XI and XII. The CDC also develops the textbooks, teachers' guides and other reference materials related to school level curriculum. The Secondary Education Curriculum (2014, p. 50 ), has written that, "Through learning English, learners will develop the confidence to communicate effectively in speaking, listening, reading and writing English that will enable them to participate actively in a global society".

Over the past twenty years, national policies and syllabuses have been moving increasingly towards various versions of communicative language teaching to enable citizens to communicate effectively in English (Littlewood, 2007). The school level English curriculum in Nepal is based on the communicative approach to language teaching with the aim to develop communicative competence. Competencies have been devised for primary (grades I-V), lower-secondary (grades VI-VIII), and secondary (grades IX-X) levels in present English curriculum with a focus on language skills. "These competencies relate to listening to, and reading of fiction and non-fiction texts about own and other countries, to communicate orally and in writing in English about own and other cultures, and to compare and contrast Nepali values, beliefs and customs with those of people from other countries." (Secondary Education Curriculum, 2014, p. 50).

In absence of multi-textbook policy, a single textbook developed and prescribed by the CDC is strictly implemented in the schools all over Nepal. A teacher's guide that includes the details on teaching learning activities, materials to be used, formative assessment procedures, and listening scripts for the listening texts, accompanies this textbook. The CDC also develops textbooks as well as Teacher's Guides. According to Curriculum and Textbook Development Guideline (2016, p. 17), the textbooks are written

by a group of experts of the specific subjects.

### **Student Assessment**

Students are required to take a national level examination called Secondary Education Examination (SEE) at the end of grade 10. Secondary Education Curriculum (2014) wrote that, “A continuous informal assessment of what the students have learnt and what they are not able to learn will be done, and on the basis of the result of it, remedial instruction should be conducted” (p. 70). For this, the curriculum requires the teachers to assess the students’ learning achievement throughout the academic year using formative evaluation such as class work, homework, weekly tests, monthly tests, and project work.

As specified in the Secondary Education Curriculum (2014, p. 72), out of total 100 marks in English in the final examination, 10 % is allocated for listening skills, 15 % for speaking skills, 40 % for reading skills, and 35 % for writing skills respectively. From the marks allocated for the different four skills, it is clear that reading and writing skills are overemphasized whereas listening and speaking skills are focused on less.

### **Teacher Preparation**

National Centre for Education Development (NCED) under the Ministry of Education, is responsible for the professional development of public school teachers through long- term and short-term in-service training programs in Nepal. Revisiting the history of teacher training practice in Nepal, a formal teacher training practice started in 1956 with the establishment of College of Education that offered a four-year degree program in education (Bista 2011; NCED, 2009; Shrestha 2013). As documented by NCED (2009), after the implementation of New Education System Plan in 1971, the Institute of Education (IOE) of Tribhuvan University (TU) started different kinds of teacher trainings (long short, pre-service and in-service) and degree level teacher education programs. “The last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the early years of the second millennium saw many changes in the teacher education sector in Nepal.”(NCED, 2009, p. 22).

The Universities through their Bachelor and Master Degree programs in Education are offering pre-service training to the aspiring teachers. According to the School Sector Reform Policy (SSRP, 2009), the minimum qualifications of teachers for basic level and secondary level of education is stipulated as Intermediate in Education (I. Ed.) and M. Ed. respectively. As mentioned by Bhattarai, (2006), one of the serious challenges in the educational sector in Nepal is the problem of teacher development as the scarcity of trained English language teachers is always being felt despite long institutional efforts of the government. Although the Nepalese Government is investing a large amount of money in the name of teachers' selection procedure and teacher training, and FOE in T.U has been constantly training English teachers since 1957, expected success is invisible (Sharma, 2006).

### **CLT in the context of Nepal**

As explained above, the communicative approach to language teaching is one of the dominant approaches in the field of ELT today. The English curriculum of Nepal has been designed with a communicative intent. As highlighted by the researchers and the practitioners (e.g. Bista, 2011; Karki, 2014), there is a gap between policy documents related to English language teaching and the classroom realities, especially in the disadvantaged areas where the classrooms are inadequately equipped.

The number of students in a classroom has a lot to do with the success of communicative language teaching. According to the Ministry of Education (2015), the student teacher ratios (based on approved positions of teachers and students in all types of community schools) in Nepal are 36:1, 60:1, 37:1, and 152:1 in grades 1-5, 6-8, 9-10, and 11-12, respectively. Teaching English in the large multilevel classes is one of the major challenges in an ELT setting (Khatri, 2010). The teachers have to handle very large classes without any physical facility in many cases, and without electricity (Bhattarai, 2006). Thus, the unsatisfactory practice of curriculum in English classrooms in Nepal can be attributed to interrelated factors such as inadequate resources, lack of space and facilities, limited exposure to English, and time constraint (Karki, 2014).

## **Research Questions**

The study intends to address the following research questions:

1. What factors influence the selection of English language teaching methods in Nepalese EFL context?
2. What are the perceived problems of secondary level English language teachers in implementing CLT?
3. What are some of the strategies the teachers practice to overcome those problems?

## CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

### Method

This exploratory study combined the qualitative and quantitative methods. The combination of both the methods allowed me the collection and analysis of data for the in-depth understanding of English language teachers' instructional practices and experiences in an EFL context.

### Participants

To investigate the practice of English language teaching in secondary level (grades 8, 9, and 10) in Nepal, I purposively selected English language teachers teaching in secondary level as the participants of this study. I used a convenience sampling procedure (Dörnyei & Csizer, 2012) for sample selection in which members of the target populations are selected only if they meet certain practical criteria such as geographical proximity, availability at a certain time, or easy accessibility. All the teachers are non-native English speakers.

Altogether 20 English language teachers (7 female and 13 male) participated in this study. Their teaching experience ranged from 5 –25 years with an average of 11 years. The background information of the participants of this study are presented in Table 1.

### Tools

I used questionnaire and interview guidelines as the major tools in this study. A questionnaire (See Appendix – A) was administered to elicit the required information for the study including the background information of the participants. It consisted of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. Altogether 12 close-ended items were rated by the participants on a seven-point “true -of -me” Likert scale (0 = Insufficient experience, 6 = Always true of me). The close-ended items focused on quantitative data related to factors influencing the selection of teaching methods whereas the open-ended questions focused on teaching practices and problems. The questions were thematically categorized to assess the information on three main areas: a. Factors influencing instructional practices b. Perceived difficulties of

the teachers in implementing communicative language teaching and c. Strategies practiced to overcome the problems.

I also used a semi-structured interview guidelines (see Appendix – B) to interview five participants on Skype. The interview guidelines consisted of 10 questions to guide a 45-minute online interview. The interview focused on teachers’ perceived difficulties in EFL context and the strategies they practice to overcome the difficulties. Apart from these tools I also reviewed the documents related to teacher training, curriculum, assessment, and textbooks published by government and non-government organizations in Nepal to collect the secondary data.

*Table 1: Background Information of the Participants of the Study*

<b>Teacher</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Teaching Experience (Years)</b>
T1	F	M.Ed.	7
T2	M	M. Phil.	23
T3	M	M.A.	7
T4	M	M.A.	12
T5	F	M.Ed.	5
T6	M	M.A.	25
T7	M	M.Ed.	7
T8	F	M.Ed.	11
T9	M	M.Ed.	6
T10	M	M.A.	4
T11	F	M.Ed.	5
T12	M	M.Phil.	15
T13	F	M.Ed.	20
T14	M	M.A.	15
T15	M	M.Ed.	20
T16	M	M.Ed.	10
T17	F	M.Ed.	12
T18	M	B.A.	13
T19	M	B. Ed.	5
T20	F	M.Ed.	5

## **Procedure**

I piloted the questionnaire among 10 EFL teachers (my colleagues in MA TESOL program at Michigan State University). Since I had proposed to collect the data online through a questionnaire and Skype interviews, I first made sure that the participants had Internet access. The questionnaires were sent to the participants through email. At the end of the questionnaire, the participants were asked if they would be willing to participate in an online interview too. I emailed the questionnaire to 45 teachers with an expectation to collect back at least 25 filled questionnaires but received questionnaires from only 20 of the teachers. The data were collected in the month of January and February 2017.

After the preliminary analysis of questionnaire data, I scheduled an appointment for the interview with the participants who mentioned that they were willing to participate in an online interview. The interview allowed me to ask individual questions to the participants for further clarification of the statements they mentioned in the questionnaire. I interviewed five of the respondents about favorable and unfavorable contextual factors influencing their instructional practices, the challenges they have encountered, and their personal experiences. Each interview conducted was audio recorded and transcribed for data analysis. The interview was conducted in English. To confirm the data obtained from questionnaire and interview, I also reviewed the documents related to curriculum, textbook, teacher's guide, teacher training programs, and assessment published by government and non-government organizations.

Once I obtained the data, I named the 20 participants as T 1, T 2, T 3, T4..... T 19, and T 20. I classified the data into three distinct categories for the purpose of analysis: a. Factors influencing the instructional practices b. Perceived difficulties of the teachers and c. Strategies practiced to overcome the perceived difficulties. The data collected from both sources was integrated to address the research questions.

## CHAPTER 3: DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

I attempted to answer the research questions from the quantitative and qualitative data. The data obtained from the questionnaire and the interview is interpreted side by side for the purpose of addressing each research question. For RQ1, I analyzed participants' responses to the 12 statements on a 7-point Likert scale and an open-ended question in the questionnaire (see Appendix-A). For RQ 2 and 3, I analyzed the data obtained from open-ended questions from both the questionnaire and the interview (see Appendix-B).

### **Factors Influencing the Selection of Teaching Methods in Nepalese EFL Context**

The data obtained from the questionnaires reveal that classroom size is one of the major determinants with an average of 5.4 points out of 6 regarding the selection of teaching methods in Nepalese EFL context. As Figure 1 shows, 60% teachers always select the teaching methods considering the size of their classroom while 35 % teachers often do so. As reported by the teachers, the number of students in the classes ranges from 25-50. As shown by the data the classroom size seems to have a great impact on the selection of teaching learning activities for the lesson.

According to the data obtained from the participants through Skype interview, the number of students in a classroom determines the seating arrangement in the room, the group work and the pair work the teacher assigns, and the amount of time each student is provided to demonstrate their performance in the class. A large number of students in a class, according to the teachers, results in the challenges such as managing the class and correcting the written work of the students. This factor further results in other challenges such as handling disruptive students and time management in an English classroom.

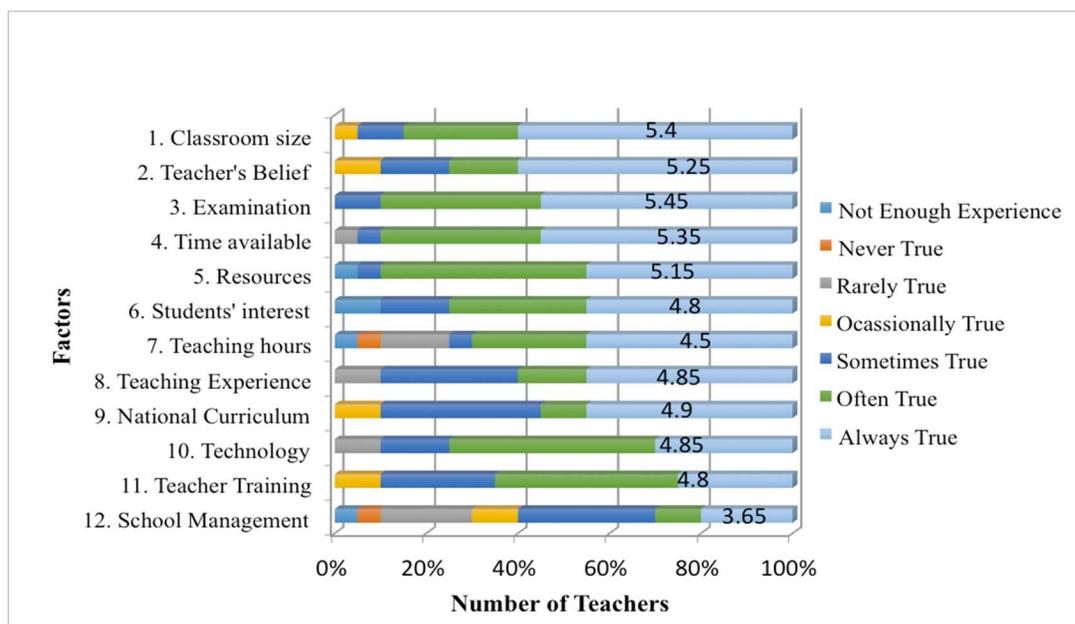


Figure 1: Factors Influencing the Selection of Teaching Methods in Nepalese EFL Context

Excerpt 1

T 13 *“Due to the uncontrolled classroom I have to ignore the learner centered methods and should be a traditional teacher.”*

Excerpt 2

T 9 *“It’s certainly not easy in the classroom that has more than 40 students. I rarely involve the students in group work and pair work.”*

As shown by the data, the other factor that seemed influential in the selection of teaching methods in an English language classroom is the examination. With the highest average rating (5.45), the examination was reported to be a key factor to be considered by most of the teachers. 55 % of the teachers mentioned that they always plan their lesson considering the final examination that the students are required to take at the end of the academic year while 35% of them mentioned that they often plan their lesson considering the examination.

The Secondary Education Examination (SEE) that the students are required to take at the end of grade 10 has a tremendous impact on teaching and learning of English at the secondary level in Nepalese schools. This high-stakes examination, as reported by the teachers in response to the open-ended

question, “What factors do you take into consideration before selecting any teaching methods in your class? Why?” seems to determine what and how they teach in an English class since the score that the students achieve in this test determines the type of college and the program the students will be joining after graduating from the high school. As reported, the teachers and the schools are also evaluated based on the students’ achievement in this examination. Most often the classroom activities are guided by the nature of questions asked in the examination in the previous years.

All the educational stakeholders including the parents, teachers, and the school management, according to the research participants, are very concerned about the students’ achievement in this examination because it is regarded as the indicator to determine the future of the student, prestige of parents, ability of the teacher, standard of the school. From the data, it can be inferred that in most of the occasions the teachers and the students in the secondary level, especially grade 10, are involved in preparing for SEE throughout the academic year rather than being involved in communicative teaching learning activities in a real sense.

#### Excerpt 3

T 6 *“Examination system seems to focus on learning about a language rather than learning a language. This makes us focus on the exam in the class, which has nothing to do with communicative language teaching. As a teacher, we have to be exam-oriented and prepare the students about what types of questions will be asked and how to solve them and all that.”*

#### Excerpt 4

T 16 *“The teachers are evaluated and rewarded or punished based on the grades the students achieve in their final examination. So my teaching is more examination driven”.*

Likewise, teacher’s beliefs, with an average rating of 5.25 is the other major influencing factor. The quantitative data obtained from the questionnaire suggests that 60% teachers are always influenced by their own teaching philosophies and beliefs regarding the nature of language teaching and learning while selecting the teaching methods. However, the interview data indicates that the teachers are most often influenced by the school environment and setting of the classroom. Although most of the teachers

believe that language teaching should be practice based and language learning better takes place when sufficient exposure is ensured, the students are neither provided with an opportunity to practice English nor they are exposed to English. Almost all the teachers were found to be aware of the benefits of communicative language teaching, it seems like there exists a tension between teachers' beliefs and the contextual factors such as classroom setting and washback those restrict the teachers to put their belief into practice.

Excerpt 5

*T 6 "I believe, Language teaching should be practical and exposure is necessary for the students, I do not much believe in just paper and pen test. But basically in the context of our country what we test our students with is just paper and pen test. It doesn't test language very well. What I think is language should be tested on the basis of how your students perform and how nicely they are able to use language."*

Time constraints and the availability of teaching materials are the other influential factors in the selection of teaching methods with average point 5.35 and 5.15 respectively. More than 50% teachers mentioned that they always design the classroom activities depending upon the total time allocated for teaching and learning of English in a day, week, and in the whole academic year. As reported, English is taught 5 days a week and each lesson lasts for 40-45 minutes which according to the teachers is insufficient to expose the students to English. Forty-five% teachers mentioned that they always select teaching learning activities based on the availability of teaching materials and technology inside and outside the classroom while the other 45% teachers reported that they often do so.

Excerpt 6

*T 6 " Talking about technology, I find myself lucky because my school has managed an audiovisual room where I have been provided with desktop, multimedia set, and the Internet. I can take my children to an audiovisual room and entertain them. Before that, I had just textbooks, writing materials, and markers. I used to write the things on the whiteboard and try to make them understand. That was how I used to teach. Gradually things are improving."*

Contrary to what most of the research studies concluded regarding the role of teaching experience on teachers' performance, the data in this study revealed that teaching experience is not the only major determiner when it comes to the selection of teaching methods. Forty-five% teachers mentioned that they are always influenced by their teaching experience while determining the instructional method whereas 10% teachers mentioned that they are rarely guided by their teaching experience in doing so.

Twenty-five percent of the teachers mentioned that they are unable to take account of their students' interest while designing the lessons due to several constraints around them. As reported, although the teachers are aware of addressing students' interest, the constraints such as large size classroom, lack of technology, the level of students, unavailability of authentic materials, and examination pressure compel them to apply the teacher centered techniques such as lecture and demonstration in a language classroom.

Figure 1 shows that the teachers have mixed responses regarding the role of school management in the selection of their teaching learning activities. 20% of them mentioned that the school management always has an influential and decisive role in their teaching whereas only a few of them (10%) mentioned that the school management most often has an influence on their teaching. According to the teachers who reported the decisive role of the management in their teaching, it is the management, not the teachers who decide which book to teach and which methods to use. The school management was also found to have a neutral role in case of 20% of the teachers.

Excerpt 7

T 3 *"It is the teachers who use the textbooks in the classrooms. So, teachers have the best knowledge of a textbook. Unfortunately, teachers are disregarded when it comes to finally selecting the most appropriate textbooks. Since I have been teaching English for seven years now, I am confident enough to pinpoint some mistakes in the textbooks. But the students are bound to believe in the book rules rather than me (a teacher)".*

Excerpt 8

T 1 *“The school management, school principal, they don’t provide any kind of guidance to us. We teach ourselves, we select the methodology and we how we deal with the students and how we do the activities. It is up to us. So we are the ones who decide how to go through the course.”*

As revealed by the data, the national curriculum, the English textbook recommended by the government, and the teacher training programs launched by the Educational Training Centers (ETCs) under the Ministry of Education seem to have significantly less impact on teachers’ performance. In most of the cases, teachers do not bother employing what they have learned from pre-service and in-service teacher training programs inside the classroom. Most often the teachers do not bother trying out the teaching techniques that they learned in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs due to the lack of resources and lack of support from school administration.

Excerpt 9

T 7 *“It is difficult for the teachers to use the knowledge and skills learned from the training inside the classroom because of different factors such as the thought of principal, management committee, colleagues and availability of teaching materials”.*

The teachers also reported that they do not feel obliged to strictly apply the teaching methods and techniques prescribed by Curriculum Development Centre in the Secondary Education Curriculum. Rather they seem to be influenced by their own classroom reality. One of the teachers mentioned that he follows the curriculum but does not always follow the textbook recommended by the government.

Excerpt 10

T 10 *“I do follow the national curriculum but I rarely follow the textbook prescribed by CDC. If I go through that book, that looks so dull, I really don’t want to follow that right? But according to the curriculum, I can follow or I can refer to any other books or any source. I have access to the internet and all so I prepare my worksheets for my kids or use different forms of media as well, teach them how to talk in English or how to develop their good writing skill and all.”*

## Problems Perceived by the Teachers in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching

CLT has been introduced in school level ELT curriculum in Nepal and the syllabus has been designed accordingly. However, the implementation aspect of the curriculum cannot be considered satisfactory as shown by the research data. In response to the open-ended questions the teachers came up with a list of problems they experienced while trying to put CLT into practice. In most of the cases, the above-mentioned factors influencing their teaching practices are found to be the causes of their problems in English classroom and most of the factors and the problems are interrelated.

The causes of the problems perceived by the participants of the study in implementing communicative language teaching are presented in Figure 2.

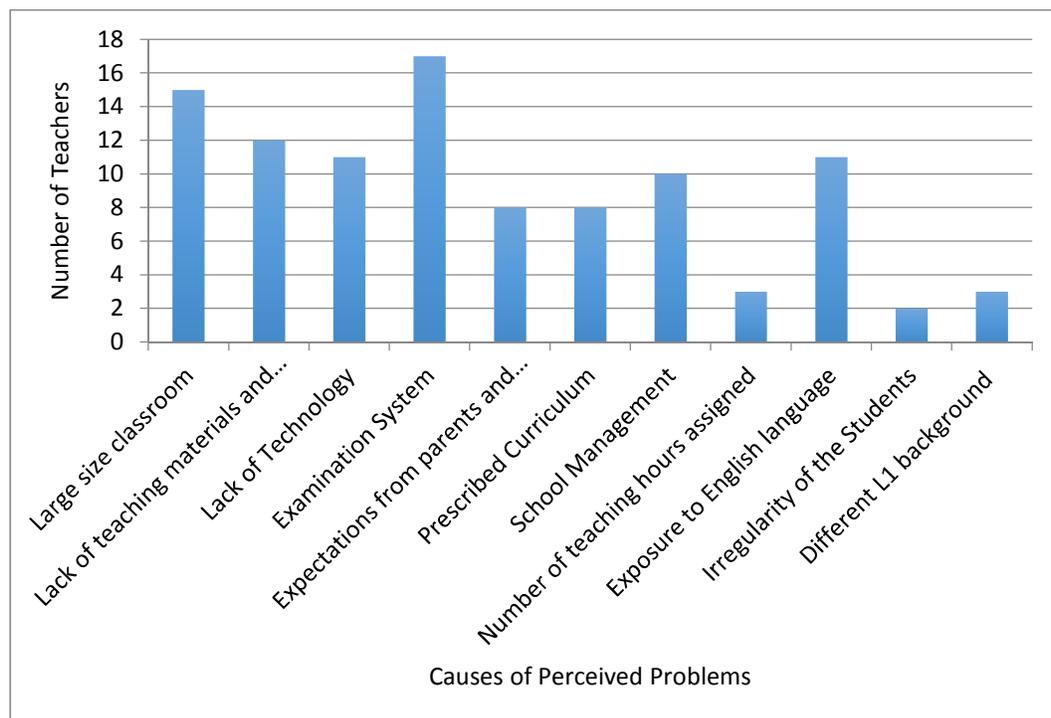


Figure 2: Problems Perceived by English Language Teachers in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching

As shown in figure 2, out of 20 teachers, 15 of them mentioned that they have experienced one or the other problem while trying to implement communicative language teaching due to the large size

classrooms. Some of the major problems in a large classroom as reported by the teachers are listed in Table 2.

Table 2: *Problems Experienced by the Teachers in a Large Size Classroom*

<b>Problems</b>
1. It is difficult to reach out all the students in the class. So everyone cannot be treated equally.
2. It is difficult to monitor group and pair activities.
3 Feedback cannot be provided to each and every student especially in the practice of the oral skill.
4. Even a short task demands longer duration in the class.
5. The students in the front get more opportunities than the last benchers.
6. Marking the assignment on time is always challenging.
7. Students' achievement cannot be evaluated properly.
8. Everyone cannot be treated individually
9. It takes longer to correct students' written work.

A lack of authentic teaching materials and technology is the other key factor that challenges the teachers in a communicative classroom. Altogether 12 teachers mentioned that they have experienced problems related to teaching materials in teaching and assessing the language skills. Likewise, 11 teachers mentioned that they have experienced problems due to the absence of technology in their language classroom.

Excerpt 11

T2 *“Computers, internet, and projectors are not easily available for a language teachers in the school. So without audio or visual materials, English language teaching is not effective in the traditional classroom.”*

The secondary level examination overemphasizes reading and writing skills whereas underestimates listening and speaking skills. The students, according to the teachers, secure high marks in the examination but they are communicatively incompetent. Altogether 17 out of 20 teachers mentioned

that examination system exerts the pressure on them and their students so the teachers are required to help students prepare for the exam rather than involving them in the interactive activities.

Excerpt 12

T 2 *“You feel like using the communicative method but that may not help them much in getting better grades. Examination anxiety always has always a negative impact on language teaching and learning. The students are too much focused on getting good marks in the examination. So, they prefer rote learning to interactive classroom activities.”*

Excerpt 15

T 10 *“Examination has always been a big headache to me. It seems quite biased, as it hasn't been able to differentiate different abilities of the kids.”*

The other problems perceived by the teachers in implementing communicative language teaching are related to less amount of exposure to the English language in Nepali medium schools, high expectations from the parents, the existing gap between the examination and English curriculum, unsupportive school environment, more number of teaching hours assigned to the teachers, irregularity of the students in the class, and the students from different L1 backgrounds in the class.

Students have less exposure to English in Nepali medium public schools where the medium of instruction is Nepali. Eleven teachers in this study reported that this is one of the major problems perceived by them. They are aware that communicative language teaching cannot be effective unless the students get enough exposure to a target language. The students enrolled in Nepali medium public schools have an opportunity for exposure to the English language just for about 40-45 minutes a day in their English class which the teachers think is really insufficient to learn English. According to the teachers, in a large classroom it is challenging for them to provide individual students an opportunity to speak and monitor the students' progress within 40-45 minutes.

Excerpt 16

T 20 *“The students do not get enough exposure to English. Because of this, I am facing problems while trying to make them use English inside and outside the classroom. I mainly have difficulty in teaching listening skill.”*

Similarly, according to eight teachers, high expectations of the parents regarding their children’s performance in the examination is also the other challenge in practicing learner-centered teaching techniques. What parents expect from their children is high marks or pass marks in the exam. One of the teachers mentioned that the parents often pinpoint teachers’ mistakes but never appreciate their efforts even if some teachers deserve the appreciation. The other teacher told that the parents are not concerned about the techniques used in the classroom. Instead, they want to be ensured that the teacher teaches their children everything written in the textbook so the children do well on the exams.

Excerpt 17

T 1 *“Parents are very much conscious that we have to follow each and every line of the textbook because students have to sit for the examination. Parents are also very conscious about the course completion so we strictly go through the books developed by Curriculum Development Center.”*

The gap that exists between the examination and English curriculum has also been perceived as a major problem by 8 of the teachers. The curriculum treats all the skills equally while the examination does not do so. Out of total 100 marks, 40 % marks is assigned for reading and 35% marks is assigned for writing tasks whereas just 10% and 15% marks is assigned for listening and speaking tasks respectively in the examination. So, the teachers complained that the examination seems really biased in treating different language skills.

Excerpt 18

T 5 *“ Problem occurs due to the gap between examination system and the objectives set by the curriculum. For example, all the four language skills are not equally tested in the exam. Reading and writing skills are given priority.”*

As perceived by 50% teachers, the school management committee that is formed by political appointment does not work efficiently to create a favorable working environment for the teachers. These

teachers mentioned that they are often favored or criticized by the school administration based on their political ideology rather than their professional performance. According to them, such a school environment creates frustration among them and demotivates them in their profession.

### **Strategies Practiced to Overcome the Problems**

One of the objectives of this research study was to explore what the teachers in Nepalese EFL context have been doing inside and outside their classrooms to overcome the problems experienced in an English classroom. I discovered that despite the presence of several issues in their workplace, the teachers have been trying their best to ensure that effective language teaching and learning takes place. In response to an open-ended question in the questionnaire and the interview, “ Have you tried out any significant practices to overcome the problems you have experienced in an English class? If so, please mention some strategies you tried out with your students”, the teachers came up with some interesting strategies that they have been practicing to teach English. They shared some of the best practices which I think may be tried out by other English language teachers in the similar EFL contexts as well.

Some of the significant strategies shared by the teachers are compiled as follows:

1. Provide the students with an opportunity to practice English in groups and pairs in a large class
2. Arrange for after school English classes
3. Manage a mixed ability classroom by designing different versions of a task so that the fast learners are challenged and the slow learners are guided through
4. Collaborate with other English language teachers to find a solution to their common pedagogical problems
5. Observe the other teacher’s class and asking the other teacher to observe their class.
6. Prepare worksheets and use them in the classroom to deal with textbook related issues
7. Select 2 to 3 students to speak out as role models and encourage other students to speak as a way to deal with students’ inhibition in class.

8. Take the students out of the classroom and expose them to the English language by involving them in English conversation with tourists.
9. Combine the students from two different classes (e.g. grades 9 and 10) to ensure that the students have more time (80 minutes instead of 40 minutes) to practice English.

Although constrained by issues such as a large number of students, under-resourced classrooms, and examination pressure, the teachers in this study still have been trying their best to ensure that their students are communicatively competent in the target language. They have been trying out what seems to work in their context.

#### Excerpt 19

T 6 *“My school is near Patan Durbar Square (one of the famous tourist destinations in Kathmandu valley). Many foreign tourists visit this place. I take my students outside to talk to them. I allow them to bring a mobile phone with a voice recorder for that day. I divide them into groups and each group goes to talk to some tourist. I keep observing and keep the record of their activities. If I find any tourist uncomfortable talking to my students, I tell them that they are my students and would like to practice speaking English with them. The students record the conversation. They find that all the tourists don't have very good English and realize that there is someone who doesn't know as much as they do. They come to me and say, “Teacher, I thought my English was terrible but I met a guy whose English was even poorer than mine.” They no more hesitate to speak English and this way they learn speaking. When we play the recordings the students see their performance and definitely they perform better the next time.”*

#### Excerpt 20

T 2 *“Sometimes I try to come out of the textbook. I combine two different classes to make sure that the students have more time (80 minutes instead of 40 minutes) to practice English. I take them out of the classroom and assign them a task or a situation in groups and pairs”*

## **CHAPTER 4: SUMMARY OF RESULTS, DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS, AND CONCLUSION**

### **Summary of Results**

The curriculum prescribed by the government is not the only factor that guides the selection of teaching methods and techniques among secondary level English language teachers in Nepalese EFL context. The number of students in a class, examination, teachers' beliefs regarding language teaching, the amount of time available to teach English, and the availability of resources including technology are the major factors influencing the selection of teaching learning activities in English classrooms. The other influencing factors are: students' interest, a total number of teaching hours assigned to the teachers, teaching experience of the teachers, and the role of school management.

The examination system has a negative impact on teaching and learning of English in secondary level. Teachers do not bother implementing learner centered teaching methods, rather they are concerned about the grades students will achieve in the final examination. It is because their ability to teach is most often judged based on the grades that their students achieve in high stakes examination such as SEE.

The major problems experienced by most of the English language teachers in implementing communicative language teaching in Nepalese EFL contexts are managing a large size classroom, meeting the expectations of educational stakeholders (the parents, students, and school management), performing in under-resourced classrooms under the pressure of examination that over emphasizes reading and writing, and exposing the students to English language (in Nepali medium schools), and dealing with a politically biased school management committee.

Teachers are aware of the importance of learner-centered teaching techniques but are compelled to exploit the traditional and teacher centered techniques such as lecture, question answer, and demonstration due to the above-mentioned constraints. These constraints are often responsible for teachers being unable to transfer the skills learned in pre-service and in-service teacher training programs. At some points teachers' beliefs and their knowledge contradict with the contextual factors and classroom

reality. In few cases, the school management plays quiet a supportive role to create a favorable environment for the teachers whereas, in most of the other cases, it is either neutral or decisive.

Despite all the challenges and constraints existing in foreign language teaching context in one of the developing countries, Nepal, the teachers have been continuously attempting to develop the communicative competence of their students in a target language. Constrained by the issues such as a large number of students, poorly resourced classrooms, and examination pressure, the teachers in this study still have been trying their best to ensure that their students are communicatively competent in the target language. They have been trying out what seems to work in their context. Some of their efforts include ensuring opportunity to practice English in groups and pairs in a large class, taking extra time to deal with students' written work and expose them to English language, addressing a mixed ability classroom by designing different versions of a task, practicing collaborative learning approach for their professional development, and employing students as the resources in a language classroom.

## **Discussion**

The study reveals the determining role of the contextual factors in the selection of teaching methods and practices by secondary level English language teachers in Nepalese EFL setting. CLT is still perceived to be a hard nut to crack due to the factors like minimal exposure available to the students, classroom setting, lack of resources, and facilities. These factors influencing the teaching practices in the language classroom are found interrelated. This finding resonates with Karki's (2014) claim that the unsatisfactory practice of CLT in Nepal can be attributed to some interrelated factors such as inadequate resources, lack of space and facilities, limited exposure to English, and time constraints.

One of the major influencing factors, washback from national tests, was found to exert a serious impact in the implementation of CLT curriculum. The curriculum designed with a communicative intent is exploited in a wrong way resulting in the practice of teaching to the test content (Luxia, 2005) and narrowing of curriculum ( Smith, 1991).

The study noticeably revealed the inconsistency existing between teachers' beliefs regarding language teaching activities and their actual classroom practices. Almost all the teachers were aware of the benefits of CLT, however, the contextual factors, mainly the classroom size and washback played a determining role and did not allow the teachers to put their belief into practice. It was noticed that the teachers' beliefs and their philosophies about language teaching contradicted the classroom reality. This finding corroborated the result of the previous studies (Farrell & Bennis, 2013; Zheng, 2013; Zhang & Liu, 2014) that the contextual factors play a hindering role and prevent teachers from practicing what they believe regarding language teaching.

Contrary to what most of the research studies concluded regarding the role of teaching experience on teachers' performance, this study showed that teaching experience is not the only major determiner in the selection of teaching methods. This finding contradicted the result of the study by Basturkmen, (2012) that teaching experience is the dominant factor in determining teacher's classroom practices. As the data showed, in Nepal, teachers are more influenced by the classroom setting and the assessment system than their teaching experience. This could be because in Nepal, the classroom setting exerts more of an influence because some of the basic needs in the classroom are unmet. As reviewed, class sizes are large, and some teachers teach with the bare minimum, and even without electricity. In such environments, communicative language teaching methods may take a back seat to general classroom management and goals related to instructing students on what will appear on national tests, tests that assess language as object.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study some of the measures to be taken to improve the existing ELT situation in Nepal are discussed.

Since in Nepal most of the teachers experience problems with large-sized classrooms, the government and non-government training providers should train the teachers on managing large-sized classrooms specifically. The school management committee should ensure a favorable working

environment in the school and evaluate the teachers based on their performance. Regular supervision and monitoring of the teachers should be ensured by school management. The teachers, rather than the administrators should perform a decisive role regarding what to teach and how to teach. Additionally, researchers who investigate task-based language teaching methods and communicative language teaching methods should put efforts into investigating and describing how such methods work best in large-scale classrooms. Normally communicative and task-based language teaching research is conducted in small-sized classrooms. Thus, theorists and language pedagogues don't know a lot about how communicative language teaching can work in large-sized classrooms. More research in this area is gravely needed, and such work could be done in Nepal, where large-sized classes abound.

Most of the teachers and students feel pressure throughout the year due to the demanding nature of the national examination administered at the end of school year. Although the high-stakes examinations like SEE are unavoidable in the Nepalese context, the negative washback effect of such examinations can be minimized. Teachers, parents, and students should be trained on how to minimize the impacts of high-stakes examination while maximizing the opportunities to learn a language. The examination should be reformed in such a way that it matches with the curriculum and requires the students to demonstrate their communicative competence in a target language situation rather than the linguistic competence alone.

The English language teachers should collaborate with other teachers from the same institution or different institutions in order to find a solution to their common pedagogical problems and develop themselves professionally. The schools and concerned authorities should disseminate the best practices of the expert teachers among the novice teachers so that the novice teachers get to learn about how to deal with the challenges related to teaching English. To deal with the problems related to an availability of resources and technology the teachers need to make use of the alternative ways to involve the students in language practice. They may expose their students to authentic English using the resources they have on their hands such as a mobile phone or a voice recorder.

## **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that English language teachers in Nepal are influenced greatly by several contextual factors and a lack of resources while selecting language teaching methods. Many of the problems perceived by the teachers in implementing CLT are related to the factors such as overcrowded classrooms and examination pressure. Although the teachers are aware of CLT and its benefits to the language learners, they often find it difficult to put it into practice.

I expect that the findings of this study will inform the TESOL professionals to some extent about how English is taught and learned in Nepalese EFL contexts. It will notify the stakeholders about the factors supporting or hindering the instructional practices of the teachers, the problematic issues faced by the teachers, and some of the best strategies the teachers have been practicing to overcome the challenges. This will help the policy makers, program developers, and material developers to be aware of classroom reality and come up with appropriate policies, programs, and materials to uplift the existing ELT situation in Nepal.

The findings, however, cannot be generalized in all the EFL contexts because this study was limited to relatively a small sample size. Altogether 20 secondary level English language teachers from Nepal participated in the study. The data was elicited using only two tools: a questionnaire and an interview. The study did not involve classroom observation of the teachers, and the findings are based on only one source, i.e. the opinions of the teachers. The information they provided may or might not resemble the voice of other stakeholders, including the school principals, parents, and the students.

Research interest in the area of instructional practices in EFL contexts has been increasing in recent years. However, most of the research studies on teaching English as a foreign language have been carried out on more accessible parts of Asia such as China, Korea, and Japan whereas the other countries in South East Asia such as Nepal have been underrepresented in such studies. This study tried to rectify this disparity by describing the classroom reality of Nepalese EFL context. Although some studies had been carried out to explore English language teaching practices in Nepalese schools, none of them tried to investigate the attempts made from teachers' side to overcome the difficulties perceived in

technologically devoid, less resourceful, and large size classrooms. Further study can be carried out about teachers' beliefs about CLT and their classroom practices in an EFL setting, the strategies the teachers use in a large-sized classroom, the stakeholders' (students, parents, teachers, administrators) opinions about (and impact of) high-stakes examinations and teachers' and students' ideas on minimizing negative consequences of the examination.

## APPENDICES

**Appendix A**  
**Questionnaire**

Dear Sir/Madam, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. This questionnaire is a research tool for gathering information for my research entitled "Factors influencing the selection of teaching methods in an EFL context" under the guidance of Professor Dr. Paula Winke, Michigan State University. Your sincere responses to the questionnaire will help me gain valuable insight into the instructional practices of English language teachers in Nepalese EFL context. The information you have provided will be kept highly confidential and used only for research purpose. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. I would appreciate your honest opinions and assure you that your responses will be completely anonymous. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact me at [adhikarikunti@gmail.com](mailto:adhikarikunti@gmail.com) or by phone 5175071984. Thank you for your time and effort.

Thank you for your time and effort.

<b>Background Information</b>
Name:
Gender: Male/Female
School:
Address:
Experience:
Educational Qualification:

**A. Factors influencing the selection of teaching methods**

1. Please read the statements carefully, and put a cross (x) on the box next to the number that best indicates your response about the factors those influence the selection of teaching methods in your classroom. Alternatives range from 6 (Always true of me) to 0 (Insufficient Experience).

**Alternatives**

Always True of me – 6

Often True of me - 5

Sometimes True of me - 4

Occasionally True of me – 3

Rarely True of me - 2

Never True of me -1

Insufficient Experience - 0

Statements	Scale						
	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
i. I consider the classroom size before selecting the teaching method.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
ii. My beliefs regarding language teaching and learning influence my instructional practices.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
iii. I select the teaching methods based on my teaching experience.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
iv. The examination system has an impact upon my instructional practices.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
v. I choose the teaching learning activities considering available resources.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
vi. I choose the teaching learning activities considering the time available.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
vii. The school management has an influence upon my instructional practices.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
viii. I apply the strategies learnt in teacher training in my classroom.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
ix. Number of teaching hours assigned to me determines how I perform in the classroom.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
x. I consider students' interest and choose the teaching learning strategies.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
xi. I am guided by the National curriculum while selecting the teaching activities.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0
xii. Availability of technology influences my instructional practices.	6	5	4	3	2	1	0

2. Are there any factors other than those mentioned in question no. 2, which have influence upon the selection of your instructional practices? If so, please mention them.

**B. Perceived Difficulties in implementing Communicative Language Teaching**

3. Have you experience any difficulty in implementing communicative language teaching in your classroom? If so, what are your perceived difficulties?

Please list the problems perceived due to

i. Number of students in the classroom:

ii. Availability of teaching materials:

iii. Technology:

iv. Examination System:

v. Expectations from parents and students:

vi. Teacher training programs and practices:

vii. Curriculum:

viii. School Management:

ix. Number of teaching hours:

x. Exposure to English language

4. Have you experienced any problems in your classroom due to the reasons other than those mentioned in question no. 4? If so, please mention those problems.

**C. Strategies Practiced to overcome the problems**

6. Have you tried out some strategies to overcome these problems from your personal side? If so, please mention the strategies you have tried out in your classroom.

**D. Would you like to participate in a short interview on Skype about your teaching experiences and instructional practices for the purpose of this research?**

- a. Yes
- b. No

**Thank you very much for your participation.**

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-structured Online Interview Guidelines**

1. Please introduce yourself in brief.
2. Could you describe your school and classroom context?
3. Which factors do you take into consideration before selecting any teaching methods in your class? Why?
4. Which of the language teaching methods do you use and why?
5. Please describe your daily teaching
6. What are your beliefs and experience about language teaching, use of resources, and assessing students' performance?
7. Have you encountered any difficulties while using CLT in your context? If so, please mention the perceived difficulties.
8. What do you think are the challenges of an English language teacher in an EFL context such as ours?
9. How do you think these problems can be solved?
10. Have you tried out any significant practices to overcome the problems you have experienced in an English class? If so, please mention some strategies you tried out with your students.

**Thank you very much for your participation.**

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