CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

8.1. INTRODUCTION

In this study, it was taken an in-depth look at the phenomenon of CLT adoption and adaptation among I year B.E. / B.Tech students in Engineering Colleges, the teachers with experience of various training programmes. It was investigated how CLT was interpreted, as well as the extent to which the approach was considered compatible with the I year B.E./ B.Tech. Students’ in EFL context, taking into account possible constraints on its implementation.

This study explored how and in what ways CLT was actually adopted and adapted by the participants in practice, via interview and observation. In addition, this study attempted to identify the extent to which the participants considered the experienced teachers who underwent various training programmes to have been conducive to facilitating CLT implementation in their own contexts as well as to improving their teaching proficiency in a general way.

In chapter one, this study introduced the background and motivation to establish this study. This study also specified the research gaps currently existing and identified how the findings of this research were going to fill these gaps. This study then briefly introduced the general organization of the whole thesis.

In chapter two, this study navigated through the relevant theories in relation to CLT and CLT as appropriate methodology. This study then identified the current research gaps from a theoretical perspective and emphasized the potential contributions of this study. It also justified the design of the research questions.

In chapter three, the researcher presented a detailed rationale for the research design, including the choice of research methods, instruments, procedure of data collection and model of data analysis. This study also explained how to ensure the validity and reliability of the research, and I also considered ethical issues.

In chapters four, five, and six, the study presented the findings relating to the three research questions and engaged in some initial discussion.

In chapter seven, the study discussed the findings in further depth, on the basis of key points and issues emerging from the previous chapters, by referring back also
to the Literature Review. This study also identified in what ways the findings for this study can fill the research gaps specified. Nevertheless, it needs to be recognized that this study contains some limitations, and these will be discussed in the next section.

8.2. MAJOR LIMITATIONS OF THIS STUDY

One of the limitations of this study lies in the choice of colleges as research settings and their locations. There were four colleges chosen as research settings and three of them located at rural area. This fact may to some extent affect the general relevance of the findings for this study, as, generally speaking, the top universities are reputed as providers of high quality education with highly qualified professionals, and the teachers and learners’ average level is supposed to be higher than those studying at rural colleges. Therefore, from a methodological perspective, what was considered by the urban college language teachers as effective in general may not work well in the teaching contexts of rural colleges.

In any case, however, as the study has emphasized in Chapter 7, teacher beliefs and teaching styles can be very individualized, and can vary dramatically among teachers or even within one teacher due to the changing needs of context. Thus, the limitations discussed here can be considered as weaknesses that commonly exist in studies of this kind.

Another limitation consists in the difficulty of making generalizations about the data in cases where there may have been insufficient evidence to back up claims in certain parts of the findings chapters (e.g. 6.1.2.). This weakness largely results from a problem the researcher noticed during the process of analyzing interview data – the researcher was aware that some answers to the interview questions were quite simple and superficial because the participants did not offer detailed examples to support their arguments despite the efforts made to probe into answers they had given.

This fact to some extent limits the presentation of data and contributes to a lack of strong link between argument and evidence at certain points. This study therefore decided to present the data through a general framework of categorization, which in my view, is an effective way to alleviate the identified weakness by indicating the commonalities and dissimilarities existing in the findings so as to support or counter general points made. For instance, in section 6.1.2., this study was categorized the classroom activities reported as ‘representing communicative ideas’
according to the classification system proposed by Littlewood (1981), trying to make a distinction between functional communicative activities and social interaction activities.

However, the researcher was aware that many informants failed to describe how these activities were carried out in their teaching contexts, and the findings for the observational data suggested that not all the activities reported as ‘communicative’ were actually carried out in a communicative way. In this sense, this study considers the way of categorizing the reported activities provides a general but solid basis for the subsequent discussion built around the concept of ‘seeming-communicative-approach’ which the study has introduced.

A third limitation of this research may lie in the way the study presented findings generated from observational data. In chapter six, the findings for observational data were presented descriptively in a general way rather than through detailed description and analysis as individual case studies.

Although the observed lessons covered a wide range of courses, which could provide a solid basis for in-depth case study analysis and follow-up discussion, during the data analysis, it was noticed that the themes and categories emerging from the observational data were quite similar to those which emerged from the interview data. Therefore, it was decided to present the findings for the observational data in the same way as the researcher presented findings for interview data rather than analyzing each observed lesson as an individual case study.

This practice might make this research appear more like an exploratory study rather than typical case study, as the analysis was not carried out based on selected cases and the focus was laid instead on certain fundamental issues. Nevertheless, Yin (1993) has argued that exploratory research can be categorized as case study. In addition, Feagin, Orum, and Sjoberg (1991) argue that case study itself calls for the researcher to develop holistic and in-depth thinking when carrying out the investigation, and case studies are multi-perspective analyses that require researchers’ sensitivity not only to the voices of participants but also to relevant groups of participants and the interaction between individuals within and across groups. Given that these criteria are met by this study, (I took an in-depth, holistic look at other relevant issues apart from CLT such as the participants’ interpretations of good
language teaching, and the effectiveness of their experience by attending various training programmes), the researcher do not feel that the way of presenting the findings for observational data sacrifices the reliability and validity of the whole study.

**8.3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY**

One of the major contributions of this study is to fill an identified research gap by examining the effectiveness of CLT in the I year B.E./ B.Tech student EFL context from an anti-essentialist perspective. This study pointed out the danger of the tendency of essentialism underlying the participants’ interpretations of CLT and teaching practices which it was termed ‘seeming-communicative’. However, it should be clarified that this research has not been intended to advocate or defend any particular teaching approach or teaching philosophy.

Instead, by identifying the problems existing in current studies on the appropriateness of CLT in Engineering Colleges and by revealing how/whether the findings of this study support assertions made in previous work, it aims to highlight the complexity of the issue. This is because teaching methods and teacher beliefs are not static. Instead, they can greatly vary not only among teachers from different educational and academic backgrounds but within individuals as well, due to the changing needs of teaching contexts and learners given the dynamics of the language classroom.

This viewpoint actually mirrors Holliday’s arguments on ‘becoming-appropriate methodology’ in which he stressed that seeking appropriate methodology is a continuous and dynamic process involving the steps of ‘how to teach’ and ‘learning about how to teach’ (1994:164).

Importantly, however, it should be noted that how to activate this sort of dynamic cycle of teaching process poses great challenges to the language teachers and their teaching proficiency. For instance, it calls for teachers’ sensitivity to the changing culture of a particular given context as well as their initiative in self-exploration, self-reflection, and being critical and anti-essentialist. Encouragingly, this tendency is found to exist in the findings, in the post-method pedagogic perspectives (Kumaravadivelu, 2006) developed by some of the informants both in relation to their interpretations of appropriate methodology and as shown in their ways of teaching.
For instance, Kalpana and Anuradha both identified the importance of being able to decide on one’s way of teaching independently and pointed out the inappropriateness of limiting oneself to a particular teaching approach or method without careful consideration. In Kalpana’s view, whether or not the adopted methodology is appropriate largely depends on the extent to which practitioner considers the way he or she teaches is harmonious with oneself.

Venkatalakshmi reported that teachers should have an in-depth understanding of the local teaching context when adopting an imported approach or theory in order to make it culturally acceptable and effective rather than spending time discussing whether the approach or theory itself is good or not. As indicated previously (see 5.3.2.), these particular informants’ eclectic attitudes towards the appropriateness of CLT in the I year B.E. / B.Tech students EFL context reflect the basic elements of the theoretical framework of post-method pedagogy put forward by Kumaravadivelu (2006), namely, particularity and possibility.

These two elements reflect an emphasis on competence in adjusting one’s way of teaching based on the understanding of one’s learners and the learning culture they bring to the classroom. Venkatalakshmi’s arguments also echo Prabhu’s declaration that there exists no best method, and Kalpana’s ideas about seeking the harmony between appropriate methodology and teachers themselves reflect the feature of another element of the post-method pedagogy framework – practicality, which calls for teacher’s sense of plausibility to develop one’s own way of teaching. In addition, the post-method pedagogic perspective can be seen as reflected in the tendency of eclecticism found to exist in the ways of teaching of many participants as observed.

The second implication of this study is that the findings suggest the important role played by teachers’ intercultural competence and critical thinking ability in terms of CLT implementation and the development of context-sensitive methodology in I year B.E. / B.Tech students’ EFL context at Engineering College Level. These two aspects are widely considered as very important facets of professional development for second language EFL teachers as well as the key criteria for a good English language speaker nowadays (see 5.2.).
Indeed, it needs to be stressed that being open-minded and critical is of paramount importance for second language EFL teachers, as these are the attitudes that can not only help them to develop a holistic and reflective thinking with regard to the problem of essentialism, but can also make them aware of the danger of the emergence of a kind of meta-essentialism – the pitfall of establishing a non-essentialist critical theory (Jang, 2002).

As argued by Jang, attempts to counter essentialism can actually involve a different type of essentialism. By claiming that there is no essence, one can go to another extreme through negation of essentialism, which can seem meta-essentialist, but in practice be a new form of essentialism. In this sense, the notion of anti-essentialism ought to go beyond the limitations of the framework of non-essentialist critical theory. Instead, it might be better to serve as sort of reminder of the importance for people to develop less subjective and judgmental attitudes but to think more deeply about different issues as well as to reinforce one’s competence in seeing through things, underneath what they seem to be.

Encouragingly, the findings show some evidence that this issue has drawn the attention of some informants (see 6.1.2.), and it seems that most informants did reflect on their teaching philosophy and teaching practice critically and seriously, taking learners’ needs into account, and then tailored their teaching plan and adjusted their way of teaching accordingly (see 6.2.). Nevertheless, there is still a lot that can be done. For instance, the findings suggest that the informants are not so enthusiastic about academic exchanges with peers, as none of the participants mentioned any sort of voluntary academic communication either with Tamil language colleagues or expatriate teachers except for organized classroom observations conducted by the college.

Few contacts with expatriate colleagues can be attributed to Tamil Teachers’ intercultural incompetence apart from the reasons such as linguistic incompetence, demotivation, heavy workload, etc. This fact indicates that perhaps more opportunities should be given to second language EFL teachers for either offshore or in-service training to help them develop a more open attitude towards the academic exchange between colleagues to facilitate peer observation, as this can be a valuable chance for novice teachers to improve their teaching techniques by learning from the seniors. Teachers themselves are expected to do more serious thinking about their
teaching performance through self-reflection and exploration in order to train their ability in critical thinking as well.

A third implication of this study relates to the way the importance of immersion experience to professional development has been raised. As previously identified, overseas teacher education experience of teacher education can be effective in enhancing the overall teaching proficiency of pre-service EFL teachers, and it was widely agreed by the informants that the core value of such experience lay in enhancing teachers’ intercultural competence and critical thinking ability (see 5.2.).

At the same time, it needs to be noted that the picture is mixed, as the findings also suggest that intercultural experience may just play a limited role in improving teachers’ linguistic competence, and various training programmes background is commonly seen as productive rather than essential in relation to professional development. These facts, indeed, are a ‘big wake-up call’ for those who blindly worship an training programmes experience. Moreover, they may help to open up the pursuit of a variety of in-service teacher development training opportunities at home in order to enhance overall teaching quality in the Engineering College EFL profession in general.

In this connection, more attention should be paid to English language proficiency development for Second language teachers in particular in terms of reinforcement of authenticity in their use of English language. Efforts can also be made to improve the quality of current English textbooks by introducing more authentic and up-to-date materials.

8.4. SUGGESTIONS FOR DIRECTIONS OF FUTURE RESEARCH

In the present study, teachers’ perspectives were focused upon, but one possibility for future research is to look into the appropriateness and effectiveness of CLT from learners’ perspectives via in-depth interviews. Focus could be laid on investigating learners’ preferred ways of teaching, the reasons underneath such preferences and the extent to which the preferred ways of teaching reflect communicative ideas.

In addition, based on the approach adopted in the present study, studies could be launched to investigate what kind of teaching is considered by learners as effective, and the extent to which this way of teaching can be seen to relate to CLT.
It might be worth looking also at ways in which second language learners consider teachers with intercultural experience to be distinguished from expatriate teachers and teachers with no intercultural experience. It would be interesting to see what learners’ suggestions are for teachers in terms of maximizing teaching effectiveness. Another possibility is to take an in-depth look at the teaching philosophy of second language EFL teachers who have experienced the promotion of CLT. By using a life story approach, such a study could focus on the development and implementation of CLT in the I year B.E./ B.Tech students EFL context at Engineering College level from a historical perspective.

A third possibility emerging from the present study would be to study the interrelation and crossover between CLT and Confucianism from a philosophical perspective. Overall, it can be argued that the present study, in revealing some of the complexity of perceptions and actual implementation of CLT in the second language learner of I year B.E./B.Tech context, has opened up avenues for further research which might continue to build a non-essentialist picture of EFL in Engineering Colleges.