



Vietnamese EFL teachers' approach in employment of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) via synchronous online learning

Ngoc Hong Nguyen

School of Education, University of Hull, Hull, United Kingdom
allison.ng281@gmail.com

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Abstract— With the advent of technology-enhanced learning, research emphasizes the pivotal role of teachers' beliefs in shaping their implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), whether in traditional or virtual classroom. Nevertheless, little investigation has been conducted concerning Vietnamese EFL teachers' beliefs, especially those working in language centres and private teaching, with regards to CLT and their implementation of this approach in online contexts. This research aims to explore the universal beliefs towards CLT among Vietnamese teachers as well as their methods to apply the approach into their virtual classrooms. A mixed-methods approach, with a combination of an online questionnaire and semi-structured interviews, was adopted to generate both generalised and in-depth data from Vietnamese EFL teachers. Findings showed that Vietnamese teachers have positive beliefs towards the principles and characteristics of CLT despite certain misconceptions regarding the importance of teaching grammar and a preference for teaching speaking skills. Moreover, they demonstrated a noticeable dedication as they apply certain teaching strategies and activities associated with CLT during their virtual classes. Accordingly, the research revealed a strong link and alignment between teachers' beliefs and their implementation of the approach in virtual classrooms. The research also highlighted the relevant obstacles faced by Vietnamese teachers when adopting CLT online and potential solutions to these problems.



Keywords— CLT practices, Communicative Language Teaching, online learning, Vietnamese EFL teachers, teachers beliefs

I. INTRODUCTION

Traditionally in Vietnam, EFL students tend to prioritise learning grammar over communicative skills and working individually; this is due to the national English curriculum set by the Ministry of Education and Training (Anh, 2013). As a result, CLT appears as a potential solution to this problem in the context of EFL teaching in Vietnam, as it offers significant benefits in reinforcing learners' communicative competence as well as classroom interactions.

Moreover, with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic in late 2019, the education field witnessed a considerable shift from face-to-face to online teaching and learning. In response to the pandemic outbreak, educational institutions in Vietnam started to operate

online classes to meet the high demand for remote learning. Specifically, synchronous online learning has been widely implemented due to its simulation of simultaneous interactions between teachers and learners (Midkiff & DaSilva, 2000). As a result, the implementation of CLT within the context of synchronous online learning has gained great attention in the field of language education in Vietnam (Nguyen, 2010; Hieu et al., 2022). Technological tools and platforms like video conferencing apps can facilitate learners engagement in interactive and collaborative language tasks (Nguyen, 2010; Kamiri & Aziz, 2022).

Furthermore, a number of studies reveal the influential role of teachers' attitudes towards CLT in determining the effectiveness of its implementation.

Specifically, teachers' process of lesson planning and decision-making in class is considerably regulated by their beliefs (Teh, 2021; Gloriez, 2022; Jeong, 2018; Nguyễn, 2012). These investigations provide insights on teachers' beliefs, practices and challenges when adopting CLT, with the aim of offering recommendations on relevant training to enhance effective communicative teaching practices in language classes operated by universities or public schools. However, this field of research has not gained much recognition in Vietnam, particularly in the context of synchronous online learning within language centres and private language classes.

The paper aims to investigate Vietnamese EFL teachers' common beliefs of CLT and their employment of this approach in virtual classrooms organized either by private English language centres or independent teachers. The study will address the following research questions:

1. What are the demonstrated beliefs of CLT among Vietnamese EFL teachers?
2. How do teachers employ CLT in their synchronous online English classes?
3. What challenges do teachers encounter when using CLT to teach English in their synchronous online classes?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communicative language teaching

According to Ellis (2003), CLT allows learners to acquire language knowledge through the understanding of broader concepts, notions, and language functions that facilitate real-life communication, as opposed to learning language in isolation, such as individual grammar structures or vocabulary. Nunan (1991) emphasised that CLT encourages language learning with interaction in the target language, authentic materials, linking classroom learning with outside language-related activities and incorporating learners' personal experiences for language competence development. This approach aligns with the central theory of CLT, which proposes that communicative competence is the primary aim of language teaching (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009; Sauvignon, 2002).

To understand how teachers can implement the CLT approach and ensure learners develop communicative competence, Sauvignon (2002) proposed a model highlighting the interrelation of grammatical competence, sociocultural competence, discourse competence and strategic competence, all of which contribute to learners' ability to communicate the target language effectively. Specifically, grammatical competence is about the ability to use a language rule to communicate rather than to

explain the usage of that certain rule. She also explained that discourse competence, referring to text coherence and cohesion, concerned with the interrelation of utterances or words or phrases in written form to create a meaningful speech or text. Like Hyme's (1996), Richards' (2006) and Canale & Swain's (1980) ideas of sociocultural competence, learners need to be well-informed of the setting that the target language is applied including "the roles of the participants, the information they share and the function of the interaction" (Sauvignon, 2002, p.9). Sauvignon (2002) did not emphasise the importance of strategic competence as other scholars; however, she mentioned that effective use of different coping strategies helps enhance the comprehensiveness of communication despite the lack of linguistic knowledge. Overall, teachers should consider all four components when teaching communicative language so that each development contributes to the increase in learners' overall communicative competence.

2.2 CLT practices in the classroom

By looking at the various techniques and activities that teachers use, we can better grasp how CLT can foster a dynamic and engaging language learning environment for students. Specifically, CLT emphasises the role of learners in classroom activities. With a greater emphasis on learner-centredness, the teacher's role has shifted towards a facilitator who establishes an effective language learning environment and provides their learners with opportunities to use and practice the target language (Richards, 2006). Furthermore, teachers also act as advisers or counsellors helping learners improve their errors and learn from their mistakes in communicative activities (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

According to Richards and Rogers (1986, p.76), learning activities that reflect the CLT approach need to "engage learners in communication", focus on developing their fluency rather than accuracy and require them to share information, negotiate meaning and interact with others. Therefore, there are two main types of CLT activities, namely functional communication which refers to information gap and problem-solving activities and social interaction including meaningful conversations based on various contexts (Richards and Rogers, 1986; Richards, 2006). Other typical activity types are also considered to help promote learners' opportunities to communicate in the target language such as task completion, information gathering, opinion sharing, information transfer, reasoning gap and role plays (Richards, 2006).

To develop learners' communicative competence, most of the activities in CLT emphasise pair and small

group work in which learners can gain several perks regarding peer-learning, maximised opportunity for communicating, increased learning motivation and fluency development (Richards, 2006; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Another major attribute of CLT is the use of authentic materials as the basis for a communicative classroom to facilitate practical language learning. According to Martinez (2002), using authentic materials not only helps increase students' learning motivation by aligning with their needs and interests but also raises their awareness of cultural appropriateness and exposure to practical use of the target language.

2.3 CLT approach in synchronous online learning

According to Midkiff & DaSilva (2000), synchronous online learning refers to the situation where teachers and learners engage in simultaneous interaction through the internet, despite their learning locations. With Zoom Meetings being one of the effective video conferencing platforms for synchronous online learning, Anggraheni et al. (2020) revealed that the collaboration between CLT and the platform resulted in indirect improvement of learners' ESL vocabulary. Teachers can utilise different tools and online sources via Zoom easily to diversify their teaching and learning activities such as sharing video links or incorporating online quiz platforms to gamify the lessons (Anggraheni et al., 2020). Furthermore, the success of an online class via Zoom or similar platforms depends on teachers' proficiency in designing lesson plans that align with the characteristics of synchronous online learning, along with their appropriate time allocation for both learning activities and online classroom management (Lukas & Yunus, 2021; Kamiri & Aziz, 2022).

Despite the availability of strategies to employ CLT in virtual classes, teachers and learners face various obstacles, such as technological issues, distractions or learners' lack of self-regulation and independence (Savenye, 2005; Wasdahl, 2020). Nevertheless, teachers continue to implement CLT online, as it results in the same learning outcomes to face-to-face classes despite the differences in synergy and the way teachers deliver the lessons (Ng, 2020).

2.4 Teachers' beliefs in teaching

Researchers in the field of English language teaching (ELT) have demonstrated increasing interest in investigating the notion of teachers' beliefs in relation to their teaching practices (Khader, 2012). For instance, Johnson's (1992) study indicated that teachers designed lessons and conducted teaching based on their predetermined beliefs regarding how teaching and learning should occur in the classroom. Similarly, Jones and Fong (2007) showed that regardless of exposures to different

teaching methods, teachers tended to bind themselves to their initial beliefs of some certain teaching methods for their students. Moreover, teachers' beliefs also create a substantial impact on the development of teachers' teaching practices and their learners' language learning progress and abilities under their instruction (Gilakjani & Sabouri, 2017).

In general, teachers' beliefs have a crucial impact on how they decide to teach in the classroom. Regarding CLT, teachers' practices in implementing this approach depends on their ideologies toward the principles and characteristics of CLT.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research methods and design

This study adopted a mixed method approach with the combination of both quantitative and qualitative methods. In this research, the quantitative phase aimed to address the first two research questions, which focus on the common beliefs of CLT and the universal practices of this approach online among Vietnamese teachers. Additionally, it sought to identify whether there was any potential connection between these two factors. The qualitative phase, through interviews, investigated further this connection along with teachers' perceived challenges of employing CLT online, addressing research question 3.

3.2 Data collection

3.2.1 Sampling

The chosen sampling method for this research was convenience sampling as it was a practical, time-saving and cost-efficient method (Dörnyei, 2007). The participants were approached via announcement posts including a brief research introduction and target participants on Facebook groups of Vietnamese EFL teachers across Vietnam. These participants were experienced in teaching English online either through private English language centres or independent lessons. There were a total of 47 participants answered the online questionnaire and 4 of them joined the interviews.

3.2.2 Quantitative instrument

A 6-point Likert scale with first-person statements was used to help participants reflect on their actions and thoughts, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree). Using this scale without a neutral point required participants to truly think, reflect and pick the exact option for each statement (Garland, 1991). The questionnaire, designed on JISC online survey platform, comprised two main sections. Items 1 to 14 in section 1 aimed to answer research question 1, which were based on Savignon's

(2002) Communicative competence model and Richards' (2006) Assumptions of current CLT. Items 15 to 26 in section 2 focused on research question 2 following Richards' (2006) chapter of classroom activities in CLT and Ko and Rossen's (2010) guide on online activities and communication tools for teachers. Moreover, information sheet and consent form were included in the online survey to ensure the ethical perspective of the research.

3.2.3 Qualitative instrument

Sub-sequential to the questionnaire, 4 participants went through a one-to-one semi structured interview conducted through Zoom, where their interviews were audio-recorded. An online consent form was also sent to all four teachers, asking for their voluntary participation prior to the interview. The interviews were organized in two sections. Section 1 included an introduction consisted of greetings, introduction of the interviewer, the aim of the interview and reassurance for participants that the interviews were not a test. Section 2 addressed the three research questions where teachers provided their further explanation on their beliefs of CLT, ways and challenges of teaching communicative English online.

3.3 Data analysis

Regarding the analysis of the quantitative data, the items were measured using descriptive statistics which provided summary of the collect data via visual demonstrations (Marshall & Jonker, 2010). The questionnaire data was analysed directly on the JISC website using the "Analyse" feature due to its convenience and diversity in presenting

the data. In addition, Excel was also used to calculate means and to generate charts and tables pertaining to the constructs.

Qualitative content analysis was used to analyse the participants' interviews. The teachers' responses were transcribed, familiarised, coded, categorised and interpreted thematically.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

4.1 Results

4.1.1 Findings from the questionnaire

Teachers' beliefs of CLT

Fourteen questionnaire items addressing research question 1 were based on four sectors of Savignon's (2002) Communicative competence model and three main characteristics of CLT from Richards' (2006) study, with two items for each construct. Table 1 below presents the results, showing the percentages and overall mean scores of each construct.

Table 1. Mean scores of teachers' beliefs towards CLT

Principles and characteristics of CLT	N	SD %	D %	SL D %	SL A %	A %	SA %	Mean (M)
Importance of teaching grammar	47	1.00	7.00	9.00	21.00	37.00	25.00	4.59
Meaningful language use in social contexts	47	0.00	0.00	0.00	6.40	36.10	57.50	5.51
Teaching spoken and written texts to learners	47	2.15	7.45	7.45	13.80	42.55	26.60	4.67
Emphasizing fluency over accuracy in communication	47	1.05	12.75	17.00	22.35	39.35	7.50	4.08
Teachers' role as facilitators	47	0.00	1.05	6.40	15.95	36.15	40.45	5.08
Learner-centred approach	47	0.00	1.05	2.15	21.25	38.30	37.25	5.08
Collaborative activities foster communicative language learning	47	0.00	0.00	3.20	23.40	45.75	27.65	4.98

SD: Strongly Disagree, D: Disagree, SL D: Slightly Disagree, SL A: Slightly Agree, A: Agree, SA: Strongly Agree

It is evident from the table that the mean scores of teachers' beliefs for each principle or characteristic of CLT are consistently above 4.0. The results indicate that the teachers especially agree that the following aspects of this approach are significant: *meaningful language use in social contexts, teachers' role as facilitators in CLT classroom and CLT as a learner-centred approach*. This finding is supported by the highest mean score (M=5.51), with a considerable 57.50% of participants who strongly agreed with the importance of meaningful communication in the target language across different contexts. The next two characteristics of learner-centred approach and teachers as facilitators received the same mean score (M=5.08). Ranked with the third highest mean score (M=4.98), nearly half of the teachers agreed that learners predominantly learn through group and pair work in communicative language classrooms, as these activities foster meaningful communication between them.

Notably, the next three factors, including teaching spoken and written texts, emphasis on fluency and importance of teaching grammar, had higher percentages of teachers expressing disagreement compared to other factors. Specifically, 30.80% (summed disagreement percentages SD%, D%, SL D%) of teachers' answers disagreed emphasizing fluency over accuracy in communication (M=4.08). Despite the similarity in the

summed percentage of disagreement for the last two factors, which are the importance of teaching grammar (17.00%) and teaching spoken and written texts to learners (17.05%). It is still apparent that Vietnamese teachers considered teaching students effective written and oral communication (M=4.67) as more important compared to teaching grammar (M=4.59).

Teachers' online practices of CLT

In the second section of the questionnaire, participants responded to 12 items addressing 6 practices of CLT in online learning. Each of the two items were summed and the average mean of usage was calculated for each online practice of CLT, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2. Mean scores of teachers' practices of CLT in synchronous online learning

Online practices of CLT	N	Mean of usage (M)	Rank
Role plays	47	4.92	2 nd
Prioritizing fluency tasks over accuracy	47	4.56	5 th
Discussions	47	5.01	1 st
Use of authentic materials	47	4.69	4 th
Implicit grammar teaching	47	4.52	6 th
Pair and group activities	47	4.88	3 rd

Similar to the overall mean scores of teachers' beliefs toward CLT, all 6 online practices of CLT obtained their average mean above 4.5. Considerably, the three most frequently employed activities by teachers are discussions (M=5.01), role plays (M=4.95) and pair and group activities (M=4.88). Following closely, the technique of using authentic materials in online communicative classes ranked in 4th place with a mean score of 4.69. The last two online practices of CLT implemented by teachers are prioritizing fluency tasks and implicit grammar teaching with similar mean scores (M=4.56, M=4.52). To investigate further participants' responses, the top three activities were grouped into a category of communication engaging activities, while the

rest were categorised as teaching techniques, as shown in Fig. 1 and Fig. 2.

Fig. 1 shows that the majority of teachers agreed on using the three activities to foster communication among learners. Specifically, the usage of role plays in online English classes achieved the highest amount of teachers answering "Agree", which is approximately 55%. Meanwhile, the largest portion of teachers, nearly 30% strongly favoured incorporating discussions into their online communicative teaching. The percentages of teachers that slightly agreed are approximately equal for three activities. However, there is a small percentage of teachers who expressed disagreement on adopting these communication-engaging activities in the online context.

Specifically, when compared to the other two factors, most of the teachers indicated a tendency to Slightly disagree

with the incorporation of pair and group activities in online classrooms.

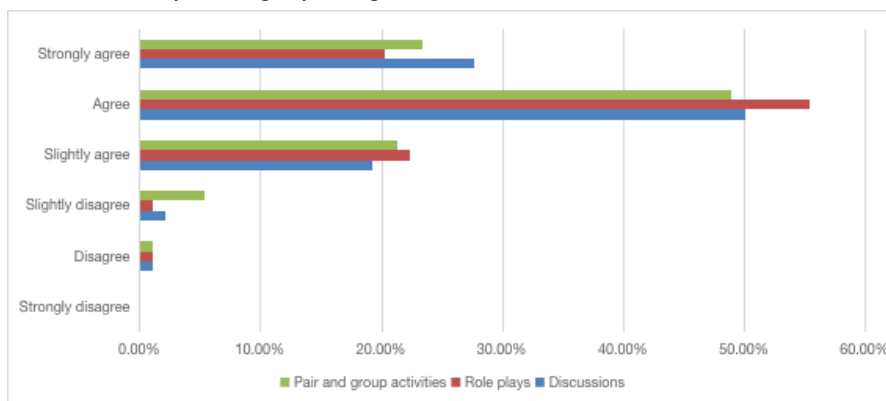


Fig. 1: Teachers' employment of communication engaging activities in online classes

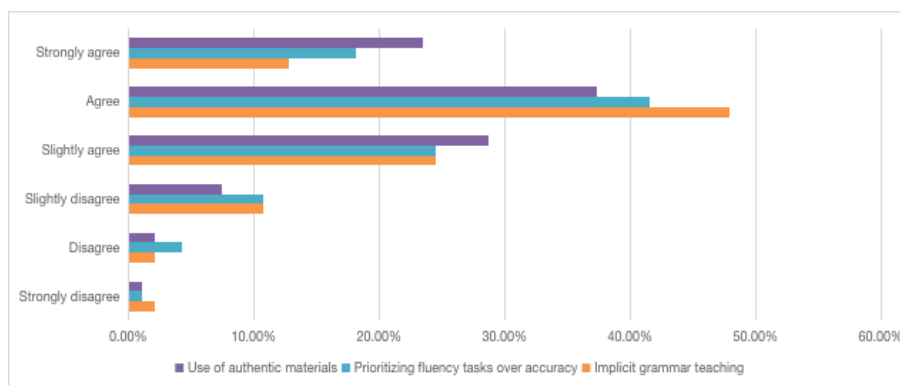


Fig. 2: Teachers' teaching techniques in online classes

Regarding the choice of teaching techniques, most of the participants expressed their agreement on the technique of implicit grammar teaching, with approximately 50% of them in agreement (as shown in Fig. 2). Meanwhile, the technique of using authentic materials for teaching communicative language online obtained the highest percentages of Strongly agree and Slightly agree responses from participants. As demonstrated in the figure, a higher percentage of teachers showed inclination towards disagreement regarding their application of the three teaching techniques in online CLT classes, in comparison to the three communicative activities mentioned above. Notably, implicit grammar teaching received the highest percentage of Strongly disagree answers from teachers.

Comparison of mean scores between teachers' beliefs and online practices

After separate analysis of teachers' beliefs and online practices, this section will focus on comparison of the two aspects. Particularly, the means of seven common beliefs will be compared with the means of six online practices of CLT, as demonstrated in Fig. 3 and Fig. 4 below. All constructs from both aspects received notably high mean

scores, exceeding 4.00. These results suggest that Vietnamese teachers held positive beliefs about CLT and were quite committed to implementing certain CLT practices in their online English classes. Regarding their beliefs in Fig. 3, four CLT characteristics addressing meaningful communication, teachers' and learners' roles and the communicative benefit of collaborative work attained the top four mean scores, all above 4.

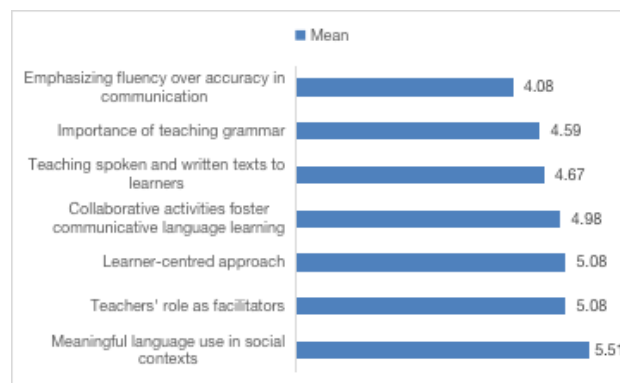


Fig. 3: Mean scores of teachers' beliefs of CLT

In addition, teachers' online practices of CLT, including discussions, role plays, pair and group

activities, as well as the use of authentic materials, which reflect the four aforementioned CLT characteristics achieved nearly similar mean scores, generally surpassing 4.6 (shown in Fig. 4). Moreover, the mean score for Vietnamese teachers' beliefs towards the importance of teaching grammar in CLT was 4.59 while the score for the technique of teaching grammar implicitly in online classes was 4.52. However, in terms of the construct of emphasis on fluency in CLT, teachers' beliefs received a lower mean score (M=4.08) compared to its practice in online learning (M=4.56).

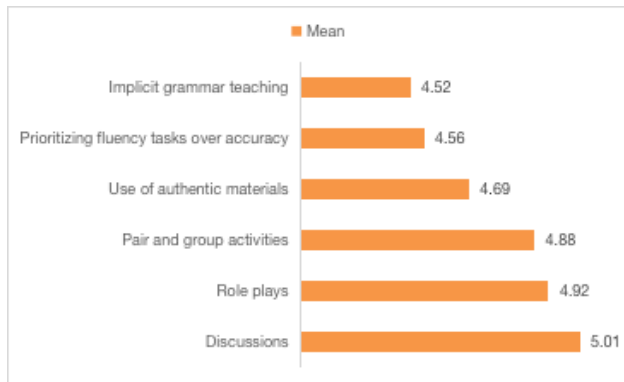


Fig. 4: Mean scores of teachers' practices of CLT in synchronous online learning

4.1.2 Findings from the interviews

Teachers' beliefs and online practices of CLT

To provide further insights for the qualitative data, four individual semi-structure interviews were conducted with four teachers who showed interest in participating after completing the questionnaire. When asked about their opinions toward using pair and group work as in-class activities, it was obvious that the teachers established positive attitudes towards the benefits of collaborative work in the CLT classroom. From the teachers' responses, four main themes were established, including: (1) increasing student interaction and speaking opportunities, (2) fostering meaningful communication in different contexts, (3) boosting students' confidence and (4) facilitating teachers to design authentic tasks. Accordingly, these themes indicate an alignment between the interview and survey data, both disclosing Vietnamese teachers' strong agreement on the effectiveness of collaborative activities and the need to promote meaningful language use in various contexts in CLT.

Regarding the degree of learner-centred of CLT, all the teachers expressed their decisive opinion that CLT is a learner-centred approach. Specifically, two of them described their beliefs on the communicative purpose for learners in CLT, while the other two teachers emphasized their opinions that CLT should prioritize student talking

time. Specifically, Teacher 3 pointed out that "the purpose of communicative teaching is for students to produce a meaningful conversation or a meaningful speech". Meanwhile, Teacher 2 added, "the teacher just plays a very simple role to assist them". This result implies that all teachers demonstrated a supportive mindset towards both learners' and teachers' roles, as well as the overall purpose of CLT.

There were three primary themes in teachers' responses relating to teaching grammar. Two teachers expressed a perspective of low importance for teaching grammar, while the other two considered this aspect of great importance. They also believed that teaching grammar in contexts is important. Furthermore, there is a similarity in two teachers' opinions regarding the focus on spoken texts only in CLT; whereas the other two agreed that teachers should focus on both spoken and written texts. In response to the question about the degree of emphasis on learners' fluency, two teachers agreed with greater focus on fluency than accuracy, with Teacher 2 specifically explained that "accuracy is not important when you really want to learn communicative English". In contrast, the other two teachers stated that the emphasis depends on the activity or the stage of the lesson.

Focusing on teachers' online practices of CLT, the analysis of interview data revealed four main themes from teachers' responses for their chosen activities that encourage learners' communication. These themes included discussions, role plays, pair/group work and gamification. Among the four teachers, three incorporated discussions and pair/group work into their online English lessons, while only two of them utilized role plays. Two teachers shared the same idea as they both employed the technique of gamification into their lessons. Moreover, all four teachers answered that they paid more attention to speaking and listening skills, especially speaking when teaching communicative English online.

In relation to the questionnaire results of teaching techniques, the interview data encompassed three specific practices within the major theme, including: (1) grammar homework, (2) fluency and accuracy tasks and (3) teaching grammar and vocabulary in contexts. Among the four teachers, Teacher 3 designed learning tasks that focus on both fluency and accuracy, such as "writing a letter using some grammar points and vocabulary", while another teacher employed teaching the target language implicitly to the students. Interestingly, only one teacher incorporated all three teaching techniques in their online English classes. When asked about teaching materials, all four teachers mentioned their preference for utilising a combination of authentic materials and textbooks as the main sources for online communicative English classes.

To examine further the similarity in mean scores between their beliefs and online practices, all four teachers were asked to reflect on whether their perspectives on CLT might have influenced the way they teach communicative English in their actual online classes. One major theme emerged as all of them confirmed the presence of a connection between their beliefs and practices of CLT in online teaching.

Teachers' challenges in online communicative English classes

Regarding teachers' challenges, Table 3 below presented all the themes coded from the four teachers' responses.

Table 3. Teachers' responses on challenges encountered in synchronous online CLT classes

Responses	Primary themes	Major themes
(T1) students don't have a chance to communicate directly with each other (T2) The hard part for me is the interaction (T3) lacks face to face interaction and the use of gestures	Lack of direct interaction	Classroom interaction & engagement
(T1) hard to keep the students engaged (T4) keep the students engaged	Student engagement	
(T2) not turn on their cameras or microphone (T4) don't want to turn on their camera	Students not turning on cameras or microphones	Classroom management & communication
(T2) monitor the class effectively (T3) classroom management	Classroom management	
(T2) don't really understand the meaning of the activity ... trouble explaining this	Trouble giving task instructions	

activity (T4) student may not fully understand my instruction		
(T3) not enough room for error correction	Lack of room for error correction	
(T3) tech related issues	Tech-related issues	Technical challenges

As shown in Table 3, all four teachers claimed that they experienced issues relating to classroom interaction and engagement, which encompass three specific challenges. Specifically, three out of four teachers reported that teaching CLT online was difficult due to the lack of direct interaction. On the other hand, only one teacher had difficulties with student engagement and students not turning on cameras or microphones during their virtual classes. In addition, three teachers revealed that they had to cope with classroom management and communication issues. Particularly, they had trouble giving task instructions and monitoring their students when teaching communicative English online. Meanwhile, only one teacher encountered both lack of room for error correction and tech-related issues in their online classes.

When asked about the roots of their difficulties, the first major cause that arose from three teachers' responses was the nature of online teaching. Particularly, according to one teacher's statement, attention span and distraction when learning online significantly affected his teaching experience. Furthermore, another teacher mentioned that the lack of in-person interaction was another major cause of difficulties in their online teaching practice.

Teachers' suggested solutions to their challenges

They all suggested two solutions that relate to adaptation and professional development and three solutions regarding student engagement and classroom management. Three teachers claimed that they would have to adapt to online teaching to solve their problems. In addition, teacher training is also needed as a professional development on their teaching practice. Regarding student engagement and classroom management, teachers believed that they need to motivate students, create ground rules for students and build rapport with them, to improve the overall online teaching and learning experience.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 Research question 1: What are the demonstrated beliefs of CLT among Vietnamese EFL teachers?

The research results reveal that Vietnamese EFL teachers seem to hold positive beliefs about CLT. This finding resonates with the study of Gloriez (2022), which established favourable attitudes towards CLT among Indonesian EFL teachers. Specifically, Vietnamese teachers believe that the most important aspect of CLT is the consistent involvement of meaningful language use in various social contexts in the classroom. Furthermore, the quantitative results reflect a positive outlook among teachers regarding the efficacy of collaborative work, such as pair and group activities, in encouraging communication in the classroom. This aligns with Savignon's (2002) identification of sociocultural competence as one of the key components of learners' communicative competence.

Despite some minor disagreement in teachers' questionnaire responses, it is evident that Vietnamese teachers equally support the roles of both teachers and learners in the CLT classroom. This belief correlates with the studies by Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) and Richards (2006), which emphasise the learners' role as the main communicators in classroom activities, while teachers focus on providing speaking opportunities and establishing a meaningful language learning environment.

Although Vietnamese teachers acknowledged the necessity of grammar instruction, it was not considered as important as other factors of CLT. This result, to some extent, contradicts with Gloriez's (2022) finding, which reveals that the majority of EFL teachers either denied or were unaware of the necessity of teaching grammar in CLT classes. Specifically, the research results among Vietnamese EFL teachers display a range of opinions regarding the importance of teaching grammar, with a considerable number expressing agreement on its significance. These beliefs are in line with many researchers' idea of incorporating grammatical competence to develop a learner's overall communicative competence (Richards, 2006, Savignon, 2002, Hyme, 1996, Canale & Swain, 1980). Although CLT approach places emphasis on meaning in communication, it is crucial to understand that effective communication also requires a foundation of structures, which includes the proper use of grammar (Savignon, 2002).

Regarding discourse competence, which concerns the ability to produce different types of texts for both spoken and written communication (Richards, 2006), a substantial number of Vietnamese teachers concurred on the need of integrating both text types into their teaching. This emphasis reflects their commitment to ensuring a

learner-centred environment that aims to enhance learners' proficiency in effective communication. In addition, Vietnamese EFL teachers tend to prioritise fluency over accuracy. This mindset, to some extent, reflects Richards' (2006) description of fluency development as one of the goals of CLT. However, it overlooks the contribution of accuracy to maintaining the flow of meaningful communication, which both Savignon (2002) and Hyme (1996) refer to as strategic competence.

4.2.2 Research question 2: How do teachers employ CLT in their synchronous online English classes?

It can be inferred from the participants' responses that Vietnamese EFL teachers are fairly committed to applying certain CLT techniques and activities to engage their learners in communication and collaboration in synchronous online learning. This finding is in line with Richards and Rogers' (1986) belief that learning activities reflecting the CLT approach should involve learners in communication and aim to develop their fluency as well as promote interaction with others. Similarly, Nguyen (2010) confirmed that the employment of CLT can be improved by incorporating collaborative activities, such as role plays, discussions, pair and group tasks, within virtual classrooms to simulate real-time interactions.

Beside communication engaging activities, Vietnamese teachers are likely to favour the use of various websites and online media as the main resources for their class activities. This finding associates with Jeong's (2018) discovery that technology-integrated classrooms facilitate the implementation of CLT by providing access to a variety of authentic language materials. However, Vietnamese teachers also favour the combination of both authentic materials and text books that are provided by the school or language centre. While the majority of teachers prioritize fluency over accuracy when designing online tasks, some teachers value a combination of both factors in their activities. Moreover, Vietnamese teachers seem to endorse the technique of implicit grammar teaching during their online communicative English classes. Their practices follow Savignon's (2002) recommendation to replace direct grammar instruction with a self-discovery approach that allows learners to focus on grasping the meaning and appropriate usage of grammar within authentic contexts.

Connection between Vietnamese EFL teachers' beliefs and implementation of CLT in synchronous online classes

As previously discussed, Vietnamese teachers express their acceptance of CLT principles and characteristics. In addition, they also show considerable dedication to including activities as well as teaching methods associated with CLT in their online classes. It is evident that the

teachers' responses reveal a connection between their beliefs regarding CLT principles and characteristics and their implementation of the approach within the virtual classroom setting. This finding supports Choi's (2000) exploration on the positive relationship between teachers' beliefs about CLT and their application of its techniques in teaching. Furthermore, Richardson (1996) and Johnson (1992) claim that teachers design lesson plans and conduct teaching based on their established beliefs regarding effective classroom teaching and learning strategies, which is reflected in this context through Vietnamese teachers' online application of CLT.

4.2.3 Research question 3: What challenges do teachers encounter when using CLT to teach English in their synchronous online classes?

Even though Vietnamese teachers demonstrate their determination to apply various CLT techniques into their real-time online English classes, their interview responses, as analysed in the previous chapter, reveal multiple challenges that dispute their practices within this context. The most common challenges that teachers encounter relate to the interaction and student engagement within the online learning context. Teachers indicate that online learning usually derives from direct interactions between the teachers and their students as well as among the students. This issue is also revealed in Ng's (2020) study that despite the simulation of real-time communication and similarity in learning outcomes, the interactions within virtual classroom is certainly different from the traditional one. Specifically, online classes conducted on video conferencing platforms limit interactions between students and teachers to a video screen, restricting their expressions. Furthermore, Kamiri and Aziz (2022) state that teachers experience major difficulties while conducting speaking tasks online like poor engagement among students. This is resulted from the "limited access to direct interactive communication" when teaching online (Kamiri & Aziz, 2022:777). Regarding decreased student engagement in online class, the issue tends to be derived from their lack of learning motivation (Savenye, 2005; Kamiri & Aziz, 2022). This challenge is considered common among EFL teachers within the traditional CLT teaching context as well (Nguyễn, 2012; Pitikornpuangpetch & Suwanarak, 2021; Maestre & Gindidis, 2016). This emphasizes the importance of motivation in enhancing student engagement and interaction in the online learning environment.

According to Hieu et al. (2022), one of the dilemmas of adopting CLT techniques in the online learning setting is the high demand for teachers' classroom management ability. Ng's (2020) research illustrates the complexity of online classroom management, especially

during breakout room activities. It is apparent that these mentioned difficulties are also encountered by Vietnamese teachers when teaching communicative English in online classes. Another identified issue associated with online classroom management and communication is Vietnamese teachers' struggle in giving effective task instructions. Kamiri and Aziz (2022) elaborate that students find it challenging to engage with the learning materials due to the confusion in online task instructions, in contrast to the clarity in face-to-face classrooms. Some teachers from the research also recognised the lack of room for error correction as one of the greatest challenges encountered during their implementation of CLT in online sessions. Despite the tolerance on errors in communicative activities, teachers should provide error correction as well as feedback on students' target language use at the end of the activity to improve their communication (Richards, 2006). This issue is believed to derive from the time-consuming nature of online classroom management, which may require teachers to spend a considerable amount of time assigning tasks and giving instructions.

To overcome the mentioned challenges, Vietnamese teachers suggest teacher training as one of the key solutions to develop their professional online teaching practices. In addition, they believe that creating a clear online classroom procedure between students and teachers improves student engagement and classroom management. Teachers also attempt to motivate their students as well as build rapport and understand students' interests and needs to enhance the interaction and learning progress.

V. CONCLUSION

The research investigated Vietnamese EFL teachers' beliefs about CLT and their adoption of certain CLT techniques in synchronous online teaching. The study found that teachers hold positive beliefs towards CLT, recognising its core principles and characteristics, such as meaningful language use in social contexts, the communicative outcomes of incorporating collaborative activities and learner-centredness. Despite some teachers' misconception of neglecting grammar instruction, it is widely recognized as crucial for effective communication, though many tend to prioritize developing learners' fluency over accuracy. As for teachers' employment of CLT in online class, the majority of them prefer incorporating communicative activities that foster collaboration among learners, including discussions, role plays and other pair and group activities. They also employ implicit grammar teaching and use a variety of authentic online materials, alongside textbooks, to tailor lessons to learners' needs and ensure meaningful grammar use. It is clear that

Vietnamese teachers' beliefs towards CLT significantly influence the way they teach communicative English in their online classes. Furthermore, the study identified teachers' common struggles revolve around the lack of in-person interactions, decreased students' engagement, difficulties in classroom management and technical issues. Accordingly, teachers emphasised some solutions to overcome their challenges like professional development to gain essential online teaching skills and classroom management skills.

Regarding pedagogical implications, the research results may contribute to the enhancement of language teaching practices for Vietnamese EFL teachers, while also providing insights on how to improve students' communicative competence through online platforms. Specifically, the findings on CLT principles and online teaching methods can be a beneficial resource for guiding other Vietnamese EFL teachers, especially novice teachers, in grasping the nature of CLT and effectively applying it into their online sessions. Furthermore, given the substantial impact of teachers' beliefs on their online teaching practices, as well as the challenges regarding CLT, language schools and organizations in Vietnam are recommended to provide EFL teachers with comprehensive training programs to rectify any misconceptions and ensure teachers' efficient implementation of CLT in online classes.

The main limitation of the study is its small sample size which may result in the lack of sufficient generalizability of the data. As a result, the findings might not entirely represent Vietnamese EFL teachers in this research context. This indicates that any further research should consider mitigating this limitation by adopting a larger sample size. Additionally, future investigations could consider examining further the connection between teachers' beliefs and their online teaching methods. A qualitative research approach that conducts interviews prior to classroom observations could verify whether teachers' implementation of CLT in synchronous online sessions truly reflects their attitudes towards CLT.

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