

Secondary School Students' Beliefs, Perceptions and Attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Structural Approach (SA)

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Abstract

In English language learning, there are mainly two instructions being used in classroom teaching which are the Communicative Language Teaching and Structural Approach. Many studies have looked into teachers' perceptions of implementing both approaches in the classrooms; few have looked into students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes with respect to these English language instructions in classroom practices. This study investigates the students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes with regard to classroom practices focusing on Communicative Language Teaching and Structural Approach. The objectives of the study were to investigate students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards English language instructions and the correlation between students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the students toward Communicative Language Teaching and Structural Approach. 134 Form 4 students from a selected secondary school in an urban area in Seremban were chosen in a cluster sampling for this study. A set of questionnaires using 5 points Likert scale was used as one of the instruments in gathering the data. Quantitative data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics such as mean and standard deviation were used to investigate the students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching and Structural Approach. For inferential statistics, Pearson Correlation was used to analyse the correlations between the students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards Communicative Language Teaching and Structural Approach. The findings of the study showed positive students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching as well as Structural Approach. However, the weightage inclined more toward Communicative Language Teaching. There is a significant correlation between the student's beliefs, perceptions and attitudes toward Communicative Language Teaching and Structural Approach.

Keywords: Beliefs, Perceptions, Attitude, Communicative Language Learning (CLT), Structural Approach (SA), English Language Instructions.

Introduction

English is a very important language in the world. It has moved a step from being an international language to a global language. It is now a widely spoken language because of its status as a political and economic tool of communication in the world. Krishnan (2012) said that this is evident today when international business deals and political diplomacy are carried out in the language. In a globalised world, speaking English is a very important skill for those who aspire to be businessmen as well as diplomats. Razmjoo and Riazi (2006) stated three important reasons for learning English. Firstly the latest technological and scientific resources which are used in various sectors are written in English, secondly, in the world of information technology it is important to know how to utilize the internet efficiently and lastly being proficient in the language improves cultural understanding between different nations.

Globalization has placed English in a very important position in Malaysia's education. The Ministry of Education (MOE) lately has put tremendous effort to revive proficiency in English among the students. This is due to a consistent decrease over the years in the level of proficiency among the students, especially in the skills of speaking as well as writing – two important output skills. As Bawani (2010) puts it – “In Malaysia, the two main concerns are the falling standard of English and the impact on the national language” (p57). A study by Noor Azina Ismail (2011) found that English language proficiency is a major factor that contributes to employability. She boldly stated that “Good grades did not guarantee employment for Malaysian graduates. They must have a good command of English and other soft skills”. (p97) CEO of Jobstreet.com, an Asia-Pacific leading Internet recruitment website, Mark Cheng attributed not being proficient in the language as the main factor why companies are reluctant to hire fresh graduates. This was evident in a survey conducted from March 29 to 31, 2005. The latest survey carried out in July 2013 still maintained that not being proficient in the language is still a key factor for not being employed. Language mastery contributed to 55% of the reason why fresh graduates are not hired.

We can see continuous and positive efforts by the MOE to increase the level of standards of English among teachers and students through various programmes. While these measures are applauded, we cannot deny the fact that these solutions will have an impact on the command of the English Language among the students but these are not enough because we have not identified the root problem. Based on these facts, the focus should be aimed at the students for their low proficiency in the language - What has made the majority of them not interested in learning the English language and applying it in their everyday lives. The beliefs, perspectives and attitudes of these students towards English language instructions should be studied to get a clearer picture of the situation. The reason could be due to the approaches in the methodology of teaching being employed by the teacher. If there is a mismatch between students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes and teachers' pedagogical approach, there is a tendency for a failed lesson to take place which will not benefit either party.

Problem Statement

As a result over the years, we have seen a decline in the command of the language, especially in speaking and writing which was very eminent for the past few years. Krishnan (2012). It shows that the student's needs in the forms of their beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are being ignored and they are being taught with different methodologies over the years whether they like it or otherwise. For more than 100 years, SLA (Second language acquisition) experts have debated the best approach to teaching English to non-native speakers or L2 learners. Thus this study will try to look into students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes toward English language instructions which play a very important part in the classroom. The problem to be addressed in this research is the beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the students towards two important English language instructions which are communication or better known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and grammar or also known as Structural Approach (SA).

Beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are important factors a student should have in order to learn. These factors shaped the way learners react to learning and they can be the deciding factors between success and failure. Positive factors contribute to success while negative factors contribute to failure. Positive factors can turn into negative and vice versa if there is a defect in the approaches used. Students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes toward English language instructions are important elements because they influence the students' commitment and perseverance in learning the language in the classroom. Therefore, students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes needed to be understood to pinpoint the challenges, hindrances and obstructions that they faced while learning in a classroom. (Hiew, 2012) The effectiveness of any type of language learning is strongly related to the student's beliefs, perceptions and attitudes. (Ganjabi, 2011). Since the students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes relate to their thinking and reactions toward English language instructions, research into these factors will yield some answers regarding the relations between students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards CLT and SA respectively. Therefore, students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes can be attributed as important and determining factors in a successful language teaching process.

Literature Review

The Implementation of CLT in Malaysia

The Malaysian education system has gone through many changes throughout the years since independence. Bawani (2010) divided the changes into 3 different stages. From 1957-1970, the grammar-translation method, direct method and situational approach were used in Malaysian classrooms, from 1970 – 1990 the communicative approach was implemented and from the 1990s onwards the English Language Teaching (ELT) curriculum in Malaysia was created to suit the changes that is taking place locally and globally. According to Su (2007) in Malaysia, the structural approach was used for Form 1, Form 2 and Form 3 in the 1970s. The CLT was introduced in 1975 and was used for Form 4 and Form 5 to use the language for various purposes.

The MOE has implemented the CLT for all its English subjects in the primary as well as the secondary schools under its KBSM (New Secondary School Syllabus) curriculum designed by the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in 1989. Malaysia is one of the earliest nations to implement CLT in the classroom. Teacher trainees have gone for practices at the teachers' training colleges and universities in this new approach. Therefore, there is no conflict among the teachers to implement it although some of them went through the old school of thought when they were learning the language. The new syllabus put emphasis on the four main skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Focus was also given to language contents like grammar, sound system and vocabulary by introducing CLT into English Language Teaching. A communicative approach with overt teaching of grammar is taught where it is deemed necessary. (Ministry of Education, 1989) This is known as the role of grammar through CLT or the Interaction Hypothesis introduced by Long in the 1990s. According to Lee (2002), this communicative approach was introduced by the MOE because "... of dissatisfaction with the old curriculum which was thought to be too subject content-biased, too much emphasis on rote-learning, too exam oriented and excessive dependence on textbooks". (p12)

Support for CLT

When CLT gains popularity in Europe in the 60s, other countries started to take the initiative to study and implement them. From the 70s onwards, CLT was used as the methodology in many Asian countries. Besides, many SLA scholars also advocate this methodology in classroom teaching. Although SA is used to teach grammatical form and is known to be effective, there are shortcomings such as the students becoming passive learners and lack of exposure to communicative skills. (Dam 2001) Besides, students who have been exposed to the traditional approach like the SA – over the years are good in grammatical competence however they have difficulty conversing in the target language with native and non-native speakers. (Rao 1996). In other words, SA did not achieve the function of teaching students to communicate well. For Xiao (2006), in order to teach a foreign language, CLT has been accepted as the best approach.

Furthermore, many materials in English such as textbooks, revision books and others have been written based on the approach of CLT. So it will be easy for teachers and students to utilize these materials in the learning process. Since the introduction of CLT in Malaysian schools, most of the textbooks and authentic materials have been written to incorporate communicative activities. Chung (2005). So, teachers have abundant exercises and activities to conduct in the classrooms using this approach. Richards et al (1995) stressed that the CLT touches on real-life situations like giving directions, conversation, problem-solving, dialogues, etc which bring benefits to the learners. Furthermore, these activities will instill a sense of cooperation, togetherness and teamwork which indirectly creates a sense of language being used naturally. (Brumfit, 1984) When the learning process takes place especially during games, role-plays and drama, the language is being practised unconsciously. They communicate and converse freely among themselves without being tied to a certain rule or placed in a boundary. These exciting activities create an atmosphere where the students practice the focused language unconsciously. On top of that, they are playing and enjoying doing it.

Pawlak (2004) stated that majority of language experts preferred CLT to be used in acquiring the second language. This is because since 1970s, the linguist had some reservations about the old traditional method which in their perspective did not contribute to language learning and is against the natural processes of acquiring a language. On top of that, from the viewpoint of Krashen (1985), grammar has no significant part in learning a new language although he does not entirely object to the idea. Even if a learner knows grammar rules, he may not be able to converse in the language overnight. Besides the knowledge of knowing grammar rules will not last long. In a research conducted by Babic (2010) on tertiary students, all of them connected grammar only to grammatical exercises done during their classes and 65 percent of them stated they thought that grammar was not important for knowing the language, because the only truly important thing was communication. The linguist Charles Fillmore (1981) stressed that “the language of face-to-face conversation is the basic and primary use of language, all others being best described in terms of their manner of deviation from the base” (p.152)

Ineffectiveness of CLT

Other hurdles in carrying out the CLT in Malaysia include low student motivation and attitude, large class size, non-optional teachers, not being well-versed with CLT, etc. The environment where the students live especially in the rural setting does not help the students to apply their new-found skills outside of the classroom. There is no purpose for English to be used in this setting where their mother tongue took precedence. In Vietnam, clashes of cultures and values made the task of teachers even more difficult in implementing CLT in the classroom. Ellis (1996) said that CLT should be adapted rather than adapted to the new setting. In his own words, Ellis simply stated that it should be “culturally attuned and culturally accepted”. (pg.1)

Another setback Wang (2009) pointed out is that teachers do not put emphasis on grammar accuracy during CLT classrooms. Researcher Gatbonton (2005) stated that although most teachers claimed that they prefer the CLT approach compared to other approaches, in real sense they do not apply the methodology in the classrooms. Karavas-Doukas (1996) made a summary of the situation in the following. The few small-scale classroom studies that have been carried out seem to suggest that communicative approach is not followed; in practice they are following more traditional approaches. (pg.187) One of the most popular criticisms towards CLT is that it leads to the production of fluent but inaccurate learners. Hughes (1983) stated that in CLT priority is given to fluency over accuracy. Thus, error correction has no significant place in the classroom. The teacher who acts as a facilitator will not stop the conversation to correct the students as it he or she wants the communication to go on smoothly and effortlessly. As a result, fossilization of errors occurred and may never be corrected.

There are other shortcomings with CLT which need to be addressed as found in numerous research. Some of the nonnative speakers find it unnatural to speak English to their friends with whom they have been using their L1 for a long time. It is also difficult for a single teacher to control a big class and to notice if they speak in the language. This is because they have never practiced speaking English in the classroom with their peers. There is always resistance from the peers not to use the foreign language. They are not supportive of the approach which is practiced by some of their friends.

The teachers are only interested in the old ways of translation and memorization when teaching English. Parental resistance is another factor. They want their children to pass the entrance exam. Therefore the schools focused on how to teach grammar and vocabulary for exams and many CLT activities don't work in classroom. Sometimes, the textbooks used do not adhere to the CLT approach.

The Structural Approach (SA)

The SA approach is teaching the rules of grammar to the students as it is. It is a process of dividing the whole parts of speech into manageable bite size chunks and then introduces these to the students, one chunk per lesson, so that they gradually and systematically accumulate a complete picture of the language. The grammar rules are explained explicitly by the teacher when presenting it. There are two basic options when applying the SA in the classroom, which are the deductive approach and inductive approach which is also known as the discovery method. In the deductive approach, the teacher presents the rule/pattern/generalization and then goes to provide practice in the application of these rules. When a teacher is explaining rules of grammar to his students, this approach is popularly known as the top down approach. In this approach, the teacher explains the rules of grammar explicitly to the students.

On the contrary, the bottom up approach is when students are given a number of exercises and they try by themselves with the guidance of the teachers to find the connection or rule governing those particular parts of speech. For example exercises relating to subject verb agreement will enable the students to come to the conclusion and apply that conclusion to answer the following questions. This is because they have noticed the pattern. This is also known as the inductive approach. Beare (2013) In this approach, the teachers need a methodology that find ways to present small pieces of language that have previously been selected by the teacher to exemplify particular structures. Each new item will then be practised until the students are familiar with it, revised at future dates and eventually incorporated into the larger body of language that has previously been presented and practised. This is known as presentation, practice and production.

Preference for SA

Many scholars still believe in the SA because there are some studies which prove the effectiveness of this approach. Needless to say some teachers are still practising this approach in their classroom activities because it shows the desired results. No actual empirical studies have been conducted that prove that 'communicative' classrooms produce better language learners than the more traditional teacher dominated classrooms. In the beginning, a small number of evidence supports it because of its feel good features and promising results. However, the communicative approach has also shown strong evidence which shows that, it can also cause inability among the students to master the appropriate parts of the speech and this will lead to slowdown in progress in acquiring the second language.

Approaching grammar using the SA is a way to introduction of functional grammar because the conceptual framework on which it is based is a functional one rather than a formal one. It is functional

in three distinct although closely related senses in its interpretation of text, system and elements of linguistics structures. Chung (2005) said that “Communication proficiency will become easier to achieve only when one has grasped the necessary knowledge of language such as grammar.”(p35) Mareva (2012) pointed out “that emphasis on linguistic competence and accuracy as production is expected to be error free if this approach is used.” (p105). Another researcher Pawlak (2004) wrote:

that with time, however, it turned out that the complete rejection of formal instruction (SA) might have been premature and in the 1990s grammar was rehabilitated and recognized once again as an essential component of language learning. (p271-272)

There is no doubt that there are cases where learners acquire the second language grammar on their own naturally. They picked it up easily by deliberately getting themselves close to the native speakers and communicating in the language. For example, people who migrated from Japan, China, Cambodia and other places to US are able to acquire the language on their own within certain period of time. This happens rather quickly with the young immigrants. However, the same cannot be said of other learners. If we study carefully, we will find out that there are groups who have achieved a certain competency in the language but their English is not accurate. Pienemann (1984) has shown effectively in his research that learners who are given grammar lesson achieved a certain degree of proficiency and progressed to the next level within two weeks compared to those without any exposure to grammar classes will normally take a few months.

Pawlak (2004) stated that:

“one most compelling arguments against purely communicative approaches is that learners often fail to achieve high levels of grammatical competence even if they learn the language naturally or have plentiful in-class exposure to comprehensible input as well as opportunities for meaningful language use.” (p 272)

Ellis (2006) stated that “although there is no convincing direct and indirect evidence to support the teaching of grammar however, many studies... can be expected to favour grammar teaching.” (p86). He also mentioned that in order to reap the maximum benefit from the teaching of grammar, studies have shown that the effective grammar must be taught in line with the learners’ natural processes of acquisition. He also pointed out that grammar should be taught at a very young age to enable the learners to grasp the basic rules of grammar and build upon it subsequent understanding. Richards et.al. (2001) mention that although many stated they followed a communicative approach to teaching, “many of the respondents in a research still hold firmly to the belief that grammar is central to language learning and direct grammar teaching is needed by their ESL students.” (p54). Pica (2000) argues that communicative teaching with little focus on grammar is not enough for achieving good proficiency in the language. DeKeyser (1998) argues that

“grammar should be taught explicitly to achieve a maximum of understanding and then should be followed by some exercises to anchor it solidly in the students’ consciousness, in declarative form, so that it is easy to keep in mind during communicative exercises” (p58)

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the students' beliefs towards CLT and SA?
2. What are the students' perceptions towards CLT and SA?
3. What are the students' attitudes toward CLT and SA?
4. Is there a significant correlation between beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of students towards English language learning based on SA?
5. Is there a significant correlation between beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of students towards English language learning based on CLT?

Research Methodology

This is a quantitative study. For the purpose of this study, it focuses on secondary school students. The study focuses on Form Four students of 16 years of age. 134 respondents are selected as participants in the study. The study employs questionnaire in order to gather the data. The items in the questionnaire are adopted and adapted from Savignon and Wang (2002). The questionnaire comprises four sections A, B, C and D. The items in Section A focuses on the background details of the respondents, Section B, C and D will be on the constructs of the students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes about CLT and SA in the classroom respectively. Analysis using Statistical Package Social Science (SPSS) version 18 involves descriptive analysis using the mean as well as employing the inferential statistics which used the Pearson Correlation.

Findings

Students' Beliefs towards CLT and SA

Table 1 shows the descriptive analysis of the students' beliefs towards CLT and SA based on items.
Table 1 Students' Beliefs towards CLT and SA based on Items

No	Item	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Grammar Based (SA)</i>				
B1	Learning English is learning its grammar rules.	134	4.02	0.76
B2	Learning English through sentence drilling is effective.	134	3.82	0.88
B3	I believe Bahasa Melayu should be frequently used in my English class to translate sentences	134	3.02	1.20

so that I can better understand the lessons.

B4	I believe the more grammar rules one memorizes, the better he/she is at using English.	134	3.91	0.93
B5	Speaking in English during lesson is not important for English learning.	134	1.85	0.86
B6	The formal study of grammar is essential to eventual mastery of English.	134	3.91	0.78
B7	I believe my English improves quickly if I study and practise grammar.	134	4.27	0.74
B8	There should be more formal lessons of grammar in English class.	134	3.58	0.82
B9	It is more important to study and practice grammatical rules than to practice English in a communicative way in the classroom.	134	3.02	0.92
B10	Grammar rules should be explicitly explained in class.	134	4.09	0.73
<i>Communication (CLT)</i>				
B11	A language classroom should be communication-focused.	134	4.02	0.75
B12	It is important to practice English in real-life or real life like situations.	134	4.35	0.70
B13	Languages are learned mainly through communication with grammar rules explained when necessary.	134	4.26	0.70
B14	I believe making trial and error attempts to communicate in English helps me to learn the language.	134	4.30	0.73

B15	A teacher should create an atmosphere in the classroom to encourage interaction as a class or in groups.	134	4.30	0.66
B16	Learning English is learning to use the language.	134	4.20	0.77
B17	Learning English by practicing the language in communicative activities is important in mastering a foreign language.	134	4.38	0.68
B18	A communication-focused language program often meets the learner's needs.	134	3.82	0.73

In analyzing the students' beliefs towards English language instructions in detail based on items, item B7 "I believe my English improves quickly if I study and practise grammar" (mean = 4.27, SD = 0.74) under the construct grammar shows the respondents' highest level of beliefs. Item B5 "Speaking in English during lesson is not important for English learning", on other hand, shows lowest level of beliefs (mean = 1.85, SD = 0.86). Three items, B1, B7 and B10 which are "Learning English is learning its grammar rules", "I believe my English improves quickly if I study and practise grammar" and "Grammar rules should be explicitly explained in class" respectively on grammar construct scored mean above 4.00. Most of the students believe that learning English is actually studying grammar and their English language improves if they study grammar. Besides, they also believed that grammar should be explained overtly. The students strongly disagree with item B5 which is practise speaking the language in the classroom is not important. For the communicative construct, item B17 "Learning English by practicing the language in communicative activities is important in mastering a foreign language" shows the highest beliefs (mean = 4.38, SD = 0.68), whereas item B18 "A communication-focused language program often meets the learner's needs" is the lowest (mean=3.82, SD = 0.73).

Students' Perceptions towards CLT and SA

Table 2 shows the Descriptive Analysis of the Students' Perceptions towards CLT and SA based on the Items.

Table 2 Students' Perceptions towards CLT and SA based on Items

No	Items	n	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Grammar-based (SA)</i>				
C1	English teaching in my school is grammar-focused.	134	3.66	0.89
C2	My English teacher in school often asks us to repeat sentences after them.	134	2.65	0.94
C3	My English teacher uses Malay to translate sentences during English lessons.	134	3.38	1.21
C4	English teaching in my school is mainly about explaining and practicing grammar rules.	134	3.74	0.97
C5	I seldom need to speak during my English lessons in the classroom.	134	3.04	1.35
<i>Communication (CLT)</i>				
C6	English teaching in my school is communication-based.	134	3.50	0.83
C7	My teacher often designs activities to have us communicate in English with our classmates.	134	3.44	1.07
C8	My focus in class is communication but the teacher would explain grammar when necessary.	134	3.71	0.92
C9	My English teacher allows us trial and error attempt to communicate in English.	134	3.94	0.83

C10	My English teacher often creates an atmosphere for us to use English.	134	3.64	0.95
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When analyzing the students' perceptions towards CLT and SA in detail based on the items, item C4 "English teaching in my school is mainly about explaining and practising grammar rules" (mean = 3.74, SD = 0.97) under the grammar construct showed the highest level of perceptions among the respondents. The students spent most of their time on grammar in the classroom. Item C1 "English teaching in my school is grammar-focused" (mean = 3.66, SD=0.89) comes next. The students admit that the lessons are primarily grammar-focused English teaching. Item C2 "My English teachers in school often ask us to repeat sentences after them" on the contrary showed the lowest level of perceptions (mean = 2.65, SD = 0.94). The data shows that the teachers don't carry out sentence drilling in the classroom. For the communication construct, item C9 and C8 which are "My English teacher allows us trial and error attempt to communicate in English" and "My focus in class is communication but the teacher would explain grammar when necessary" showed the highest level of perceptions (mean=3.94, SD = 0.83) and (mean=3.71, SD=0.92) respectively among the respondents. In this scenario, the teachers permit the students to speak even though they make mistakes when doing it. Item C7 "My teacher often designs activities to have us communicate in English with our classmates" is the lowest in the communicative construct under students' perceptions (mean = 3.44, SD = 1.07). Activities in CLT are very few as this data suggests. Although there are mixed reactions towards both approaches, CLT still stands out based on overall mean of 3.65 compared to SA which is 3.30 as shown in table 4.2.

Students' Attitudes towards CLT and SA

Table 3 shows the descriptive analysis of the students' attitudes towards CLT and SA in detail based on the items of the research questions.

Table 3 Students' Attitudes towards CLT and SA based on Items

No	Items	N	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Grammar (SA)</i>				
DI	I like grammar-focused English teaching in my school.	134	3.60	1.06
D2	I like repeating sentences after my teacher during English lessons.	134	3.06	1.15

D3	I like my English teacher to use Bahasa Melayu to translate sentences during English lessons.	134	3.26	1.25
D4	I like much of the time in the classroom to be spent in explaining and practising grammar rules.	134	3.58	1.06
D5	I like an English class in which I do not have to speak.	134	2.20	1.11
<i>Communication (CLT)</i>				
D6	I like communication-based English teaching.	134	4.20	0.66
D7	I like communicative activities so that we could communicate in English with our classmates.	134	4.17	0.79
D8	I like my English class to be focused on communication with grammar explained when necessary.	134	4.20	0.70
D9	I like English teacher in my school to allow us trial and error attempts to communicate in English.	134	4.20	0.71
D10	I like my English teacher to create an atmosphere that encourages us to use English in class.	134	4.17	0.80

In analyzing the students' attitudes towards CLT and SA in detail based on the items, item D1 (mean=3.60, SD = 1.06) under the grammar construct shows the highest level of attitude among the respondents. This is followed closely by D4 "I like much of the time in the classroom to be spent in explaining and practising grammar rules" (mean=3.58, SD=1.06). The students like grammar- focused English teaching and doing exercises based on grammar. Item D5 "I like an English class in which I do not have to speak" on the other hand shows the lowest level of attitude (mean= 2.20, SD = 1.11). The students do not like to be in a classroom where they are not able to speak. Under the communicative construct, item D6, D8, D9 which are "I like communication-based English teaching", "I like my

English class to be focused on communication with grammar explained when necessary” and “I like English teacher in my school to allow us trial and error attempts to communicate in English” show high level of attitude (mean= 4.20, SD = 0.66, 0.70 and 0.71 respectively), while D7 and D10 “I like communicative activities so that we could communicate in English with our classmates” and “I like my English teacher to create an atmosphere that encourages us to use English in class” are the lowest (mean=4.17, SD = 0.79 and 0.80 respectively) although they are above the mean of 4.00. The data clearly shows the students’ preference towards communicative compared to grammar. Although they like communicative related activities, they do not forgo altogether the grammar rules as they know it is also important in acquiring a language.

Correlation between Beliefs, Perceptions and Attitude of Students towards English Language Instructions based on SA

This part reports the analysis of the relation between beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the students towards English language learning based on grammar. Table 4 shows the result of the correlation analysis. It is shown that the relationship of the studied constructs shows a smaller significant value compared to the standard significant value of $p < 0.05$. This show that there is a positive significant relation between beliefs and perception of the students for the construct of grammar ($r=0.369$, $p=0.000$). This is the same for the construct of beliefs and attitudes ($r=0.616$, $p=0.000$). A positive significant correlation can be seen in the relation between perceptions and attitudes. ($r=0.539$, $p=0.000$)

Table 4 Correlation between Belief, Perception and Attitude of the Students towards English Language Learning based on SA

Constructs		Beliefs	Perceptions
Perceptions	Value of r	.369**	
	Sig	.000	
Attitude	Value of r	.616**	.539**
	Sig	.000	.000

* Significant at confidence level 0.05

Correlation between Beliefs, Perceptions and Attitude of the Students towards English Language Instructions based on CLT

This part reports the analysis of the relation between beliefs, perceptions and attitudes of the students towards English language instructions based on CLT. Table 5 shows the result of the correlation analysis. It is shown that the relation of the studied constructs show a smaller significant value compared to the standard significant value of $p < 0.05$. This shows that there is a positive

significant relation between beliefs and perceptions of the students for the construct of communication ($r=0.171$, $p=0.049$). It is the same for the construct of beliefs and attitudes ($r=0.508$, $p=0.000$). A positive significant correlation can be seen in the relation between perception and attitude. ($r=0.279$, $p=0.000$)

Table 5 Correlation between Beliefs, Perceptions and Attitudes of the Students towards English Language Instructions based on CLT

Constructs		Beliefs	Perceptions
Perceptions	Value of r	0.171*	
	Sig	0.049	
Attitude	Value of r	0.508**	0.279**
	Sig	0.000	0.001

*Significant at confidence level 0.05

Discussions

Students' Beliefs towards CLT and SA

Students do believe in communication but did not rule out grammar all together. They believe grammar has a place in language learning. The students have been involved in meaningful language production for such a long time. It shows that they are influenced by the current classroom practices. Over their 9 years in school – 6 years in primary and 3 years in lower secondary – the English teachers have used CLT in their teaching. This put their preference towards communicative above grammar. The study also determined that the students did experience some grammar lessons in their classroom probably when facing two important public examinations – UPSR and PMR which emphasize on grammar. Examinations have been a stumbling block in utilizing CLT fully in classroom. Without grammar, it would be difficult to answer the questions as written scripts emphasize on grammar rules. Regarding correction, it is believed that in CLT, students should not be corrected. This again goes against the spirit of examination. The teachers wanted to make sure that the students do not repeat the same mistakes in the exam hall. PMR which is replaced by PT3 in real sense does not change anything but put more burdens on the already exhausted teachers. PT3 is also an examination conducted like the previous one but the only difference is it is school-based.

Students' Perceptions towards CLT and SA

As a whole, communication is accepted compared to grammar as more communication approach is experienced in the classroom as shown by the individual items. This is consistent with students' beliefs towards communication compared to grammar. The students' perceptions could have been related to their strong beliefs and classroom situations that they have experienced. It should be

stated here that attention and focus towards grammar is not neglected. Activities relating to grammar are taught to the students when the need arises. Trial and error is permitted in the classroom although at a very low level. This is also consistent with the students' beliefs where making mistake is permissible. Savignon (2002) is of the opinion that teachers should attend courses relating to CLT to enhance their skills in the approach.

Students' Attitudes towards CLT and SA

The findings show that preference towards CLT is very profound in all the items. The students' attitudes towards the classroom practices are very positive as the entire items show mean above 4.00 unlike the variables beliefs and perceptions. For the researcher, attitudes is a very important factor which depicts the students' overall feelings towards communicative. The students' attitudes are also consistent with the two previous variables – beliefs and perceptions but somewhat at a lower level.

Correlation between Beliefs, Perceptions and Attitude of the Students towards English Language Instructions based on CLT and SA

The result shows that students' beliefs, perceptions and attitude are from weak to moderately positive towards grammar and communication. Basically, the students are for both constructs. This is amazing because it shows that they know the importance of both constructs in learning English. This research question supports the interactive theory created by Long in the 90s which supported both approaches in English language learning.

Conclusion

The results of this study suggest that it is essential to identify students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning based on the constructs particularly grammar and communication so that the teachers are aware of the students needs during the learning process in the classroom. There will be no mismatch between the teachers' expectations and students' needs in the classroom. The teachers can also take the opportunity to enhance students' learning. The results of the study in general demonstrated high students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning specifically in terms of grammar and communication. Many studies have been carried out on students in foreign countries which show preference towards either grammar or communication. This study is unique because the students showed preference for both aspects of grammar and communication which cannot be denied as a very important element of learning a language from the perspectives of instructionalists. Therefore, the teachers should follow the syllabus set by the Curriculum Development Center which has actually incorporated the two elements in the syllabus.

The Ministry of Education should always have more workshops on how to train the teachers on how to apply these two constructs in the classrooms. As seen on mass media nowadays, speaking skill among Malaysian has deteriorated immensely. Communication is one way of making them to speak

and grammar will lead them to speak accurately although there are some SLA scholars who disagreed with the concept. However, since CLT and SA are two different teaching approaches, they have their own features. Therefore the teachers cannot expect the students to prefer these two approaches at the same time. Some may prefer the CLT more than the SA or vice versa (Feng, 2013). Utilizing these two approaches in the classroom should be a good teaching practice.(Spada & Lightbrown, 2008) There are a lot of other contributing factors towards students learning in the classroom. Students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes are few factors that need to be considered when studying students' language learning in the classroom. This study suggest that teachers should be made aware of students' beliefs, perceptions and attitudes towards English language learning in the classroom, to make the teaching and learning process more effective. If there is a match between teachers' beliefs and perceptions with the students, towards English language learning, then the objectives have been achieved.

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