

Why do you teach the way you do? - The case of communicative language teaching in Japanese junior high schools

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Previous research has found that high school English teachers in Japan may be reluctant to use Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) techniques that would allow them to deliver on national curriculum policy. The aims of this investigation were to see to what extent teachers use CLT techniques and to understand the justification they provide for the techniques they use. In an initial observational stage of the investigation, it was found that CLT techniques were seldom used. Organizational factors were identified as likely main constraints on teachers' freedom to try out different techniques. In a second phase, responses to a questionnaire were analyzed and it was found that the pattern of technique use seen in the class observations was replicated on a wider scale: repetition, read aloud, and textbook-related activities were generally favoured over CLT-style techniques. The reasons teachers gave for the techniques they use were analyzed and were found to generally align with the findings of previous studies. However, a more detailed analysis revealed that around one-fifth of teachers were high CLT technique users who justified their use of these techniques in distinctly different ways to those who do not regularly use CLT techniques.

Keywords: teacher beliefs; teaching techniques; CLT

1.1 Introduction

There are around 30,000 English teachers in Japan who work in approximately 10,000 junior high schools (JHS) that cater for students between the ages of 12 and 15. Among this teaching community there are accepted norms, shared ways of teaching, and beliefs about the effectiveness of certain techniques. In this investigation, I have sought to understand the context in which JHS teachers work and to see how they justify what they do to try to understand why they teach in the ways they do and why they do not necessarily teach in the ways that central curriculum designers would have them teach. The focus is on the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) in Japanese junior high schools and the purpose of this investigation was to understand why many teachers seem reluctant to employ CLT techniques in their classes.

Since 1989, when the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) began stressing the importance of teaching English with a focus on communication, successive editions of the Course of Study (the national curriculum) have encouraged teachers to use CLT techniques to help students improve their English communication skills (Nishino, 2011). For example, the most recent edition of the Course of Study makes it clear how communication practice and grammar instruction should be combined:

“Grammar and communication should not be viewed as two separate entities that stand in opposition to each other. It is necessary to devise effective ways of introducing, teaching, and practicing grammar in a way that does not separate it from the contents, purposes, situations, and circumstances of communication, but relates it closely to them. Rather than pursuing only a conceptual understanding of grammatical structures and

ending up with one-way explanations by the teacher, we should consider teaching in a way that encourages students to notice how grammar is used to achieve communicative goals.” (MEXT, 2017: 93).

However, while the policy objectives are clear, observers have frequently noted how everyday classroom practices do not coincide with these objectives and have sought to understand why many English teachers appear to be reluctant to employ CLT techniques. The contention of this paper is that one reason why teachers may not employ CLT techniques is because these techniques do not comply with their beliefs about teaching.

1.2 Teacher beliefs

A ‘belief’ is generally held to be the “attitude we have, roughly, whenever we take something to be the case or regard it as true” (Schwitzgebel, 2021). A belief is generally seen as a ‘propositional attitude’, that is, the mental state of having some attitude, stance, take, or opinion about a proposition. Teachers have beliefs and theories about teaching that are part of teachers’ thought processes (Clark and Peterson, 1984), part of the unobservable cognitive dimension of teaching (teacher cognition) (Borg, 2003). ESL teachers, for example, may have beliefs about language learning (e.g., repetition leads to memorization), about their students (e.g., this class can benefit from engaging in communicative tasks), about themselves (e.g., I am a confident English speaker), as well as about other aspects of their teaching environment. It is thought that teacher beliefs affect planning, decision making and interactive thoughts (Fang, 1996), as well as what actions teachers take in the classroom in terms of methods and techniques. The beliefs may affect action in a consistent manner or may be applied less consistently, due to the complexities of the teaching environment where implementation of beliefs is contingent on other actors and on the constraints imposed by, *inter alia*, the school, the school district, or the national curriculum. There may therefore be an incongruence between beliefs (cognition) and practice (Borg, 2003). A teacher’s beliefs, personal theories and pedagogical principles may be based on the professional knowledge they have gained through teacher training and teaching experience, but will also result from personal life experiences including, in the case of ESL teachers, experiences as a language learner.

The assumption in this paper is that teachers’ beliefs affect the actions they take in the classroom in terms of the teaching techniques they employ and those they do not. This is, admittedly, a very narrow perspective on what teaching involves. This perspective does not acknowledge, for example, the minutiae of the on-going real-time decision-making that is part of everyday teaching that may also be affected by a teacher’s beliefs. Rather, the focus here is on the decisions teachers take regarding the teaching techniques and activities they regularly use.

1.3 What is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?

CLT has its theoretical roots in the concept of communicative competence. It is a teaching approach that assumes that the goal of second language learning is for students to be able to use the language beyond the classroom for communication. According to Harmer, CLT now functions as “a generalized “umbrella” term to describe learning sequences which aim to improve the students’ ability to communicate” (Harmer, 2007: 70). To this end, the use of meaning-focused communicative tasks is an important part of a CLT curriculum and in some definitions of CLT this communication practice is seen as the principle means for acquiring the second language. This language experience component is complemented by language analysis in which there is a focus on the form of the target language (Savignon, 2002). Task-based language teaching (TBLT) can be seen as an extension of CLT in which the language learning task becomes the central building block

of the curriculum, but with task-*supported* language teaching there is a recognition that CLT may need to integrate with other local teaching practices. In this paper, CLT teaching techniques are defined as those that provide learners with opportunities to practise communicating in the second language. Information gap activities are the classic type of CLT technique, but a broad range of techniques, such as the teacher using the target language spontaneously in class to communicate with students, is also taken to conform to this broad definition.

1.4 Factors hindering the implementation of CLT

One major factor relating to low uptake of CLT is the controversial nature of CLT itself. Narrow and broad definitions abound leading to misconceptions among teachers. Thompson (1996) identified 4 prevalent misconceptions about CLT he encountered among teachers in diverse contexts:

- i. CLT means not teaching grammar;
- ii. CLT means teaching only speaking;
- iii. CLT means pairwork, which means role-play; and
- iv. CLT means expecting too much from the teacher.

Nishino and Watanabe (2008) outline the factors that they consider to be hindrances to the implementation of CLT in Japanese schools including:

- i. a lack of knowledge about CLT due to inadequate teacher education at university and a lack of opportunities to learn about CLT on the job;
- ii. a low level of English language proficiency among English teachers;
- iii. a consequent lack of confidence in using English in class because of a fear of losing face and authority; and
- iv. a belief in the overriding importance of grammatical knowledge for passing entrance exams.

They also note that several contextual factors tend to conspire against the introduction of CLT. These include:

- i. a possible reluctance among students to engage in CLT because of the limited opportunities they have to use English outside the classroom;
- ii. an acceptance of teacher-centred instruction as the norm and a consequent rejection of the learner-centred activities espoused in CLT; and,
- iii. as with teachers, an acceptance among students that study for the entrance exams is what really counts.

Reliance on textbooks and questionable textbook design are also undoubtedly major factors affecting the implementation of CLT. Wada (2002) notes how teachers feel compelled to teach the contents of Ministry-approved textbooks. Further, Sato and Kleinsasser (2004) have noted how a high priority is given to covering content at the same pace as other teachers in the same school according to collaboratively planned schedules making any deviation into using 'new' techniques and activities all the harder.

Pacek (1996) and Markee (1997) have highlighted the way in which MEXT is attempting to impose curricular change in a highly centralised, top-down, power-coercive fashion with little consideration given to the widely held beliefs and attitudes concerning language teaching and learning among teachers. Littlewood (2007) has shown how teachers in other East Asian contexts have also wrestled with the implementation of CLT. In many cases, teachers have simply rejected or ignored the national curriculum guidelines which aim to promote CLT and a number of scholars have recommended that teachers in the region 'adapt rather than

adopt' CLT principles to bring them more in line with local practices (e.g., Samimy and Kobayashi (2004) in the Japanese context).

2. Literature Review

In a series of surveys of Japanese high school English teachers (Gorsuch, 2001, Nishino, 2008, 2011 and 2012; Cook, 2012; Sasajima, Nishino, Ehara, and Nagamine, 2012), researchers have drawn attention to the gap between teachers' favourable views of CLT and their unwillingness to use communicative activities in their own classes. In two observational studies (Sakui, 2004; Taguchi, 2005), the researchers found that overall, in actual classroom teaching, grammar instruction was central, and far more foregrounded than CLT. Sakui noted that teachers saw CLT as something separate from their main teaching which was aimed towards tests and entrance exams. CLT was something fun they could do when they team taught with an assistant language teacher (ALT). Most of the teachers believed that students needed to receive grammar instruction before they attempted any communicative tasks, seemed to be unclear about CLT, and lacked confidence in implementing CLT activities in their lessons. CLT activities were seen as requiring time, both in terms of preparation as well as in consuming valuable class time. Teachers were required to progress through the curriculum at a very rigid pace so that CLT activities were seen as a luxury or 'side-show' they could ill afford. Taguchi (2005) reports that classes were largely teacher-centred with input from the teacher taking up between half and three-quarters of class time, between 50-90% of class time was allocated to the study of language form, and the classroom tasks were determined and guided by the teacher 100% of the time.

All the above researchers see teacher education and continuing professional development as essential for engendering change.

Several studies have looked specifically at the link between teachers' beliefs and classroom practice in a Japanese school context. Based on the results of a larger-scale questionnaire and on detailed observations and interviews with 5 high school teachers, Nishino (2012) interpreted her main finding to mean that when teachers perceive that students' expectations for communication and their ability to engage in pair and group work are high, teachers are likely to use communicative activities. In a detailed investigation of three Japanese high school teachers, Nishimuro and Borg (2013) found that the teachers mainly justified their approach to grammar instruction in terms of teaching experience and experience as learners rather than with reference to any formal theory or methodological concepts in L2 teaching. This grammar instruction was characterized by "discrete grammar lessons, extended decontextualized and metalinguistically rich teacher-led analysis conducted largely in the L1, with an emphasis on logic (e.g., equating grammar with mathematics) and limited opportunities for meaningful grammar use" (2013: 42).

In a recent Ministry survey of 9,340 public junior high schools carried out in December 2018 (MEXT, 2019), teachers were asked what proportion of each lesson their students spent on 'language activities' (言語活動) including pair work and group work. Of the 15-16,000 teachers who answered the question for each year-group level, overall, 79% said that such 'language activities' accounted for at least half of total class time. It is difficult to know, however, how the term 'language activities' was interpreted by the respondents and whether the pair and group work of 'language activities' involved communicative practice.

3. Research questions

To find out which techniques teachers in junior high schools employ and how they justify their use, I

conducted an investigation in two phases. In the first phase, I gathered in-depth observational and interview data from a small group of JHS English teachers to better understand the context in which they work and their preferred teaching approaches. In the second phase, I gathered data from a larger sample of teachers across Japan using a questionnaire based on the observed teaching techniques from the first phase. The data collection sequence conforms to what is called “an exploratory sequential design” in mixed methods research (Cresswell, 2014). The questionnaire in phase 2 also asked the teachers to explain their reasons for using or not using these techniques.

Research questions for Phase 1:

1. What is the context in which JHS teachers work?
2. What materials and techniques do teachers typically use?

Research questions for Phase 2:

1. Which teaching techniques do teachers use?
2. Why do they use these techniques?

4.1 Materials and Methods - Phase 1

In Phase 1, I observed 17 classes taught by 5 teachers in 4 JHS in one school district in western Tokyo. Each class lasted 45 minutes. I made detailed notes of these regular lessons, took video to corroborate my notes, and asked the teachers to check my notes. The teachers were contacted through the Board of Education and the headteacher, and were asked to complete a consent form after the reasons for my visits had been explained. Three of the teachers were women and 2 men. One of the female teachers and one of the male teachers were close to retirement. One female teacher was in her third year of teaching. The other 2 participants had 7 and 13 years of teaching experience. This school district may have an unusual academic achievement profile, even within Tokyo, in that half of the students fall into the ‘A’ category on academic achievement tests, when normally only 25% should. It is difficult to say therefore how typical this school district is or whether the variation between schools is representative of the national picture.

Each of the five teachers were observed either 3 or 4 times. For four of the teachers, these observations were spread over a number of weeks, but for one all the observations were carried out within a one-week period because this was what the school preferred. After the final observation, the teachers were asked to fill out a questionnaire which mainly focused on materials use, but also covered lesson planning, and, at the end, included questions about freedom and control, and teaching goals and beliefs. Finally, after reading the teachers’ responses to this questionnaire, I noted things I wanted to confirm with them and asked about these in a follow-up interview. After the interviews, I listened to the recordings and made detailed notes about what the teachers had said.

4.2 Phase 1 Results

From these observations, the questionnaire, and the interviews, I was struck by certain features of the teaching context and particularly about the organizational constraints under which these teachers were working.

Perhaps most obviously I was struck by the teachers’ individuality. Observing five teachers you see 5 different ways of teaching. Personality, experience and age are all inevitably highly influential in dictating a teacher’s style. Generally, however, I was struck by how fast-paced the lessons were with teachers using a variety of

materials and resources and students often only spending 2 or 3 minutes on each activity. All the teachers were very skilful in orchestrating the activities so that there was never an opportunity for students to lose focus. They were kept very busy for the whole lesson. The teachers were obviously well prepared for their classes.

A second general impression from the observations was that, although the students were often asked to work in pairs, the extent to which the practice verged on meaning-focused communication depended heavily on the teacher and the age group. In the third-year classes I observed, the students regularly practised exchanging opinions in pairs on a set topic, while in the first and second-year classes speaking practice tended to be much more controlled and mechanical. Even though all the teachers employed pair work regularly, the majority of the pair work did not involve communicating meaning. Apart from opinion exchange on a set topic and one example of a survey activity, students in these classes did not engage in communicative tasks. Information-gap activities, for example, were not used at all.

An unexpected finding from the class observations was that the production and use of worksheets that paralleled the textbook material appeared to stymie individual freedom and control. There seemed to be an assumption in all the schools I visited that teachers should produce worksheets to supplement the textbook, but because one teacher produced all the worksheets for one year group the other teachers were not able to exert control over the materials. In addition, the desire for all students to be exposed to exactly the same materials in exactly the same sequence and at the same pace (as noted in Wada (2002) and Sakui (2004)) led to a lockstep and one-size-fits-all approach which again seemed to stymie individual teacher freedom and control. Students would be tested on exactly the same content irrespective of which teacher had taught them, so there was a strong sense of everyone teaching to exactly the same plan.

Overall, the impression I had was that there are strong pressures on teachers to conform to a syllabus that is nationally mandated and to ways of working that are decided by school districts and by lead teachers in individual schools. English classes have been reduced in size as part of a national drive to improve English education, but this has led to an increase in the number of lessons each teacher has to teach. This in turn has affected the amount of preparation time teachers have during term time. The solution in this particular school district has been for one English teacher to make the worksheets for one year group in each school and for the other teachers to agree to use these in their own lessons. Thus, the move to reduce class sizes has perhaps inadvertently led to greater pressure on teachers to teach to an even tighter plan than they did before. The overall effect is to squeeze the amount of time and space available for teachers to exert control over what and how they teach and to give less time for experimenting with new techniques.

5.1 Materials and methods - Phase 2

To get a more general picture of which techniques JHS teachers in other schools use and what their rationales are for using these techniques, a questionnaire was designed based on the techniques that had been observed in Phase 1. Rather than asking teachers about the appropriacy of techniques, as previous surveys have done, I decided to ask mainly about techniques they might be expected to use, at least according to those that had been commonly observed in Phase 1. Initially, 95 techniques were identified from the 17 observed classes and then this list was narrowed down to the 24 techniques that had been observed at least 3 times each. Four of these techniques were then removed from the list because they were considered to be either idiosyncratic, or possibly only used in this school district, or because they appeared to be too similar to each other.

Five techniques that might be broadly classed as communicative language teaching techniques were added to the questionnaire. Three of these were observed once each in Phase 1: one was a walkaround survey activity; the other two involved spontaneous use of English by the teacher. Another technique, a pair work opinion exchange activity, was observed several times in one teacher's classes, as noted above. By coincidence, this corresponded to an item on Gorsuch's (2001) survey and the wording was therefore copied from this survey. In addition, one more item was taken from Gorsuch's survey. This described the use of a pair work information-gap activity. Previous surveys have found that teachers tend not to use these techniques. They were added to see whether they are used among a larger sample of teachers.

For each technique, teachers were asked to indicate on a scale of 1 to 4 to what extent they used the technique (4 = always/nearly always; 1 = hardly ever/never) and then were provided with 10 possible reasons why they might use the technique and 10 parallel reasons why they might not use the technique. They were asked to mark up to 3 possible reasons from the appropriate list or to write their own reason in the space provided. (A sample questionnaire item is included in the Appendix).

Questionnaires written entirely in Japanese were sent to 211 JHS in 9 regions of Japan. The schools were selected randomly from the complete list of schools in each area. In total, there were 44 responses, 8 online and 36 by post, constituting a 21% response rate.

Twenty-six of the respondents were women, 16 were men, and 2 did not indicate their sex. The age and length of teaching experience are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Respondents' age and length of teaching experience

Age range (years)	Number	Teaching experience (years)	Number
20-30	8	1-4	5
31-40	10	5-9	7
41-50	15	10-19	15
51-60	8	20-29	15
61-65	2	-	2
-	1		

Thirty-five of the respondents had overseas experience. The average length of stay abroad for the 41 teachers who clearly stated this was 292 days. Removing one outlier who lived abroad for 8 years, the average length of stay was 225 days. Eighteen teachers went abroad for language study, while another 8 went specifically to take part in TESOL-related training courses.

Thirty-nine of the 44 schools in which these teachers work are public JHS, 3 are private, and 2 are national. On average, the schools had 291 students across three year groups, with the largest having 788 students and the smallest only 23. As mentioned before, the schools were situated in 9 regions of Japan from one end of the country to the other. Thirteen schools were situated in 'city centre residential areas'; 13 were situated in 'suburban residential areas'; and 12 were situated in 'agricultural, forestry or fishing areas'. One school was situated in a 'mountainous region', while the remaining four were classified as 'other'.

5.2 Phase 2 Results

5.2.1 Teaching techniques

Table 2. The 25 teaching techniques ranked from most often used to least often used according to mean score (max=4; min=1)

T	Mean	SD	Technique description	Category
3	3.77	0.48	The teacher walks around the classroom while the students are doing an activity to check that they are on task and to pick up on any problems they may be having.	General class management
1	3.48	0.88	The teacher uses a timer to give students a set number of minutes on an activity.	General class management
2	3.45	0.70	The teacher says/reads a sentence from the textbook, or a dialogue/passage line by line, or a word from a vocabulary list and the students repeat the sentence/word together.	ALM/Textbook-related
7	3.20	0.90	The teacher explains how the grammatical structure in focus is formed and may also explain why the form is being used in this situation.	Textbook-related
25	3.20	0.76	The teacher asks individual students around the class for their answers to an exercise they have just completed. Sometimes the teacher might ask a student to report on what their partner said in the exercise.	Checking/Testing
12	3.19	0.92	The students read a passage from the textbook aloud together at the same speed.	Ondoku/Textbook-related
13	3.18	0.79	The teacher uses English spontaneously during the lesson to react to something, for example, by saying, "Whose eraser is that on the floor?", etc.	CLT/TETE
5	3.07	1.02	The teacher explains what questions the students need to answer and then plays the listening text on CD or via digital textbook material. After playing the recording several times, the teacher checks the students' answers.	Textbook exercise
6	3.07	0.85	The students read aloud a passage from the textbook or a script, but they read at their own pace so that some finish reading before others (= "buzz reading").	Ondoku/Textbook-related
21	3.05	0.89	The teacher reviews a textbook dialogue or passage, often using picture prompts and asking questions to remind students about the content.	Textbook-related
8	3.02	1.00	The students do a textbook writing activity usually to consolidate what they have just done as a listening and/or speaking exercise from the textbook. Students might write on a pre-prepared worksheet.	Textbook exercise
22	2.93	1.10	The teacher has pairs or small groups of students ask each other and then answer questions in English about their opinions on a given topic.	CLT
15	2.89	0.89	The teacher uses a situation in the class to teach students how they can express themselves in English (e.g., "Could you say that again, please?", etc).	CLT/TETE
19	2.80	0.88	The students write the script in English for a presentation on a given topic.	MEXT curriculum
24	2.77	1.08	The teacher uses the target grammar in example sentences without initially drawing the students' attention to the grammar. The presentation might simply be spoken, or with slides or video that the teacher has prepared. The students might then be asked if they noticed the form that was being used.	CLT
14	2.77	1.00	As students listen to a passage from the textbook, they read it at the same speed as the recording.	Ondoku/Textbook-related
23	2.77	1.25	The students are given a few minutes to memorize a list of vocabulary using whatever techniques they like (e.g., copying into a notebook) or they are required to memorize vocabulary as a homework assignment.	Textbook-related
20	2.59	1.09	After a speaking activity the teacher asks if there was anything the students were unable to express in English. She collects Japanese expressions on the board and asks students how these might be expressed in English. She does not ask the students to translate these expressions, but to express them in simple English as best they can.	CLT
9	2.58	0.91	After the students complete an activity, they compare their answers with another student (usually before the teacher checks the answers with the whole class).	Checking/Testing
17	2.50	1.04	The students read a passage or dialogue and are required to extract examples of the target grammar structure.	Textbook-related
10	2.30	0.86	Often using questions written in a table or on a worksheet, the students walk around the class asking other students the questions and noting down their responses.	CLT
18	2.28	0.88	The teacher has the students work face to face in pairs. One student sees a page that has some missing information. The other student sees a different page that has that information. The first student must ask questions in English to the other student to find the missing information.	CLT
4	2.27	1.11	One student reads the Japanese word from a list on a worksheet and the other student gives the equivalent word in English without looking at the worksheet.	pseudo-CLT
11	2.21	1.26	The students check the meanings of new vocabulary in a dictionary and write the meanings and phonetic transcriptions onto a worksheet or into their notebooks.	Textbook-related
16	2.16	0.84	While listening to a recording, the students say the sentences from the textbook passage at the same speed as the recording without looking at the textbook.	Shadowing

Notes: TETE = 'teaching English through English'; ondoku = 'read aloud'

In Table 2, the 25 teaching techniques contained in the questionnaire are ranked according to the mean score given by the teachers on a scale of '4' (= 'always/nearly always (use)') to '1' ('hardly ever/never (use)'). The top 11 techniques (shaded grey) received a mean score of 3 or over. The following 9 techniques (in white) received a mean score of between 2.5 and 3. The bottom 5 techniques (shaded dark grey) received a mean score of between 2 and 2.5. The right-hand column shows how the techniques were classified.

Overall, the mean use score for the 8 techniques classified as CLT or pseudo-CLT was 2.65; for the 7 textbook-related techniques it was 2.83; and for the 5 techniques classed as ALM/ondoku it was 2.93. However, this analysis hides the fact that among the different classes of technique there was a considerable range of use. For the CLT techniques, 82% of the teachers said they always or often speak English spontaneously in class (T13), while only 42% said that they always or often use walkaround surveys (T10). For the textbook-related techniques, 82% said they always or often explain grammar to their students (T7), while only 40% regularly have their students check vocabulary in dictionaries (T11). For the ALM/ondoku techniques, as many as 94% said they always or often have their students repeat words or sentences after them (T2), while only 39% regularly had their students do unseen shadowing practice (T16).

5.2.2 Reasons

After indicating how often they use a technique, the teachers selected up to 3 items from one of the two parallel lists of 10 reasons to explain why they use or do not use the technique. They were also given the option of providing a reason in their own words. In Tables 3.1 and 3.2, the reasons given for either using or not using the techniques are shown in order of frequency with the most commonly cited reason at the top and the least at the bottom.

Table 3.1 Reasons for using a technique ranked from most to least frequent.

Reason (R)	Times chosen	Reason Description
1	470	because from my experience I have found it to be effective
8	217	because when I use this technique my students work seriously
9	124	because my students have the ability to understand and engage in an activity using this technique
3	123	because there is enough time to fit this technique into my lessons
4	118	because I studied this technique in a teacher training course and I have found it to be effective
2	108	because I already have the materials for using this technique
10	77	because this technique is useful for helping my students prepare for entrance exams and other tests
Other (for using)	75	other
7	72	because I have the English ability and confidence necessary for using this technique effectively
5	68	because most English teachers I know use this technique
6	50	because when I was a school student my English teacher used this technique and I think it is effective

The most frequently cited reason for using a technique was that the teacher had found from experience that the technique was effective (R1) and for each of the 25 techniques at least 5 teachers cited this reason. The parallel reason for not using a technique (R11) was also cited frequently, but for 6 techniques this reason was not cited at all. Three of these 6 techniques were CLT techniques (T18, T22, and T24).

The second most frequently cited reason for using a technique was that the teacher felt that when using this technique the students work seriously (R8). T18, the information-gap activity, was the only CLT technique among the 10 techniques for which this reason was most frequently cited, but it will be noted that it was among the techniques least often used. The parallel reason used to justify not using a technique (R18) was not cited so frequently and was used with reference to a range of techniques.

The third most frequently cited reason for using a technique was that the students had the ability to understand and engage in an activity using this technique (R9). The parallel reason for not using a technique (R19) was also frequently cited. Among the 10 techniques that teachers said they did not regularly use and that were most frequently justified in terms of their students' lack of ability, there were 6 CLT techniques.

Table 3.2 Reasons for not using a technique ranked from most to least frequent.

Reason (R)	Times chosen	Reason Description
13	161	because there is not enough time to fit this technique into my lessons
Other (for not using)	69	other
11	56	because from my experience I have found it to be ineffective
19	50	because my students do not have the ability to understand or engage in an activity using this technique
12	33	because I do not have the materials for using this technique
17	20	because I don't have the English ability or confidence necessary to use this technique effectively
18	19	because if I use this technique my students might not work seriously
14	15	because I have never studied this technique in a teacher training course and I don't know whether it is effective
16	9	because when I was a school student my English teacher used this technique and I think it is ineffective
20	7	because this technique is not useful for helping students prepare for entrance exams and other tests
15	6	because no English teachers I know use this technique

The reason most frequently cited for not using a technique (see Table 3.2) was that there is not enough time to fit the technique into the lesson. Among the 10 techniques for which this reason was most frequently cited were 5 CLT techniques: T10, 18, 20, 22, and 24.

Although 'Other' is the second ranked reason for not using a technique, it is not a single reason but rather a miscellaneous collection. Thus, the second most frequently cited single reason for not using a technique was that the teacher had found from experience that the technique was ineffective (R11). This was commented on above. The third most frequently cited single reason for not using a technique (R19) was also commented on above.

The concerns expressed under 'Other', when teachers wrote their own reasons for not using a technique, are instructive. Often the teachers expressed a conviction about a technique to explain why they did not use it or expressed a clear judgement that other unspecified techniques were superior. Teachers also often expressed a concern about time. In this case, CLT techniques were apparently in some teachers' thoughts. For example, one teacher (Teacher 15) wrote about Technique 15 (impromptu focus on how students can express themselves in English) and Technique 18 (the information gap activity) respectively:

The time is pretty much taken up with doing worksheets and the content of the textbook.

Because with smaller classes for English there is too much preparation.

Other teachers openly admitted to not using a technique because they did not know about it. The majority of these were CLT techniques.

5.2.3 High and low CLT technique users

By ranking the 44 teachers in order of who indicated they use the 8 CLT techniques most often, it was possible to identify 8 ‘high CLT technique users’ and 10 ‘low CLT technique users’. The high users were defined as those who indicated that they use 7 or 8 of the 8 CLT techniques always, nearly always, or often. The low users were defined as those who indicated that they use 3 or fewer of the 8 CLT techniques always, nearly always, or often. It was then possible to see which reasons these ‘high’ and ‘low’ group teachers most often gave for their use/non-use of the CLT techniques.

The 8 high CLT technique users most consistently said that they use these techniques either because from their experience they have found them to be effective (R1) or because when they use these techniques their students work seriously (R8). By contrast, the 10 low CLT technique users most consistently said that they do not use these techniques either because there is not enough time to fit these techniques into their lessons (R13) or because their students do not have the ability to understand or engage in an activity using these techniques (R19). This suggests that different groups of teachers may have very different perceptions about CLT techniques.

Teachers in the high CLT users group had an average of 288 days’ experience overseas while those in the low CLT users group had an average of 30 days. One person in the high users group and 5 in the low users group had no overseas experience. Two people in each group had studied on a TESOL course while abroad. Five in the high users group and one in the low users group had studied at language schools while abroad. Those in the high users group had an average of 18 years’ teaching experience; those in the low users group had an average of 17 years’ teaching experience.

6. Discussion

Through Phase 1 of this investigation, it was possible to gain an insight into the teaching practices of 5 JHS English teachers. Although teachers express their own personality and individuality through their teaching practices, they were clearly severely constrained by organizational changes that resulted in a uniform way of working. Teachers were either conforming to these uniform work practices or attempting to get others to conform. A desire to treat every student equally, to follow agreed teaching procedures, and to fit in with colleagues all seemed to conspire to perpetuate a set of traditional teaching behaviours that arguably can be said to constitute a conservative technical culture (Kleinsasser, 1993). It was noticeable how regular and extensive communication practice for students was absent. Opportunities for continuing professional development come in mandated forms that teachers do not generally find appealing and are not designed to enable reflection on teaching practices.

Through Phase 2 of the investigation, it was found that of the 11 most frequently used techniques, 4 were textbook exercises or textbook-related and 3 were either ALM or ‘ondoku’ techniques. Only one was a CLT/Teaching English Through English technique. Of the 5 least frequently used techniques, 3 were CLT

techniques. The teachers in this sample therefore seem to generally base their classes on textbook work and regularly employ repetition and read aloud techniques. The fact that all of the top 20 techniques were used by all teachers to some extent suggests that teachers in both Phase 1 and Phase 2 of this study generally seem to use techniques that conform to a conventionalized pedagogic repertoire.

The most common reason teachers gave for using a technique was that they had found from experience that the technique was effective (R1). While teachers everywhere often recount how teaching experience counts most in forming their professional knowledge base, this justification may not necessarily reflect an exploratory sense of practice; it might equally reflect a tendency to stay with tried and accepted methods and to avoid more innovative techniques. This finding seems to coincide with that of Nishimuro and Borg (2013) regarding grammar instruction that did not include communicative practice: teachers seemed to justify their classroom practice largely in terms of knowledge gained from teaching experience.

Teachers also frequently justified techniques by saying that their students work seriously when these techniques are employed (R8). While teachers quite understandably like techniques that induce their students to work seriously, it is difficult to interpret what is understood by 'seriously'. Apart from one CLT technique, the techniques that were justified in these terms were all textbook-related, 'ondoku/ALM, checking, or general class management techniques suggesting that 'seriously' was mainly interpreted as meaning 'closely within the teacher's control'. The results here therefore seem to echo those in earlier studies where teacher control and teacher-centred classes were often observed.

The third most common reason teachers cited to justify the use of techniques was that their students had the ability to understand and engage in an activity using this technique. Certain techniques were judged to be within the students' abilities, while CLT techniques were often seen as being beyond students' capabilities.

Among the reasons for not using techniques, the one most frequently cited was a lack of time for fitting the technique into the lesson. CLT techniques seemed to be often unused for this reason. Whether this reflected a genuine feeling that CLT techniques just take up too much time, or whether the pressures of limited contact time were in fact being used to justify other priorities is unclear.

The teachers who said that they regularly use most of the 8 CLT techniques included in the questionnaire indicated that they used these techniques because they have found them to be effective and because their students work seriously when engaged in activities using these techniques. The teachers who only use some CLT techniques said that they do not use these techniques because either there is not enough time to fit these techniques into their lessons or because their students do not have the ability to engage in activities using these techniques. There therefore appeared to be a considerable gap in perceptions. Some teachers appear to have a positive view of CLT activities, while others do not. However, the reasons most frequently given are different and intriguing and corroborate what was said earlier: teachers may avoid using CLT techniques because they prioritise other teaching content or because CLT activities are construed as being beyond students' capabilities. The findings here seem to corroborate the interpretation noted above by Nishino (Nishino, 2012) that when teachers perceive that their students want to engage in communicative activities and when they believe that their students have the ability to engage in such activities, they use CLT techniques.

Clearly the choices teachers make often run counter to the wishes of curriculum planners. The evidence uncovered in this study suggests that there is a pronounced split between teachers who value CLT techniques and use them regularly and teachers who do not. A majority put more faith in other techniques that do not

require students to produce the target language or interact with each other.

Eight out of 44 teachers said they were regular CLT technique users. If this is generalizable to the population as a whole, it suggests that less than one in five teachers regularly use CLT techniques. With no comparable data, it is impossible to know whether this represents an increase on 20 years ago. Nevertheless, it seems to imply that 4 out of 5 teachers do not trust CLT techniques enough to employ them regularly in their classes. It may be an over-simplification to point to the large difference in overseas experience between the high and low CLT-user groups, but it seems highly likely that teachers who have experienced living longer in an English-speaking environment may have quite different attitudes towards English than those who have not, meaning that they understand the importance of communicative practice for their students.

7. Conclusion

Naturally, the views expressed in this paper are my own and are those of a western, university-based teacher who has only limited experience teaching as an ALT in JHS many years ago. The study is also limited in not including factors that are known to affect classroom practice such as the beliefs teachers have about self-efficacy. Nevertheless, the findings do suggest why CLT teaching techniques may not be part of many teachers' regular teaching repertoire.

If teachers are more broadly to trust CLT techniques and evaluate them properly for themselves, there is an urgent need to provide support in the form of more focused pre-service and continuing professional development opportunities. Teachers may need opportunities to interpret the theoretical knowledge they have about CLT in light of their own experience for the knowledge to become personalized and integral to their own teaching practice (Woods and Çakir, 2011). Appropriate materials, and the skills needed to adapt materials, are also essential. On the whole, current training opportunities appear not to encourage teachers to explore their own practice so that they may be more inclined to experiment with new CLT techniques. Sakui (2004) noted how teachers struggle to deal with competing demands: they either teach the grammatical and vocabulary knowledge their students need to pass the entrance exams, or they teach their students how to communicate in English. This is clearly a false dichotomy, and much more plainly needs to be done in the form of practical, hands-on CPD to persuade teachers that grammar teaching and CLT can work together in harmony. Sato, Mutoh and Kleinsasser (2019) show how in-service teacher training can be designed to help teachers re-examine their own practices and beliefs and encourage them to experiment with using more CLT-oriented techniques.

Rather than forcing a strong version of CLT onto teachers, curriculum planners may need to promote a fuzzier, softer conception of CLT that retains core principles but which seeks to integrate these principles into local practices. Littlewood (2014) has suggested adopting 'communication-oriented language teaching (COLT)' as a useful alternative term for CLT and Hiep (2007) has recommended teaching in 'the spirit of CLT' by emphasizing the importance of real and meaningful classroom practices. Sato (2010) argues that teachers may be more inclined to experiment with CLT techniques if these were framed within an adapted PPP model rather than as part of a wholesale introduction of a strong form of CLT like TBLT. There is a strong case for advocating language teaching which seeks to enhance students' ability to communicate (their communicative competence), but which respects teachers' beliefs and recognizes local circumstances.

A new conception of 'jugyoukenkyuu', or 'lesson study' like that advocated by Takagi and Tanaka (2021) in which schools are re-visioned as professional learning communities would seem to be the kind of reform

needed for CLT techniques to become more widely used. For young teachers to feel they are supported in implementing new methods and techniques, continuing teacher education needs to be an integral part of individual school organization so that the pressure to conform to traditional work practices does not stifle innovation.

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Appendix

An English translation of part of the Phase 2 questionnaire

TECHNIQUE 1					
The teacher uses a timer to give students a set number of minutes on an activity.					

never/hardly ever use ① ② ③ ④ always/nearly always use

If you use TECHNIQUE 1 (you chose “3” or “4” on the above scale), why do you use this technique? Choose the most appropriate reasons from the list below. Please carefully choose a maximum of 3 reasons. If there is no appropriate reason, or if you wish to explain your choice of reason in more detail, please write your own reason under ‘Other’. (If you do not use TECHNIQUE 1 or not very much (you answered “1” or “2” on the above scale), go to the next question).

- because from my experience I have found it to be effective
- because I already have the materials for using this technique
- because there is enough time to fit this technique into my lessons
- because I studied this technique in a teacher training course and I have found it to be effective
- because most English teachers I know use this technique
- because when I was a school student my English teacher used this technique and I think it is effective
- because I have the English ability and confidence necessary for using this technique effectively
- because when I use this technique my students work seriously
- because my students have the ability to understand and engage in an activity using this technique
- because this technique is useful for helping my students prepare for entrance exams and other tests
- Other: _____

If you DO NOT use TECHNIQUE 1, or do not use it very much (you chose “1” or “2” on the above scale), why don’t you use it? Choose the most appropriate reasons from the list below. Please carefully choose a maximum of 3 reasons. If there is no appropriate reason, or if you wish to explain your choice of reason in more detail, please write your own reason under ‘Other’. (If you use TECHNIQUE 1 (you answered “3” or “4” on the above scale), go to the next question).

- because from my experience I have found it to be ineffective
- because I do not have the materials for using this technique
- because there is not enough time to fit this technique into my lessons
- because I have never studied this technique in a teacher training course and I don’t know whether it is effective
- because no English teachers I know use this technique
- because when I was a school student my English teacher used this technique and I think it is ineffective
- because I don’t have the English ability or confidence necessary for using this technique effectively
- because if I use this technique my students might not work seriously
- because my students do not have the ability to understand and engage in an activity using this technique
- because this technique is not useful for helping my students prepare for entrance exams and other tests
- Other: _____