Original Research Article

# TESL TRAINEES' ATTITUDES TOWARDS ROLE OF TEACHER

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**Abstract** This study is designed to investigate the role of teachers in the classroom from TESL trainees' views. Mixed-method research is used as the mode of inquiry for this research study. The main modes of data collection are questionnaire and interview that elicits information on TESL trainees' attitudes towards the role of teacher. Participants for this study were fifteen local TESL trainees in $3^{rd}$ grade of studying in Malaysia. The findings indicate that the majority of the TESL trainees had positive attitudes towards considering teacher as facilitator instead of knowledge provider.

**Key word:** TESL trainee, attitude, role of teacher

**Introduction:** Larsen-Freeman (1986) believes one of the most important principles of CLT is learner-centeredness. The learner-centered approach provides an opportunity for learners to have a sense of "ownership" of their learning and increases their motivation (Brown, 1994). In other words, teachers should give learners the opportunity to negotiate meaning by participating in communicative tasks in the classroom.

Learners' role in CLT classroom is not the same as learners' role in the traditional approach. The CLT class is student-centred and students are responsible for their learning. Richards and

Rodgers (1986) declared:
"If it is our intention to provide opportunities for students to communicate realistically in class, we have a responsibility to create an atmosphere in which communication is possible, one in which students can feel free to take communicating initiative and are motivated to do so, making classes "student-centered" can contribute to creating such an atmosphere (p. 74)".

According to Li (1998) the role of teachers in the CLT classroom is significantly different from their traditional didactic role. Firstly, CLT considers teachers as the facilitators of communication process in the classroom (Manghubi, 2004; Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005). The teacher also engages in communicative activities with the students "as an independent participant within the learning-teaching group" (Breen and Candlin, 1980; p. 99) and as a co-communicator with the learners

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(Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Breen and Candlin, 1980; Littlewood, 1981).

In addition, the teacher plays the role of analyst, counsellor (Richards and Rodgers, 1986) to mesh students' intentions and interpretations to augment communication, a group process manager (Larsen-Freeman, 1986; Richards and Rodgers, 1986) to monitor students' errors during communication (Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005); a motivator and evaluator (Savignon, 1991) to encourage students to be active communicators and to help students to solve their problems; and knowledge provider (Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005). Another important characteristic which distinguishes CLT from other teaching approaches is its activities and materials which will be discussed in detail in the next section.

It is likely that teachers who have been taught and trained through traditional teaching approaches may not accept or adapt the role of facilitator easily or unquestionably. Zeichner and Ndimnade (2008) recommended preparing teachers for playing the role of facilitator (p: 334). Institutions which undertake the task of preparing and providing pre-service teachers and in-service teacher training programmes could play a significant role in this process. Empirical evidence which supports this notion is provided by Thanli et al (2008) who reported that their three case study teachers were convinced enough to shift their traditional point of view to student-centred as a result of their attendance of learner-centred training programmes.

**Materials and Methods**

Harling (2002) believes, all research are a search for patterns through analysis. As discussed earlier, two types of data were used in this study but the priority was given to qualitative data. Quantitative data were emerged from the questionnaires while qualitative data were emerged from interviews, observation and reflective journal.

The questionnaire was analysed quantitatively. The responses in the questionnaire were based on rating scales of 1 to 4. Statistical Package of Social Sciences was used to provide descriptive statistics on participants' attitudes. Through Statistical Package of Social Sciences (SPSS) the frequency and the mean scores for each statement in questionnaire were calculated. For analysing the pre-service teachers' attitudes (questionnaire No 1), the frequency of the pre-service teachers' responses to the odd and even statements of the questionnaire were presented in a table to show those principles (as expressed in the statements) which are mostly agreed on and those with less agreement percentage for CLT. The frequency of the pre-service teachers' responses to the odd statements of the questionnaire describes the main principles and practices of the CLT. The frequencies were calculated in order to find out whether the pre-service teachers are positive towards this approach. To make this interpretation and analysis easier, all responses for SD (Strongly Disagree) and D (Disagree) combined and referred to as disagreed, and all responses for A (Agree) and SA (Strongly Agree) combined and referred to as agreed. The mean of each teacher's score was calculated to determine if teachers had favourable' attitudes towards CLT. As discussed earlier, the priority of this research is given to qualitative data analysis. The researcher in qualitative research has to concentrate on the situation, pulling it apart and putting it back together using analysis and synthesis in direct interpretation until meaning emerges. In this way knowledge created from the data (Harling 2002). Fraenkel et al,. (2012) believe that data analysis in qualitative study includes "analysing, synthesizing, and reducing the information the researcher obtains from various sources (e.g., observations, interviews, etc) into a coherent description of what he or she has observed or otherwise discovered" (p.431).

Data analysis for both interviews, observation and second questionnaire were accomplished inductively to have the key themes emerge through the use of detailed readings of raw data from the pre-service teachers' interviews, questionnaire and observation list. The Inductive analysis was used for the issues that raised from the data.

Cresswell's (2009) six steps for data analysis were followed in the analyses of both qualitative and quantitative data. The first step is organizing and preparing data for analysis through reading and re reading each participant's set of transcripts carefully to get the gist in each narrative. the second step is making sense out of the data. Third step involves coding the data into chunks, segments. Ezzy (2002) stated that coding is the process of "disassembling and reassembling the data" (p. 94). In other words, data were broken apart into small units of texts to help researcher see the patterns emerged. Then, these units were rearranged through naming and categorizing to produce a new understanding of the data to help the researcher identified recurring key phrases and group them together based on semantic relationship. In the third step, the focus is on the details such as recurring words, phrases to determine the code out of the data. The code may be a word, a brief phrase or a sentence based on the words of the participants (Creswell and Piano Clark, 2007). Then similar codes were fallen under one category. Fourth, for each group of phrases, the research assigned a theme stating the meaning shared in all of the phrases. This process was continued until no more themes emerged.
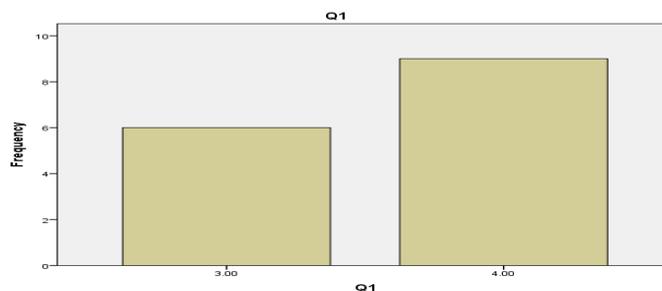
**Results and Discussion**

After finding the general attitudes of the participants of this study towards CLT, they were asked to reveal their attitudes towards 5 principles of CLT separately. Although just two of the participants expresses the role of teacher as the facilitator in definition of CLT but when in the questionnaire and interview, they were asked to explain the role of teacher, the emerged results was different

A cursory reading of the communicative methodology literature will present the reader with an abundance of "new" terms; the teacher as facilitator, as interdependent participant, as cocommunicator, monitor, guide, organiser, resource, motivator, conductor, supporter, adviser, instructor, creator of an unthreatening atmosphere (Breen and Candlin 1988, Cranmer 1991, Harmer 1983, Legutke and Thomas 1991, Littlewood 1982, 1992). Hence, I began the questionnaire by asking the participants about their attitudes towards the role of teachers in the classroom. The questions of the questionnaire asked the participants whether teacher's role is to facilitate and guide students' learning or teacher's role is to transmit knowledge through explanations and giving examples. The following tables demonstrate the results.
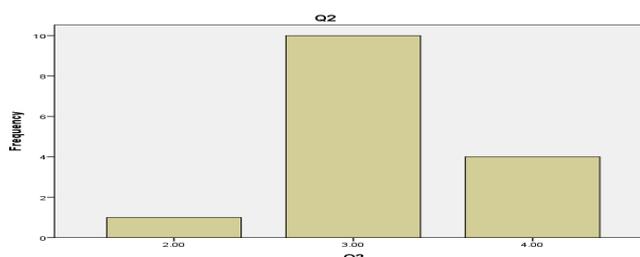
**Table1:** Teacher's role is to facilitate and guide students' learning.

|       |       | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
|       | 3.00  | 6         | 40.0    | 40.0          | 40.0               |
| Valid | 4.00  | 9         | 60.0    | 60.0          | 100.0              |
|       | Total | 15        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Table 2:** Teacher's role is to transmit knowledge through explanations and giving examples.

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Valid | 2.00 | 1 | 6.7 | 6.7 | 6.7 |
| | 3.00 | 10 | 66.7 | 66.7 | 73.3 |
| | 4.00 | 4 | 26.7 | 26.7 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 15 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |



As mentioned earlier, the purpose of using statements 1 and 2 in the questionnaire (attitude questionnaire) is determining teachers' attitudes towards an authoritarian or a facilitative preferences or bias in performing their tasks as teachers. As the table 4.2 shows, 100% of the participants agreed and strongly agreed that teachers' role is to facilitate and guide students. The interesting result is that 14 of them (except one of the participants) also agreed that teacher's role is to transmit knowledge through explanation and giving examples. According to the findings of these 2 questions although all of the participants believed that they should facilitate rather than dominate classroom discourse, they also agreed with traditional role of teachers which is transmitting knowledge. Most of them express this fact in their interview. Regarding the ideal role of the language teacher, the interviewed TESL trainees in this study believed in playing the role of facilitator. Despite fundamental position of the role of teacher in CLI theory, the role of facilitator still remains imprecise and vague. Idealised and theoretical statements such as a facilitator "facilitates the communicative process between all participant in the classroom, and between these participants and the various activities and texts"(Breen and Candlin 1980, p.99), or the facilitator creates space for the learner, allowing him to contribute his personality to the learning process (Littlewood 1981), or helps the learners understand the dynamics of the group and articulate their needs and feelings (Legulke and Thomas 1991), do very little in helping TESL trainees understand how this role can be realised in the classroom. Here, identifying the teacher' role as facilitator will be considered as adopting Communicative Language Teaching.10 out of 15 participants express the word of "facilitator" for describing teachers' roles and defined the CLT as the approach of facilitation in which the role of teacher is to facilitate students' learning. They believed that teachers should facilitate students' independent learning and should not practice any control over it. It seems to be clear for these teachers that their implementation of the CLT requires changing their traditional approach of instruction with an approach of facilitation.

The other five did not use the word of "facilitator" but indirectly express their positive attitudes towards the new role of teachers in students-center classrooms. They defined teacher' role as "very minimum", "express students to communicate", "Very significant role during the lesson although student-center, continually, guidance during group work", "for me teacher should be student-center participate in activities". For example Aishah (line 55-59) defined teachers' roles as:

*"Alright so previously we have learnt about CLT in the classroom. Teacher role is very **minimum** in CLT they will **talk less** but they will become the **facilitator** for students when the students need them they will be there but they will not talk. They will just **assist the students** in using the language. They will **motivate the students** and give and show the way without giving them too many assistant".*

Although Aisiah believed on the new role of teachers as facilitator and who talk less in the classroom but in her real class she had the complete authority and her TTT (teacher talking time) was very high.

Ainee also believed teachers should be facilitator and encourage students but the strange thing that she stated was let the students to speak in their mother tongue in English classroom. She exactly did the same in her classroom and students in her class were speaking always in Malay.

Amirah (line 36-38) believed students' communication in the class depends on the teachers. As she said:

**"***I think teachers play the important role they are the <u>started point of students</u> so if teachers ask students to communicate so students learn how to start they expose to communicative purpose to encourage and motivate them"*

In contrast with the above statements that believed the teachers should play the role of facilitator, Sara believed in adopting more traditional role in teaching and learning in which teachers "Correct learners' errors, encourage them to speak".

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