ENGLISH FOR SPEAKERS OF OTHER LANGUAGES STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF A COMMUNICATIVE CURRICULUM IN A FAMILY ENGLISH CLASS

Sarah Price

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate College of Bowling Green State University in partial fulfillment of The requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

August 2010

Committee:
Dr. Mohammed Darabie, Advisor
Dr. Ruben P. Viramontez Anguiano
Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen
Dr. Toni Sondergeld
ABSTRACT

Dr. Mohammed Darabie, Advisor

Although communicative language teaching is a successful methodology for teaching languages, the effectiveness of this approach is not necessarily universal when applied to different cultural styles of learning (Chen, 2003). In fact, across the globe, students from many different cultures had difficulties in adjusting to a communicative curriculum (Barkhuizen, 1998; Chen, 2003; Li, 1998; LoCastro, 1996; Shamim, 1996). Because cultural differences play a part in a student’s reception to communicative language teaching, understanding the student’s perceptions about the communicative curriculum is of vital importance in the success of CLT.

Through this research, the researcher explored students’ perceptions about communicative curriculum through study of a family English class in Bowling Green, Ohio. The purpose of this study involves understanding what this population of learners thinks about curriculum in order to better understand their needs.

The participants in the study were ESOL students in a Family English class in a Midwest American university town. The students originated from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures, and countries. The study was conducted by administering a mixed-method survey to the class in order to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was collected and analyzed using descriptive statistics and a content analysis.

Findings of the study showed that the students have positive perceptions about the communicative curriculum and that students’ backgrounds did not impact their experiences in a communicative classroom. Finally, it is noteworthy to suggest areas for future research, which may include a larger population sample, and research methods that allow for more in-depth data collection.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would first like to acknowledge Dr. Mohammed Darabie, Dr. Sheri Wells-Jensen, Dr. Ruben P. Viramontez Anguiano, and Dr. Toni Sondergeld for their guidance and support in writing this thesis. I would also like to acknowledge Kimberly Spallinger and the Family English class for allowing me to become a part of their class.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER I. INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research Questions</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale of the Study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Definition of Terms</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limitations</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theoretical Orientation of the Study</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Significant Historical Research</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>From Repetition to Reality</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicative Competence</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improving English Language Competency</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students’ Perceptions Regarding Need for Communication-based English Instruction</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reticence in Class and On-line</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role of Motivation in ESOL Student Achievement</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Communicative Language Teaching Around the World .............................................. 16

ESOL Students’ Perceptions about the Communicative Curriculum ..................... 18

Bridging Cultural Gaps in an ESOL Classroom ...................................................... 19

Summary .................................................................................................................. 20

CHAPTER III. METHODS AND PROCEDURES .................................................... 22

Methods .................................................................................................................. 22

Research Design .................................................................................................... 22

Participants and Study Site .................................................................................... 23

Instrumentation ..................................................................................................... 24

Procedures ............................................................................................................. 24

Data Collection ..................................................................................................... 24

Data Analysis ........................................................................................................ 25

Survey-based Research Limitations ...................................................................... 26

Summary ................................................................................................................ 27

CHAPTER IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS ......................... 28

Findings of Analyzed Data ..................................................................................... 28

Demographics ....................................................................................................... 28
CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION AND STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In very few classrooms can one find a more unique dynamic of students than in a classroom of English language learners. This is because, often times, students in an English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) classroom are not there because someone else is making them attend. Rather, they are often there because they want to be there and they have to be there—because their livelihoods depend on gaining the communicative skills necessary to function in an English-speaking country. This gathering of students from many different cultures and backgrounds with a true desire to be in that classroom is what can make an ESOL classroom so distinctively dynamic.

A common approach to language instruction in the United States is the communicative method. Communicative language teaching (CLT) is an approach to teaching languages that views language as a way through which meaning is expressed, making interaction and communication a key goal for the students. The role of the teacher is to facilitate communication among the students, while the students’ roles involves them interacting and negotiating through the learning process (Brown, 2007). However, around the globe, this type of approach that places emphasis on skills such as verbal communication is not universal. For some students, their first experience with CLT is in an American ESOL class. Therefore, in considering the great potential for the success of a communicative language teaching ESOL curriculum, it is important to understand what the students think about this style of teaching and learning.

Although communicative language teaching is a successful methodology for teaching languages, the effectiveness of this approach is not necessarily universal when applied to different cultural styles of learning (Chen, 2003). In fact, across the globe, students from many different cultures have had difficulties in adjusting to a communicative curriculum (Barkhuizen,
Because cultural differences play a part in a student’s reception to communicative language teaching, understanding the student’s perceptions about the communicative curriculum is of vital importance in the success of CLT.

Having a solid understanding of students’ needs also helps to highlight what is or is not working in the curriculum. According to Nunan (1989), "no curriculum can claim to be truly learner-centered unless the learner's subjective needs and perceptions relating to the processes of learning are taken into account" (p. 177). This statement very appropriately articulates an important belief about student learning, and the importance of understanding students’ individual needs in creating a successful curriculum. The information gained from this research could be used in future curriculum development for other ESOL classes with similar demographics to the Family English class and the surrounding community.

Research Questions

Through this research, the researcher explored students’ perceptions about communicative curriculum through study of a family English class in a Midwest American town. The purpose of this study involves understanding what this population of learners thinks about curriculum in order to better understand their needs. This was accomplished through research guided by the following questions:

1. What are the ESOL students’ perceptions about the communicative curriculum?
2. What impacts have the ESOL students’ backgrounds had on their experiences in a communicative English classroom?

Rationale of the Study

The importance of this study lies in improving ESOL curriculum for community or family English language classes by exploring students’ perceptions of the curriculum. Though
solid curriculum already exists, the understanding of students perceptions’, particularly in terms of the communicative language teaching method, will help to improve current sets of curricula so that it can better meet the needs of the individual students.

Additionally, throughout the United States, there are many cities and towns composed similarly to study site with the set up of a fairly homogenous town that has small concentrations of linguistic diversity that is often a result of a pull from a nearby college or university. Implications of this study may also be applied to other demographically similar locations around the country.

Definition of Terms

Below are the following acronyms and definitions that are often used for clarity and brevity in this study.

1. CLT: Communicative language teaching is an approach to teaching languages that views language as a way through which meaning is expressed, making interaction and communication a key goal for the students (Brown, 2007)

2. ESOL: Standing for English for speakers of other languages, the term ESOL refers to the teaching and learning of English in a setting where English is the spoken native language. For example, English classes for non-native speakers in the United States or Great Britain would be considered ESOL classes.

3. EFL: Standing for English as a foreign language, EFL classes are English classes taught in a country where English is not the native spoken language. For example, English classes in Spain would be considered EFL classes.
4. ELL: An abbreviation for English language learner, ELL is a term that represents anyone who studies English, regardless of ESOL or EFL context. This term is often used in K-12 public school settings.

5. L1: This term refers to a person’s first or native language.

6. LEP: This term that stands for limited English proficiency refers to students whose native or home language is something other than English, and “whose current limitations in the ability to understand, speak, read or write in English inhibit their effective participation in a school’s educational program” (Ohio Department of Education, 2008, p. 1)

Limitations

It is important to address various factors that limited the scope of this research. Due to the demographics of the area in which the study was conducted, access to large numbers of linguistically diverse students and ESOL students was limited. Therefore, the student participants in this study were selected via convenience sampling and no generalizations to a larger population of ESOL learners can be inferred.

Additionally, because all of the participants were ESOL speakers, the gathering of data was extremely limited by the proficiency levels of the student participants, as the majority of the students functioned at a novice-high or intermediate-low proficiency level of English (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 1999).

Finally, it is a possibility that the students in the Family English class were apt to provide the researcher with data they thought the researcher wanted to see. This may be because students from other countries may have a cultural reluctance to evaluate authority figures such as a teacher or a researcher. Though it was highlighted that participants should provide their honest
responses in terms of data collection, the process was new to many of the students, which may have influenced the way they answered various questions.

Summary

The focus of this study was to identify the perceptions of a group of ESOL students concerning a communicative curriculum. This study also addresses the importance of ESOL students’ perceptions of the communicative language teaching approach in order to help improve current sets of curricula so that it can better meet the needs of the individual students. Though the study exhibited certain limitations, information as a result of the study can be applied to other locations across the country with demographics similar to the study site of this research.
CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter focuses on how the investigation of ESOL students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum relates to what other researchers and scholars have demonstrated in current literature and research within the field of ESOL students and curriculum studies. This chapter contains information about theoretical orientations for the study, significant historical research and an in-depth discussion of contemporary research related to ESOL students’ perceptions of a communicative curriculum. Within these major categories, this chapter will also cover topics including ESOL student motivation, communicative language teaching and the use of this approach around the world, student perceptions about the communicative curriculum, and bridging cultural gaps.

Theoretical Orientation of the Study

A common approach to ESOL language instruction in the United States is the communicative approach, which is also used in the classroom where the research for this study was conducted. Historically, however, the communicative approach was not always used in the United States. Transforming in a cyclical manner, new methods and approaches have transformed, changed, and sometimes reappeared in various ways over the last one hundred years, according to Brown (2007) in a synopsis about language pedagogy. Beginning with the Grammar Translation Method in the 19th century, it was believed that language teaching should reflect the classical method that focused on rules and memorization. Eventually though, scholars and professionals in the field of language teaching realized that learning a second language should closely resemble learning a first language, paving the way for the Direct Method around the turn of the century. However, during WWII when the need for multilingualism became important for countries to communicate with one another, the Audiolingual Method became
popular, emphasizing memorization, contextualized vocabulary, and precise pronunciation. During the 1970’s language pedagogy underwent various phases of “Designer” Methods, including Krashen’s Natural Approach. Finally, during the 1980’s and 1990’s professionals in the field realized that instead of attempting to develop a new method, efforts needed to be made to combine various approaches to language teaching. From this era of language pedagogy comes the communicative language teaching approach (CLT).

It is important to note that while CLT is utilized in both ESOL classrooms such as the Family English class as well as other North American language classrooms, is it not universal in this country. Some language instruction continues to be based off of other historically popular methods such as the Grammar Translation Method.

However, around the globe, this type of approach that places emphasis on skills such as verbal communication is not universal. For some students, their first experience with communicative language teaching is in an American ESOL class. Therefore, in considering the great potential for the success of a communicative language teaching ESOL curriculum, it is important to understand what the students think about this style of teaching and learning.

Research has demonstrated the effectiveness of communicative language teaching (Chen, 2003). In fact, the current age of globalization that demands international communication has spurred some countries to change their customary language teaching methodologies from methods such as the traditional and audio-lingual methods to communicative language teaching (Chun, 1998). Historically, while other teaching methods focused primarily on four basic skills (e.g., reading, writing, listening, and speaking), CLT transformed pedagogical aims to focus not only on these skills but also to focus on communication and negotiation via use of the target language, making the communicative needs of the learner the main focus of the pedagogy
For purposes of clarity and consistency, the following explanation of communicative language teaching within the context of this study is described.

In communicative language teaching, interaction and communication are at the heart of the approach. CLT allows for and encourages students to make meaningful connections between the content material and their every-day lives. The objectives of this teaching technique are a result of the students’ needs, meaning that the objectives may vary depending on the class or even on the individual student. The syllabus design promotes functional learning, allowing students to gain the communicative skills necessary in order to function within an English-speaking society. Communicative techniques and activities are open-ended, which can make the outcomes of the techniques unpredictable when acted out in a classroom setting. Some of these techniques include games, brainstorming, and acting out scenarios. The role of the teacher tends to be more as a facilitator as opposed to having a role that is extremely central and direct. This allows for a very student-centered atmosphere. (Brown, 2007; Ma, 2009).

The following terms are several basic, concrete characteristics of communicative language teaching (Brown, 2007; Ma, 2009)

1. Fluency—while accuracy is important in CLT, the fluency of a student’s comprehension and production may become a primary goal in order to encourage meaningful and authentic language use.

2. Real-world context—activities require the student to make the content meaningful in his or her own life by creating connections between classroom tasks and actual real-world situations. Skills learn in class could be used in every-day life.

3. Student autonomy—students are made aware of their own learning styles and
preferences. Time is spent reflecting strengths and weaknesses in order to alert students of their own learning development.

4. Student interaction—students interact and collaborate with one another in order to practice fluent, meaningful language.

5. Communicative focus on form—While strict focus on form is not central to CLT, this important element of language learning is incorporated into the curriculum in ways that encourage interaction and communication rather than rote drilling.

6. Teacher as facilitator—the teacher in a CLT classroom serves as a catalyst for student learning, but in an indirect way that allows for the students to also learn from themselves and one another.

Research has demonstrated the importance of studying CLT in ESOL classes as well as the significance of understanding students’ perceptions of this teaching approach. Knowing and understanding students’ personal learning styles will allow ESOL education to be better and more productive in terms of curriculum and pedagogy (Kumaravadivelu, 1991). Teachers who understand students’ perceptions and approaches to language learning will be able to help students meet the various learning objectives set out by the teacher (Barkhuizen, 1998). Moving beyond the scope of the teacher, in order to maximize student success in English language learning, understanding students’ perceptions and approaches to learning must be a priority for curriculum designers as well.

Significant Historical Research

*From Repetition to Reality*

Though communicative language teaching has been considered as a form of best practice pedagogy for language teaching, the approach has not always been so widely accepted.
Historically speaking, other methodologies and approaches that focused on drilling and memorizing were considered best practice and professionals in the ESOL field fought to make a case for the acceptance of CLT. Larson, an ESOL teacher in the 1970’s, argued for major changes in educational approaches for ESOL classrooms in order to develop students’ communicative competence (Larson, 1974), or a learners’ knowledge of the rules of a language as well as his or her ability to know when and how to actually use the language.

The author points out three explicit suggestions that would move a classroom to function under communicative language teaching. First, the author suggests that the physical organization of the classroom needs to properly facilitate the possibility of communication among students and the teacher. This perhaps means moving away from traditional rows of students in desks that face the teacher at the front of the room. Other methods of physical arrangements, such as small groups of desks or various arrangements of large tables could possibly better equip the physical aspects of the room to support communication in the classroom.

The second suggestion deals with identifying patterns and noticing how aspects of language such as pace, intonation, pronunciation and pronoun replacement need to be presented to ESOL students in an authentic manner that would be naturally produced by native speakers. If ESOL teachers continue to demonstrate language in a non-authentic form, ESOL students will inevitably become discouraged, believing that because they are unable to understand native English speakers outside of the classroom, that they are simply unable to learn the language.

Finally, cues and signals used by the teacher in order to either bring out responses or set off language use should be similar to cues that a native speaker would respond to. Though this task becomes difficult in a classroom setting, the author offers ways to help students learn authentic language cues. For example, utilizing task-based learning that requires the students to
gather information in order to complete a task is a way for them to experience authentic language cues.

Since the 1970’s the field of teaching English as a second language has made enormous strides in terms of advancement of effective methodologies and approaches. However, before there is a need to study different aspects of CLT, first, a rationale for its place in language classrooms needed to be established.

**Communicative Competence**

An aim of learning ESOL, particularly when operating with CLT, is for the learner to gain communicative competence. In research done by Politzer and McGroarty (1985), this term is more succinctly defined as a students’ ability to convey information in English. In their study conducted with 37 ESOL students preparing to enter graduate school in the United States, the researchers investigated students’ learning behaviors and their relationship in linguistic and communicative gains. The researchers found that between two ethnic groups that participated in the study, the Asian participants utilized fewer good learning behaviors than the Hispanic participants; however, the Hispanic participants excelled more than the Asian participants in oral proficiency and auditory comprehension. The results demonstrated an interesting divide between students from different backgrounds, highlighting how culture and background play an important role in one’s ability to learn a language.

The research was conducted via a self-reported questionnaire and yielded various important results that resulted in noteworthy implications for future research in the field of ESOL. Primarily, Politzer & McGroarty, (1985), noted that cultural background “has a great deal to do with the type of language learning behaviors and likely to be used by students” (p. 119). Teachers of ESOL have the difficult job of making a connection between their particular
teaching styles and the individual learning styles of the students in a diverse ESOL class.

However, a students’ background is inevitably going to influence how he or she naturally learns the best, which makes this acknowledgement a priority in ESOL education.

*Improving English Language Competency*

In Pre-K-12 schools, there is a plethora of ESOL programs for students that varies from state to state and school district to school district. This freedom for variance exists so that schools will be better able to accommodate for the individual students in need of ESOL instruction (McKeon, 1987). One major type of ESOL program in the public school system is the stand-alone program. A stand-alone class means that ESOL students are segregated from non-ESOL students in an entirely separate class and an ESOL-plus program (McKeon, 1987). In a study conducted by Landry, the researcher investigated why ESOL students were not gaining communicative competence in the stand-alone ESOL classroom.

Second grade ESOL students in a stand-alone ESOL class were not gaining communicative competence as a result of their schooling. They struggled not only with their English skills including reading and writing, but lagged behind their peers in math skills as well.

In order to investigate this problem, the researcher implemented an immersion communicative curriculum that allowed the ESOL students and the non-ESOL students to share classroom time together, performing communicative activities that revolved around every-day topics such as food, family, art, games and music. The programs’ aims were for the ESOL second graders to gain communicative competency in English, to improve social interaction between ESOL and non-ESOL students, and develop the understanding of all second graders regarding the English language and culture.

As a result of the CLT immersion program, the ESOL students improved their
communicative competency in English. In addition to the communicative gains in the ESOL students, data analysis demonstrated stronger social cohesiveness (Landry, 1990) among both groups of students as a whole. In this case study, CLT was not only effective as a approach for teaching language, but it was also effective as a way to promote social and cultural understanding.

Student Perceptions Regarding Needs for Communication-based English Instruction

More recently, studies have highlighted the importance of understanding ESOL students’ perceptions of language curriculum in general. In 2001, Lai researched college students in Taiwan studying English as a foreign/second language\(^1\) by investigating students’ perceptions concerning the need for communication-based college English language instruction (Lai, 2001).

By performing a needs assessment among 620 undergraduate students at National Chen Kung University, Lai discovered various findings concerning the students’ perceptions concerning the EFL/ESOL instruction they were receiving. Findings of the research showed that students thought that college English was very practical and useful for their future careers and that English should be a required course at the University. Additionally students felt that learning college English was more important for enhancing communication skills than for preparing for tests and examinations. Regarding English instruction, students said that college English instructors did not utilize any of the traditional or communication-based instructional approaches to the extent necessary to accomplish their goals for studying English and that they preferred communication-based approaches, especially communication language teaching, over traditional instructional methodologies.

The findings from this study highlight not only the importance and usefulness of communication-based approaches, but also the need for instructors to adopt more communicative teaching methods to meet the needs of ESOL students.

\(^1\) The terms EFL and ESOL were use interchangeably in this study.
communicative language teaching, but also the importance of knowing what the students think about the way they experience their language education. Understanding how the students relate to instruction is necessary for college EFL/ESOL instructors and administrators to further understand information regarding students’ needs for successful and useful English instructional approaches (Lai, 2001). This supports the notion that taking into account the students’ perceptions will result in better learning experiences for the students.

As a result of this study, the researcher suggested various methods to improve practice in terms of teaching EFL/ESOL. In practice, it would be beneficial to consider students’ perceptions about the importance of the intended goals for a particular course versus the actual outcomes of the students. Additionally, teachers could make an effort to incorporate communication-based instruction, which includes CLT, into the curriculum based upon the findings of the students’ perceptions of their intended goals versus actual outcomes. Finally, the researcher suggests that school authorities should be responsible for factoring opinions from not only the students, but also alumni, teachers and administrators into any decision-making about social needs, economic development and instructional orientation.

*Reticence in Class and On-line*

As is evident from other studies, cultural factors can affect how a student reacts to communicative language teaching. Often times, negative reactions to CLT manifest in the form of reticence and lack of participation. An in-depth study of two students from Japan and Korea demonstrates how and why these two students were unaccustomed to and apprehensive about communicative language teaching. The study sought to understand the students’ difficulties interacting with others in class and found that “the interwoven affective, linguistic and sociocultural factors contribute to the students’ infrequent participation”, a conclusion even more
complex than attributing the students’ reticence to “simply ethnic/cultural backgrounds” (Chen, 2003, p. 271). Though cultural backgrounds do play a part in a student’s ability or willingness to learn from CLT, such a factor does not guarantee universal success or failure in a language classroom.

The Role of Motivation in ESOL Student Achievement

Students of English as a second or other language vary in terms of their motivation for learning English. While the ESOL students in the Family English class seem to function with an extremely high motivation that is not necessarily present in other content classes, this may not be the case for all ESOL students.

As with any learner, ESOL learners exhibit different forms of motivation. From personal pleasure fueled by intrinsic motivation to physical rewards such as a higher salary that stems from external motivation, different forms of motivation stimulate different learners (Rubenfeld et al., 2007).

Intrinsic motivation deals with activities “for which there is not apparent reward except for the activity itself... Intrinsically motivated behaviors are aimed at bringing about certain internally rewarding consequences, namely, the feelings of competence and self-determination” (Brown, 2007, p. 88). According to theorists such as Piaget, Maslow, and Bruner, humans are more likely to be successful when fueled by intrinsic motivation as they attempt to reach what Malsow calls self-actualization (Brown, 2007).

Extrinsic motivation on the other hand, involves the anticipation of some type of reward. “Typical extrinsic rewards are money, prizes, grades, and... types of positive feedback” (Brown, 2007, p. 88). While many researchers would claim that intrinsic motivation is much more valuable in the learning process that extrinsic motivation, some research shows that certain
extrinsic rewards such as positive feedback can bolster and enhance a student’s intrinsic motivation (Brown, 2007).

In addition to looking at motivation, it is important to keep in mind the purpose of studying English for ESOL students. Research by Gardner offers the idea of orientation, which can refer to integrative or instrumental orientation. Integrative orientation involves the desire to learn a language that stems from “a positive affect toward a community of its speakers”, while instrumental orientation involves a desire to learn a language in order to “attain certain career, educational, or financial goals” (Brown, 2007, p. 88).

In the Family English class, there is little opportunity for extrinsic rewards. Though positive feedback is a certain exception to this, the Family English class does not require attendance, administer grades, or graduate students to a new level or grade upon completion. The students in the Family English class are highly motivated, fueled most likely by primarily intrinsic motivation.

Communicative Language Teaching Around the World

As demonstrated through various historical studies, communicative language teaching is a common approach for teaching English to speakers of other languages in the United States. However, this form of teaching and learning is not universally employed across the globe. Other countries around the world utilize other forms of language methodology and approaches, and rightfully so, as cultural, political, and economic issues must be kept in mind when considering educational methods for teaching English as a second or foreign language. In fact, as a result of this, language teaching approaches around the world have become more “reflective and nuanced” in terms of their effectiveness and transferability across countries (Block, 2004, p. 96). This is an important issue to address because, often times, an ESOL student’s first experiences
with CLT may be in an American ESOL classroom. Adjusting to this new way to learn may be difficult for the student, ultimately hindering his or her ability to absorb and understand material.

As is indicated in its very name, communication is at the heart of CLT. A CLT curriculum cannot function properly if the students are unable or not willing to communicate with their peers and with the teacher in the classroom. A student’s willingness to communicate can sometimes be influenced by the student’s familiarity to certain methodologies and teaching approaches, which can be a result of cultural teaching techniques. For example, Chinese students often succeed at written examinations that focus on grammar, yet struggle with their spoken competency and have lower levels of a willingness to communicate (Wen & Richard, 2003). This is an important finding to keep in mind, in particular, for an ESOL class with a Chinese student learning English.

Often times, if a student supposedly has had some experience learning English via communicative approaches, in reality this is not always the case. For example, some countries that do claim to practice communicative methods in language teaching, in fact operate using other non-communicative pedagogical practices. In 1999, Thailand employed a law called the National Education Act of 1999 that mandated a fundamental shift in the traditional ways of teaching all subjects, including English, from being teacher-centered to being student-centered. As a student-centered classroom is a key component in the construction of a communicative curriculum, and also a way in which a communicative curriculum is defined for the purpose of this study, one would think that education in Thailand had adopted a communicative approach in terms of pedagogy and curriculum design. However, when examined in an authentic setting, often times certain classrooms displayed no evidence of any communicative activities (de Segovia & Hardison, 2009). Teachers in a South Korean high school experienced a similar
situation when attempting to adopt communicative approaches in their classroom. Though the teachers had well intended to implement a communicative curriculum with their students, the actual carrying out of such activities was not as easy or successful as anticipated (Li, 1998). This disconnect between communicative pedagogical intentions and actual pedagogical practices in classroom settings has been documented in Thailand, as well as other Asian countries including China, Hong Kong, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam (Nunan, 2003), exemplifying the fact that though some ESOL students may claim to be familiar with CLT, this may not actually be the case.

ESOL Students’ Perceptions About the Communicative Curriculum

Previous studies have researched difficulties with communicative curriculum in countries other than North America. Many of these studies echo some of the aforementioned difficulties that deal with bridging the disconnect between teaching approaches between one country’s methods and North American communicative approaches. One of the major problems that contributes to this disconnect has to do with the teachers’ abilities to implement such a curriculum that operates under such a foreign style of language teaching (Chen, 2003; Li, 1998; LoCastro, 1996). However, other research focuses more on the students, specifically their reactions and perceptions to the use of a communicative curriculum.

As mentioned previously, student motivation is of paramount importance in successful language learning. However, communicative approaches may not necessarily bolster student motivation to learn English. For example, a common methodology for teaching language in Japan is the grammar-translation method, whose main goals do not align well with those of communicative approaches, as much emphasis is placed on accuracy and focus on form as opposed to fluency and communication. For a Japanese student, this clash of customary
methodology with communicative approaches may result in low student motivation to learn (LoCastro, 1996). In another study of the implementation of a communicative curriculum in Pakistan, the students reacted in opposition to adoption of the curriculum. Traditionally, education in Pakistan favors rigid respect for hierarchies, little tolerance for questioning teachers, and passive, one-way knowledge sharing from the teacher to the student. These factors in traditional Pakistani education made it very difficult for the students to then function and flourish when instructed using CLT. As opposed to embracing ideas embedding in CLT, they reacted by arguing, having non-cooperative attitudes, and petitioning for more lecture-style teaching (Shamim, 1996). Another study performed in English classes in South Africa revealed similar findings. Though the syllabi of the South African schools supposedly were functioning under a communicative curriculum, the researcher of this study found little evidence that the methods were, in fact, communicative in nature. When the students were then exposed to communicative activities, they were also resistant to this type of learning and requested a reversion to what were their traditional classroom activities (Barkhuizen, 1998). Both of these studies emphasize the importance of being aware of the potential discord between the familiar learning styles of the student and the new, unfamiliar communicative methods when considering utilizing CTL in an ESOL classroom.

Bridging Cultural Gaps in an ESOL Classroom

Evidence demonstrates that a communicative language approach is not practiced all around the world. Additionally, it is clear that when this approach is something that greatly varies from a student’s traditional style of teaching and learning that is embedded in his or her own culture, it may not be the most effective approach for learning English. However, research certainly supports the use of CLT and demonstrates its effectiveness in authentic settings (Chen,
Therefore, if CTL is going to be used in American ESOL classrooms, curriculum designers, teachers, and others involved in the educational process must understand and develop ways to successfully bridge cultural gaps that create dissonance between communicative language teaching and individual student learning.

Many of the successful techniques for bridging cultural gaps begin with adjusting the frame of reference within which one operates. For example, popular research suggests that interconnectedness among cultures should be stressed in diverse educational settings as opposed to thinking about cultures as being disconnected and separate from one another (Roswell et al., 2007). The idea that each culture depends on one another on a global scale is a powerful mindset that can make students feel welcome and secure in a classroom, and ultimately, help to bridge significant gaps that arise from cultural misunderstandings. Understanding cultures in this potentially new way simply begins with a shift in paradigm on the part of the teacher.

Additionally, with a heart and mind of compassion and sympathy, another path for bridging cultural gaps in an ESOL classroom can be created. This idea of employing empathy has been expressed as it refers to researchers in culturally diverse fields (Chen, 2003); however, this same notion should be kept in mind for educators in the field of ESOL. An important step in developing an empathetic mindset toward one’s students is through reflection and self-study (Conle et al, 2000). Being reflective, sensitive, and cross-culturally aware will allow teachers to be aware of their own standpoints, biases, and pedagogical tendencies (Cruz, 2005). Particularly in classrooms as diverse as multinational ESOL classrooms, empathy is of vital importance on the part of the teacher in order to be successful in bridging cultural gaps.

Summary

This chapter focused on what other scholars and researchers had to say about
communicative language teaching and how students’ perceptions and backgrounds influence their success in a CLT classroom. By first establishing a theoretical orientation for the study, the chapter continues by highlighting research about ESOL students’ perceptions and CLT in an historical context. Finally, the chapter reviews various studies about CLT around the world, demonstrating that the approach is not universally employed in English classrooms around the world. Often times, students’ struggle learning under a communicative curriculum because the approach can be so different from the language methodologies that they are accustomed to. Finally, the chapter concludes by reviewing suggestions from other studies regarding how to bridge cultural gaps in an ESOL CLT classroom.
CHAPTER III: METHODS AND PROCEDURES

This chapter focuses on the investigation of ESOL students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum in a Family English class in a Midwest American town. The conduction of research was guided by the following research questions.

1. What are the ESOL students’ perceptions about the communicative curriculum?
2. What impacts have the ESOL students’ backgrounds had on their experiences in a communicative English classroom?

This chapter contains information about the research design, the participants, the research instrumentation, the procedures, the data collection, the data analysis, and the timeline for the study.

Methods

Research Design

This study employed a descriptive research design, both quantitative and qualitative in nature. A mixed methods approach to the research design was purposefully chosen in order to “extend the breadth… of inquiry by using different methods for different inquiry components” (Hanson, Creswell, Piano Clark, Petska, & Creswell, 2005, p. 226). With the concurrent triangulation mixed methods design used for this research, all quantitative data and qualitative data were gathered concurrently and both types of data carried equal weight in terms of importance. The research was executed via a survey that was administered to students in the Family English class. The survey instrument contained questions that required quantitative answers in the form of a Likert scale, as well as open-ended short-answer questions, in order to qualitatively supplement the quantitative data.
Participants and Study Site

To conduct this study, the researcher focused on a Family English class in a Midwestern American university town. The family English class is a program through the university that is designed to provide free English language lessons to family members of international students, visiting faculty at the University, or other people in the community who wish to improve their English language skills. The course offers students a chance to practice basic reading, writing, listening, and speaking in English skills through a communicative curriculum design that aims to help the students function in an English-speaking society.

Though the class varies in number from week to week due to the nature of the community class, it generally consists of roughly ten to fifteen students. Twelve students in the Family English class agreed to participate in the study; however, the final data comes from only eight students for various reasons such as absences. Countries represented in the class included Bangladesh (n=2), Uzbekistan (n=1), Russia (n=1), China (n=1), Vietnam (n=1), Chad (n=1) and Nicaragua (n=1).

It is noteworthy to mention background information about the site of the research study, as the make up of the city is relevant in understanding more about the participants in the study. The city is fairly homogenous in terms of demographics. According to the 2000 Census, the population of the city is 29,636, roughly 92% of which is white. It is a fairly middle class town with the average family household income being $51,032. Only 8% of families live below the national poverty line. Additionally, it is a college town with the university being located near the center of the city. Eight-four percent of students at the university are white, and the other 16% being a mix of various races.

Regarding diversity, much of what the city has in terms of this component comes from
the university. Though the university is home to the majority of the city’s diverse population, the number of non-white students is still small. Therefore, it is inevitable that international students, particularly those who do not speak the native language, will experience a certain shock in terms of social and academic cultures.

Instrumentation

A survey was created to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data to answer the research questions. The first question intended to understand what the students thought about the curriculum that they use in the Family English Class. The second questions investigated how the students’ past experiences learning English compared to how they were currently learning English in the Family English Class.

The instrument included 21 items—the first four being demographic-related questions. The next 13 questions were about communicative and non-communicative activities to be answered on a six-point Likert scale according to level of agreement. For the Likert scale, the options included strongly agree, agree, not sure, disagree, strongly disagree, and no answer. The final four questions were open-ended free response questions, which asked about the most difficult, easiest, and most enjoyable activities in the Family English class, as well as their preference for learning English in the Family English class versus learning English in the students’ home countries. See Appendix C for the complete survey.

Procedures

Data Collection

Data were collected that answered the aforementioned research question. In addition to gathering demographic data about each participant, data were collected concerning their perceptions and opinions about learning English in the Family English class. Subsequently, the
researcher collected data about the easiest, most difficult, and most fun activities during the Family English class. Finally, data were collected regarding the students’ experiences learning English in their home countries versus learning English in the Family English class.

Because the students in the class all functioned with a limited English proficiency, the researcher crafted a class lesson about surveys in order to help them understand this every-day occurrence of North American life—filling out surveys. Components of the filling out surveys that were incorporated into the lesson included using a Likert scale, describing demographic information, using frequency adverbs, and working with superlatives. Toward the end of the lesson, the survey was administered to the entire Family English Class, leaving them enough time to finish before class was over. Though the survey exhibited qualitative questions, the data collection process did not involve probing or follow-up questions, as the students were only required to answer each written question. This survey functioned as a culminating comprehension check for the students about the lesson material, but also functioned as a research instrument. Taking class time to complete the survey allowed every student in the class to have an opportunity to complete the survey. Though the students were required to take the survey as a part of the class activity, they were reminded that allowing the researcher to use their answers for my research was entirely voluntary.

Data Analysis

Open-ended response survey data were qualitatively analyzed using a method of drawing empirical inferences through a content analysis (Stemler, 2001). The analysis included identifying various codes through a process called emergent coding—an establishment of categories that follows examining the data. First, all data were compiled into a database and reviewed, looking for reoccurring themes among the responses from each participant. The initial
themes closely corresponded to the question asked, making four main themes—most difficult
communicative activities, easiest communicative activities, most enjoyable and fun
communicative activities, and preferences for learning English in the Family English class versus
learning English in the participants’ home countries. After establishing the four main themes,
smaller sub-themes emerged as similar answers to the four main questions were coded.
Significant sub-themes that emerged included games as being the most fun activity in the Family
English class and the focus on communication being a reason that students’ preferred learning
English in the Family English class as opposed to learning English in their home countries.

Likert-scale survey questions were analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., frequencies
and percentages) in order to effectively illustrate the basic findings of the research. Quantitative
data were entered into an Excel spreadsheet. Excel was then used to generate frequencies and
percentages of responses as well as graphical figures for better visual depiction of the results.

Survey-based Research Limitations

Acknowledging the various types of errors in survey research, various efforts were made
in order to reduce the errors as much as possible. Because this research focused on the Family
English class in a Midwestern American city, the participants in the study were selected
purposefully through convenience sampling. While sampling error is a type of survey research
error (Cui, 2003), the purpose of the project was not to randomly sample ESOL students. Rather,
the purpose was to focus on one particular class of ESOL students. The next type of error, non-
coverage error, was remedied by making the survey available to every student in the Family
English class. This meant that every person in the entire population had the opportunity to
complete the survey. A non-response error occurs when participants do not respond to the survey
questions. In order to diminish non-response error, the length of the survey was concise (21
items) and the participants were given a lengthened period of time (14 days) to complete and return the survey. The final error, measurement error, involves participants making mistakes in the process of completing the survey (Cui, 2003). In order to evade measurement error, the completion of the survey was crafted into a class lesson, and the teacher was available to help students complete the survey correctly and understand questions that may have been confusing.

This study also exhibited qualitative limitations as a result of the survey research. Because qualitative data were collected in the form of written responses to open-ended questions, no face-to-face interviews were performed, eliminating the possibility for follow-up questions or member checking to ensure correct interpretations of responses. While this is a limitation, the quantitative data collected from the survey allows for triangulation of the findings and interpretations of the qualitative open-ended questions.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the research methodology of this project, providing detailed description as to how this research took place by illustrating the problem to be answered by the researcher, the methodology, the participants, the instrumentation, the procedures, the data collection, and the data analysis.

The purpose of the study was to investigate ESOL students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum. The participants in the study were ESOL students in a Family English class. The students originated from a variety of different backgrounds, cultures, and countries. The study was conducted by administering a mixed-method 21-item survey to the class in order to gather both quantitative and qualitative data. Data was collected and analyzed using a content analysis as well as descriptive statistics. Additionally, various survey-based research limitations are discussed.
CHAPTER IV: DATA ANALYSIS FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The purpose of this research was to investigate ESOL students’ perceptions of a communicative curriculum in a Family English class. Research has shown the importance of understanding students’ perceptions with regard to communicative language teaching (Barkhuizen, 1998; Chen, 2003; Lai, 2001; LoCastro, 1996; Shamim, 1996). By looking closely at the Family English class, inferences can be made about improvements to the curriculum for not only the Family English class in the Midwest American town, but also in other community-based ESOL classes around the country. This chapter includes how the data was analyzed and what findings came about as a result of the study.

Findings of Analyzed Data

Results in this chapter are presented by research question. Additionally, qualitative and quantitative findings are integrated to supplement one another, providing depth and breadth of the results for each question. The qualitative research did not involve an observation protocol or in-depth interviews, as all qualitative data were collected through written responses to open-ended questions that were integrated in order to supplement the quantitative data. Appendix C depicts all quantitative raw data in the form of frequencies and percentages for each survey question. Appendix D provides all of the raw qualitative data group by the five majors coded theme, including the most difficult communicative activities, the easiest communicative activities, the most fun and enjoyable communicative activities, students’ preferences for learning English, and miscellaneous.

Demographics

In order to answer the research questions, important demographic information was collected. The country represented by the largest number of students was Bangladesh, with two
participants being from that country. One student originated from each of the remaining countries of Uzbekistan, Vietnam, Russia, China, Chad and Nicaragua.

The two most commonly spoken native languages by the participants from the Family English class were Russian and Bengali. The participant from Uzbekistan spoke Russian as her first and native language. The other Russian speaker was from Russia and both Bengali speakers were from Bengali.

Table 1 depicts the number of years that each of the participants had studied English, including the number of years studying English in their home countries (if they studied English before coming to the United States).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Years</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10+</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the participants (50%, n=4) in this study had studied English for a total of 4 years. Two students (25%) had studied English for more than 10 years, one student had studied English for 1 year and one student had studied English for 5 years.

Finally, Table 2 represents the amount of time that each participant had lived in the United States.
Table 2

*Frequencies and Percents of the Amount of Time the Participants Lived in the United States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Amount of Time</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 months</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 years</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 years</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>8</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of the students had lived in the United States for either 1 year (25%, \(n=2\)) or for 5 years (25%, \(n=2\)) at the time of the research. The remainder of the students had lived in the United States for either 9 months, 11 months, 2 years or 8 years.

*ESOL Students’ Perceptions of a Communicative Curriculum*

The first research question asked about the ESOL students’ perceptions of the communicative curriculum in the Family English class. All participants agreed (100%, \(n=8\)) that a good way to learn English is by interacting with teachers and classmates. However, some responses stated that other activities that generally are not integral parts of a communicative curriculum constituted good ways to learn English. For example, 87.5% (\(n=7\)) agreed that listening and repeating phrases was a good way to learn English and 50% of the students (\(n=4\)) thought that reading from a textbook was a good way to learn English. Other ways to learn English yielded mixed responses among the participants. For example, only 3 students (37.5%)
believe that translating from their L1 to English was a good way to learn English, while 5 students (62.5%), were either unsure or did not agree that translation from the L1 to English was good way to learn English. Figure 1 provides a visual representation of what students believed were good ways to learn English.

Figure 1

*Student Agreement on Activities that are Good Ways for Learning English*

Although the teacher of the Family English class only spoke English to the students, the majority of the students (75%, \( n=6 \)) did not think that this fact made the class difficult. Finally, 100% (\( n=8 \)) of the students always tried to speak English outside of class and 87.5% (\( n=7 \)) of the students were consistently able to use what they learned in the Family English class outside of class.

In response to learning English in the Family English class under the communicative curriculum, 100% (\( n=8 \)) of the students said that learning in this way was fun for them.
Qualitative data help to supplement the quantitative data, describing what activities were the most fun and enjoyable for the students. Jada said, “The most fun is to meet each other.” Trina and Yi both said that they enjoy listening to the teacher talk the most. Ajanta explained that the activity that she enjoys the most is “small competitions among different groups. Games like Go Fish, Apple to Apple.” Three more students were similar to Ajanta, enjoying playing games the most, meaning half of the participants’ \((n=4)\) most enjoyable activities in the Family English class were games.

*Impact of Students’ Backgrounds on their Experiences in a Communicative Classroom*

The second research question asked about how the students’ backgrounds impacted their experiences in a communicative English classroom. For the majority (87.5\%, \(n=7\)) of the students, the communicative curriculum in the Family English class was a brand new way for them to learn. Though this approach of learning was new for the students, the novelty did not necessarily make learning more difficult. Seventy-five percent \((n=6)\) of the students did not agree that the Family English class was very difficult for them. Figure 2 represents students’ familiarity with CLT and their agreement with the difficulty of the approach.

When rating the way in which the students’ learned English in their home countries as opposed to how they learned English in the Family English class, the results were split. Fifty percent \((n=4)\) of the students in the Family English class preferred learning from a communicative curriculum better than the methods by which they learned in their home countries. One student (12.5\%) preferred learning English in his home country, while 3 students (37.5\%) chose “No Answer” for this question. Two of those three students had no formal English language instruction prior to coming to the United States. Figure 3 represents the participants’
overall preferences about learning English in the Family English class versus learning English in their home countries.

Figure 2

*Students’ Prior Familiarity with CLT and their Agreement with the Difficulty of CLT*

Supplementary qualitative data expands upon students preferences for learning English in the Family English class under a communicative curriculum rather than in their home countries.

One student responded with the following comments:

**Nigora**: I prefer learning English in the Family English class. When I studied English in Uzbekistan at the first place was grammar, then reading and translation texts from English to Russian. In the FEC, first place — ability to speak in English, communication with classmates. Here I can improve my speaking skills. I like better to learn English in the USA than in my country because here I can speak with English speakers (Americans), watch movie, TV in English and etc.

---

2 All student responses are recorded verbatim

3 All student names have been replaced with pseudonyms
Unlike her experiences studying English in her home country, Nigora favored the communicative aspects of the Family English class and appreciated being able to experience English in authentic settings through. Other students also favored the Family English class for similar reasons. Lena said, “I prefer learning English in FEC because there teachers are native speakers of English and I am sure that teachers pronounce words and teach grammar rules most correct. Also, here studying English is fun for me, no pressure, no exams, the teachers are very friendly. I like the way we learn English FEC.” Not only did Lena enjoy being able to communicate and focus on proper pronunciation, she also noted that the absence of tests or quizzes made learning in the Family English class more enjoyable. Finally, Ajanta stated, “I prefer learning English in the Family English class. Because this class helps me to improve my
listening, pronunciation, speaking. Again, this student preferred learning English in the Family English class because of the focus on communicative activities and skills.

While the previous three students commented on favoring the communicative aspects of learning English in the Family English class, other students explained their preference for the Family English class for different reasons. Yi commented, “I had learn a little English in my country. Here the class I prefer the most. I learn the English in my country is little by little. But here is mix.” Han also provided another reason for preferring to learn English in the Family English class. ‘I prefer learning E in the Family E class because the teacher is very good. She always gives us a lot of fun and interesting in lesson.” In addition to students favoring the communicative aspects of the Family English class, others favor the class as a result of the teacher, the diversity of activities and the fun they have in class.

With the exception of Russia, all of the students who preferred learning English in the Family English class were from Asian countries, including Bangladesh, Uzbekistan and China. One of the students, Nigora, noted that learning English in her native Uzbekistan included translating texts with an emphasis on grammar as opposed to a focus on communication. Though this is not the case for all Asian countries, research has shown that many Asian countries either do not implement or struggle to implement a communicative curriculum for teaching languages (Nunan, 2003).

Summary

This chapter shared the results of the research and situated the results as they related to and answered the research questions. For the first question, the data results showed that students have positive perceptions about the communicative curriculum as all of the students agreed that interacting with teachers and classmates is a good way to learn English. Students reacted to the
communicative curriculum, noting that it was fun and enjoyable for them. For the second question, data demonstrated that students’ backgrounds did not impact their experiences in a communicative classroom.
CHAPTER V: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine ESOL students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum in order to better understand and better meet their needs from a curricular standpoint. The research was guided by two questions. First, what are the students’ perceptions about the communicative curriculum? Second, what impacts have the students’ backgrounds had on their experiences in a communicative English classroom?

This final chapter details the information, data and results of the previous four chapters including the introduction, the review of literature, the methods and procedures, and the data analysis. Finally, in addition to the summary, this chapter provides conclusions of the study and recommendations for future research.

Summary of Previous Chapters

The first chapter of this topic introduced the topic of study for this research. The focus of this study was to understand a group of ESOL students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum. The study answered the following major questions:

1. What are the ESOL students’ perceptions about the communicative curriculum?
2. What impacts have the ESOL students’ backgrounds had on their experiences in a communicative English classroom?

This study addressed students’ perceptions of a communicative curriculum, which corresponds to a common language teaching approach in North America—communicative language teaching. Understanding and highlighting students’ perceptions of this type of curriculum is ultimately important in helping to improve current sets of curricula so that it can better meet the needs of the individual students. The study can be applied to other locations across the country with demographics similar to the town in which the study was conducted.
The purpose of chapter two was to review what other researchers and scholars had to say about communicative language teaching and how students’ perceptions about the teaching approach played a role in their learning process. Historically, CLT was not a commonly used approach; however, over time it has been chosen as a best practice approach to teaching foreign languages. It has been studied by many and researchers have understood the importance of understanding students’ perceptions in response to CLT. Various factors can affect a student’s ability to succeed under a communicative curriculum, motivation and ethnic or cultural background being important factors. Other topics that are important in understanding students’ perceptions of a communicative curriculum include ESOL students’ motivation, the use of CLT around the world, and ways to bridge cultural gaps.

Chapter three detailed the methods and procedures that were necessary in conducting this research. It explored the investigation of ESOL students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum in a family English class. The conduction of research was guided by research questions that addressed the students’ perceptions about the communicative curriculum and how the students’ backgrounds impacted their experiences in a communicative English classroom. The research design was descriptive, gathering both qualitative and quantitative data. The participants in the study were students from the Family English class. The research instrumentation was a survey that asked quantitative questions in the form of a Likert scale and open-ended short-answer questions for gathering qualitative data. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and a content analysis.

Chapter four addressed the data analysis and discussion of results. It answered the questions about students’ perceptions of a communicative curriculum and the impact of students’ backgrounds on their ability to be successful in a communicative classroom. This study showed
that students have positive perceptions about the communicative curriculum and that students’ backgrounds did not impact their experiences in a communicative classroom.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Research has demonstrated the importance of understanding students’ backgrounds perceptions and perceptions regarding CLT (Barkhuizen, 1998; Chen, 2003; Lai, 2001; LoCastro, 1996; Shamim, 1996). While an ESOL student’s cultural and educational background may affect how the student responds to communicative language teaching, in the context of this study, students from diverse backgrounds do not necessarily struggle to learn under a communicative curriculum. Though many students were not previously familiar with CLT, this did not hinder them from not only favoring the language teaching approach, but also genuinely enjoying the learning process through such approaches.

The results of this study emphasize the importance of addressing the needs of individual classes of ESOL students, particularly in community-type settings where more emphasis is placed on gaining communicative skills over strictly academic skills. While many case studies point to the difficulties of implementing a communicative curriculum for students from around the world (LoCastro, 1996; Shamim, 1996; Barkhuizen, 1998; Chen, 2003), in the case of the Family English class, the diverse population of students that was not familiar with CLT responded positively to CLT, demonstrating student perceptions that were contrary to other research. This fact highlights the importance of avoiding sweeping generalizations and stereotypes when working with ESOL students, as not only each class, but also each individual student will bring his or her own unique dynamic to the educational process.

Findings from this study as well as from other studies confirm that a communicative language approach is not practiced all around the world. Though an approach such as CTL that is
very different from a student’s traditional style of teaching and learning can be an ineffective approach for learning English, this was not the case for the students in the Family English class, as the majority (67%, n=4) of the students that had previously studied English in their home countries preferred learning English in the Family English class. However, though the majority preferred a communicative curriculum, their reasons for the preference varied, depending on what language teaching techniques they were accustomed to in their home countries. This finding reiterates how important it is for those involved with designing, implementing and facilitating the educational process for ESOL students to be familiar with ways to successfully bridge cultural gaps that can create discord between communicative language teaching and individual student learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

Out of the research performed with the Family English class emerged other areas of study that would benefit the current body of knowledge concerning ESOL students and a communicative curriculum.

The current study looked closely at eight students in a Family English class in a Midwest American town. The students varied in terms of cultural backgrounds, as well as English language learning backgrounds. The Family English class looked at a range of students, varying from students with very basic English language skills to students with more advanced English language skills. It is possible that trends in students’ perceptions about CLT emerged according to the students’ English language skill level; however, the sample size of the current study did not allow for such trends to be confirmed. A future study could compare students’ perceptions about a communicative curriculum across a spectrum of skill levels, identifying the best skill level to use CLT.
Though the design of this study was a mixed methods descriptive research design, a more in-depth view of students’ perceptions of the curriculum could be attained by using additional qualitative methods such as structured interviews, focus groups, and various observation protocols in order to gain a fuller understanding of what the students think about they way they learn in an ESOL class. Future research could involve this type of data collection with a number of the students involved in the study.

**Implications for Teachers**

Various implications as a result of this study are noteworthy to discuss. As previously concluded, the results of this study emphasize the importance of treating each ESOL class as an individual. While one group of diverse students may respond positively and favorably to CLT, another group of students may struggle and be less successful operating under a communicative curriculum. As teachers are the ones who implement curriculum and spend time with the students, it is important that they recognize this individuality and allow for flexibility in their teaching styles and curricular design.

It is also important that teachers are in touch with their students’ perceptions and opinions regarding the curriculum. An advantage for the teacher in the Family English class is that because it is a community-based class as opposed to a university class that students receive credit for, there is a certain amount of freedom that the teacher has in the way the curriculum is designed and implemented in class. Upon learning that this Family English class most enjoys playing games during class, the teacher could use this information to make lessons more enjoyable yet educational by incorporating games each day.

**Implications for Curriculum Designers**

Though in the case of the Family English class the teacher designs the curriculum, this is
not always the case. This study shows the importance of an acknowledgement between the
design of the curriculum and the actual students in class. If those in charge of designing ESOL
curriculum are unable to maintain any sort of connection with the ESOL students learning from a
particular curriculum, then it is important that the design itself allows for flexibility and changes.
There needs to be flexibility in terms of both skill level (offer ways to intensify or ease the
difficulty of an activity) and types of activities (offer activities that exist on a spectrum of
communicativeness). Finally, designers need to be in touch with teachers, actively seeking
summative feedback about the effectiveness of a current curricular design. There is not one
foolproof ESOL curriculum, and curriculum designers must constantly be looking for ways to
improve the current design.

Summary

This chapter provides a summary of the first four chapters of the thesis including an
introduction, a review of literature, the methods and procedures, and results of the study.
Additionally, the chapter concludes with various conclusions of the study. Though other research
has demonstrated ESOL students’ difficulties with CLT due to unfamiliarity with the approach,
the novelty of the approach did not contribute to such difficulties for the students in this study.
The results of this study emphasize the importance of addressing the needs of individual classes
of ESOL students and highlight the importance of avoiding sweeping generalizations and
stereotypes when working with ESOL students. Finally, implications of the study and
recommendations for future researchers, teachers, and curriculum designers are discussed.
Though no inferences can be made to the large population of ESOL learners in community-based
CLT classrooms as a result of this study, the findings offer important insights for any teacher or
curriculum designer concerned with offering ESOL students a meaningful and effective learning experience.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

HSRB APPROVAL
April 27, 2010

TO: Sarah Price
Education

FROM: Hillary Harms, Ph.D.
HSRB Administrator

RE: Human Subjects Review Board Project No.: H10T288GE7

TITLE: English as a Second Language Students’ Perceptions of a Communicative Curriculum in a Family English Class in Bowling Green, Ohio

The BGSU Human Subjects Review Board (HSRB) has completed its review of your project involving research with human subjects.

Your project has been approved as submitted. This approval is effective April 27, 2010 and expires on April 26, 2011. You may begin subject recruitment and data collection.

The approved version of the consent document(s) is attached. Consistent with federal OHRP guidance to IRBs, the consent document(s) bearing the HSRB approval/expiration date stamp is the only valid version and copies of the dated document(s) must be used in obtaining consent from research subjects.

You are authorized to use human subjects for 12 months, but only in the manner described in your proposal. If you seek to make any changes in your project activities or procedures (including increases in the number of participants), those changes must be approved by the HSRB prior to their implementation. If any anticipated adverse reactions develop during the course of your project, you must temporarily suspend your research and notify the Chair of the HSRB.

Please notify the Board in writing (fax: 372-6916 or e-mail: hsrb@bgsu.edu) when you have completed your project. If you have any questions, please contact the Chair of the HSRB or me at 372-7716. Good luck with your research project.

COMMENTS:
Stamped consent document is coming to you via campus mail.

C: Dr. Huziak-Clark

RESEARCH CATEGORY: EXPEDITED #7
APPENDIX B

STUDENTS’ CONSENT FORM
Dear Student:

My name is Sarah Price. I am a graduate student in the College of Education and Human Development at Bowling Green State University. I am doing a research study for my Masters Thesis. The title of the thesis is: **ESOL Students’ Perceptions about a Communicative Curriculum in a Family English Class in Bowling Green, Ohio.** This study will measure your thoughts and reactions to the way you learn in the Family English Class. Your responses will be measured based on how you answered the survey from the class unit about surveys. The answers from the survey will be part of the data for my thesis. The survey is an in-class assignment, but I am asking for your permission to use your assignment for research.

**Procedure**

I am asking that you to let me use your information for my study. If you would like to participate, please sign this form. If you consent, I will use your survey answers from this class activity. This research will help to improve Family English Classes in the future. Also, completing this survey will directly benefit you because you will be able to practice filling out a survey. All of these forms will be kept in my office in a safe place. Your names will not be used in my study. You have a choice to sign this form. You do not have to sign it. Nothing bad will happen if you don’t sign the form. Your relationship with me or with BGSU will not be harmed if you do not sign the form. The survey will take about 20 minutes to complete. There will be time during class for you to complete the survey.

**Your rights**

Your personal information will be kept secret. Your name and identity will not be given in my study. You do not have to let me use your information for my research. There are no risks if you let me use your information. You may ask me any questions about the study. You may ask for a copy of the results of the study. If you decide to let me use your information, you can change your mind later.

There is no penalty if you do not complete the study. I appreciate any information you are willing to provide.

**Researcher’s Contact Information:**

**Sarah Price (Principle Investigator)**
014 Kohl Hall
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403
Tel: (419) 372-9443
Email: ssprice@bgsu.edu

**Tracy Huziak-Clark (Advisor)**
121 Life Science
Bowling Green State University
Bowling Green, Ohio 43403
Tel: (419) 372-7363
Email: thuziak@bgsu.edu
If you have questions about this study or about your rights, you may contact the Chair of Bowling Green State University’s Human Subjects Review Board at 419-372-7716 (hsrb@bgsu.edu).

**Informed Consent Statement**

Signing this form tells that you agree to be a part of this study. You do not have to be a part of this study. You can stop being a part of this study at any time.

Please check one (X) below:

( ) YES, I will be a part of this study.

( ) NO, I will not be a part of this study.

Date: ____________

Student Name: ____________________________________________

Student Signature: _________________________________________
APPENDIX C

STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS SURVEY WITH DATA
Directions: Please answer questions 1-4 by writing the answer in the blank.

1. What is your native country? _____________________________________

2. What is your native language? _________________________________

3. How many years have you studied English? ______________________

4. How many years have you lived in the United States? _____________

Directions: Please answer questions 5-17 by placing an “X” in the column that best applies to you for each statement.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>#</th>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Unsure</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>No Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>The way we learn in the Family English Class was new for me.</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=4, 50%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>The Family English Class is very difficult for me.</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>A good way to learn English by listening and repeating phrases.</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=6, 75%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>A good way to learn English by interacting with my teacher and classmates.</td>
<td>n=5, 62.5%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>A good way to learn English by reading from a textbook.</td>
<td>n=2, 25%</td>
<td>n=2, 25%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>A good way for me to learn is by translating words from my native language to English.</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=2, 25%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>I use what I learn in the Family English Class outside of class.</td>
<td>n=4, 50%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>I like the way we learn in the Family English Class better than the way I learned English in my home country.</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>The way the Family English Class is taught is fun for me.</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=5, 62.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>The Family English class is very different from English classes that I took in my home country.</td>
<td>n=2, 25%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=2, 25%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>The Family English Class is difficult because the teacher only speaks in English.</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=4, 50%</td>
<td>n=2, 25%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>I always try to speak English outside of class.</td>
<td>n=4, 50%</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>I spend a lot of time working on homework for the Family English Class.</td>
<td>n=1, 12.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=4, 50%</td>
<td>n=3, 37.5%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
<td>n=0, 0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Directions: Please answer questions 18-21 with a written description.

18. What activities in the Family English Class are the hardest for you?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

19. What activities in the Family English Class are the easiest for you?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

20. What activities in the Family English Class are the most fun for you?

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________

21. Do you prefer learning English in the Family English Class or in your home country? Explain.

___________________________________________________________________________

___________________________________________________________________________