

Article

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) through Synchronous Online Teaching in English Language Preservice Teacher Education

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Abstract

This article deals with the challenges in training English language preservice teachers in the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach through adopting synchronous online teaching using Zoom and the development of CLT tasks in the time of COVID-19. It outlines the teaching context, explains the rationale for training preservice teachers in the CLT Approach and the challenges of adopting CLT with distancing pedagogic practices where face-to-face sessions were not possible. It first examines the challenges of using synchronous online learning before explaining the rationale for adopting Zoom to train preservice teachers. It then describes how training was carried out, discusses the outcomes of the training and reflects on the practice of using synchronous online activities for training preservice teachers in the CLT Approach. The article concludes with teaching implications for educators looking at training preservice teachers in the CLT Approach through synchronous Zoom.

Keywords

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach, synchronous online teaching, preservice teacher training

1 The Teaching Context

In Singapore, with the closure of all schools and all tertiary institutions from 4 April 2020, teaching has to be conducted online to ensure safe distancing. Teachers and English language educators have to use asynchronous and synchronous online platforms to replace face-to-face lessons. This posed a challenge for teaching English language pedagogical courses at the National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore, where training has been predominantly face-to-face to prepare preservice teachers for teaching in actual classrooms with 20 to 40 students per class. However, as the preservice teachers (all graduates) studying for the Postgraduate Diploma in Education (Secondary) had to complete the module entitled 'Language Teaching Approach', I had to consider how to adapt the face-to-face teaching materials to synchronous online teaching.

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2 Rationale for the Methodology of CLT

One key teaching methodology that the preservice teachers have to be trained in is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001):

Communicative Language Teaching is best considered an approach rather than a method. It refers to a diverse set of principles that reflect a communicative view of language and language learning and that can be used to support a wide variety of classroom procedures (p. 170).

Savignon (1991) too sees CLT as a broad approach for “methods and curricula that embrace both the goals and the processes of classroom learning, for teaching practice that views competence in terms of social interaction” (p. 263). For CLT, the goal of learning a language is using it effectively for “real communicative needs, rather than simply to provide learners with the knowledge about the grammar system of that language” (Pham, 2007, p. 195). According to Richards (2006), CLT requires learners to participate in cooperative classroom activities rather than be involved in an individualistic approach to learning and the role of the teacher is that of a facilitator to enable students to develop fluency in using the language. Learners engage in meaningful interaction through “classroom activities in which students must negotiate meaning, use communication strategies, correct misunderstandings, and work to avoid communication breakdowns” (Richards, 2006, p. 14) and where classroom tasks are designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups. Kumaravadivelu (2006) discusses the benefits of CLT and says that it encourages “the creative, unpredictable, and purposeful use of language as communication ... to help the learners get ready for so-called real world communication outside the classroom” (p. 61). Teachers use information gap activities, drama techniques and “innovative classroom activities (such as games, role plays, and scenarios) aimed at creating and sustaining learner motivation” (Kumaravadivelu, 2006, p. 61).

3 Challenges for Teaching CLT through Synchronous Online Platforms

In normal face-to-face teaching sessions, students are seated in groups for the instructor to assign tasks. The instructor may give verbal instructions and/or present the task or discussion questions using slides and specify the time limit for each task or discussion. Each student is given a role either by preference or through the drawing of cards, which provides them with an element of surprise. As CLT necessitates interactive pair or group work, the key challenge concerns how to use online synchronous sessions to facilitate such interactions with no face-to-face sessions allowed due to the need to increase physical distancing.

What then are the challenges of synchronous learning online according to researchers? According to Johns Hopkins University (2010), one challenge is managing student contributions to ensure everyone gets to voice their thoughts and opinions and that no one person dominates the conversation. Examining the quantity of student communication and the quality of interaction, Berglund (2009) has found some examples of multimodal interactions, although students’ “contributions often [consist] of long monological turns” (p. 202). Card and Horton (2000) too claim that “computer technologies do not always foster a two way interaction” (p. 243) between students.

Further challenges can be seen when we compare face-to-face discussions and online discussions. Wang and Woo (2007) clarify how face-to-face discussions are most likely to involve more interactions than online discussions and the interaction is more multidirectional in terms of other members “making complementary remarks, comments or clarifications at the same time. The discussion process [is] more interactive and [goes] in multiple ways. However, the online discussions [are] more restricted and [tend] to be more one-way” (p. 283). Johnson et al (2000) discuss how face-to-face communication allowing multiple channels of communication with nonverbal information such as tone of voice, gesture and facial expression are preferred over all forms of computer-mediated communication in their study. This

is because “face-to-face communication allows for non-verbal, personal information to transpire in a real time, synchronous setting” (Johnson et al., 2000, p. 15) and there is the added value of being able to interpret non-verbal behaviour such as tone of voice, posture and facial expression.

Trinder’s (2015) study shows that 78% of respondents prefer communicating face-to-face to voice or video chat in order to improve their English fluency because of technical issues such as sound quality. Comments such as “less direct”, “less personal”, “less focused” and “less spontaneous” for technology-mediated communication point to the lack of emotive/cognitive qualities in such communication. To the respondents, “conversation is divorced from the context of shared social and physical surroundings” (Trinder, 2015, p. 94). Many of them missed “the joy of being with another human being” (p. 94) and being energized by direct contact. There is also the lack of verisimilitude/authenticity if “voice chat becomes a purely aural/oral form of communication” (p. 94). The most frequently expressed disadvantage by the respondents concerned “the missing cues of facial expressions and body language, which students consider a vital aid towards understanding” (p. 94). Hampel and Stickler (2012) find that the video conference tool *FlashMeeting* does not allow more than one person to speak at a time and the slow refresh rate of the thumbnail video images means the video is not ideal for making meaning through body language.

Interestingly, Vurdien’s (2019) study shows that EFL participants in the experimental group (n=18) engaging in communicative tasks with their partners via Zoom videoconferencing outperformed the control group (n=12) performing the same tasks in face-to-face classes. However, despite the positive results and attitude towards learning via videoconferencing, in interviews, the participants unanimously stated that they would rather communicate in a face-to-face setting. This was because they felt more motivated by peers who could provide instantaneous support should they need it and the videoconferencing atmosphere “appeared somewhat cold because they were communicating virtually, with the corresponding absence of personal contact” (Vudien, 2019, p. 287).

4 Rationale for the Choice of Zoom as Synchronous Online Teaching Tool

Despite the challenges associated with synchronous online learning outlined in the previous section, Yamagata-Lynch (2014) states that “synchronous online whole class meetings and well-structured small group meetings can help students feel a stronger sense of connection to their peers and instructor and stay engaged with course activities” (p.189) as synchronous communications allow students to engage in spontaneous discussions. According to Johns Hopkins University (2010), synchronous learning enables instructors to interact directly with students in real-time to instantly gauge students’ engagement. Participants can also receive instant feedback or answers/acknowledgement and feel more connected, almost as if they were in a face-to-face session.

Giesbers et al (2014) highlight how computer-assisted learning increasingly use synchronous communication tools that offer more resemblance to face-to-face interaction such as web-videoconference tools like Skype and Zoom which offer real-time communication through (a combination of) audio, video and chat. Such video conferencing tools have provided “the opportunity for a high level of real-time, students-to-students and students-to-instructor interaction in online learning environments [offering] ... *virtual*, yet interactive learning experiences that are closer to what is possible in face-to-face learning environments” (Moallem, 2015, p. 55).

Therefore, I decided to use Zoom, a synchronous teaching tool, because it allows communication among teacher and students to occur in real time from different locations. Zoom as a video conferencing tool is a form of computer-mediated communication that “is *nearly* a replication of face-to-face interaction” (Blum, 2020) as Zoom bears resemblance to face-to-face classrooms. Blum (2020) explains:

“[i]n a Zoom classroom with 30 students, we see faces -- just like in a classroom. We see eye movement. We can hear voices. It can even be enhanced by chat -- almost like hearing people

thinking out loud. It is multimodal, to some extent. We see gestures, at least some big ones. All this is information used by our human capacity for understanding interaction”.

It will be interesting for me to observe the use of Zoom for training preservice teachers through participation in CLT activities in pairs or groups. Breakout rooms in Zoom can provide meeting spaces for pairs and/or groups to interact simultaneously.

5 Description of Actual Teaching of the CLT Approach Using Zoom

In line with real communication as a defining characteristic of CLT, two course activities were designed for students to discuss issues related to COVID-19. The activities, which could be used in both face-to-face and online sessions, were meant to “mirror the real world and use real world or “authentic” sources as the basis for classroom learning” (Richards, 2006, p. 20) or to facilitate authentic learning processes.

The 15 preservice teachers in my class were introduced to the key tenets of CLT approach (Richards, 2006) before they participated in the two designed CLT activities as experiential learning, which involves concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations (Kolb & Fry, 1975; Kolb & Kolb, 2009).

The preservice teachers were engaged in the two CLT activities through Zoom lessons. The use of Zoom to teach CLT in this case can be considered experiential learning on the basis of the belief expressed by Delfino and Persico (2007) that in investing in the adoption of online techniques for the training of future teachers, they are more likely to use similar methods with their students with first-hand experience themselves.

Activity 1: The problem of COVID-19 in your city

The preservice teachers were briefed about the task which was to identify problems related to COVID-19. One group took on the role of a Member of Parliament (MP) who invited representatives from three different organizations to highlight two problems created by COVID-19 and to offer a suggestion to resolve a problem. The MP group had to brainstorm possible issues that the three representatives could raise. The representatives of the three different organizations were: (i) an administrative officer at a local hospital, (ii) a representative of foreign workers and (iii) a representative from the Ministry of Education. In the breakout rooms, each of these three groups had to identify two problems as a result of COVID-19 and offer one suggestion from the perspective of their assigned role. Each group selected a group member to present the two problems and one suggestion to the MP. At the end of the meeting, the MP summarised the main ideas. Each group was given a cue card for a role (see Figure 1).

SAMPLE ROLE PLAY CARD

You are the Administrative Officer at a local hospital

- Introduce yourself
- State two problems faced by citizens
- Make one suggestion

Figure 1. Sample role play card

The preservice teachers went into their breakout rooms to discuss and nominate a presenter. After the completion of the task, they were asked to reflect on the CLT task they experienced in terms of how they might adapt the task to teaching secondary students.

Activity 2: UN Assembly simulation

The preservice teachers were briefed about the simulation task:

There have been diverse views regarding the role of WHO and whether WHO has been impartial in managing the COVID-19 pandemic globally. To gather more data, the International Panel has invited representatives from various relevant sub-groups to argue their case before the UN General Assembly and its 193 member states. One group will be the International Panel. The following are the three sub-groups presenting to the International Panel: impartial scholars, pro-WHO and anti-WHO. One group member will be appointed as a key representative of a sub-group and in your presentation, you will need to state your group's views regarding the role of WHO and convey your group's position regarding what should be the resolution of the United Nations.

After the briefing, each group was assigned a specific role. Each group had to read the given articles and collaboratively draft a persuasive speech (see Figure 2, Sample instructions for Activity 2).

<p>SAMPLE INSTRUCTIONS</p> <p>Impartial scholars – your views regarding the role of WHO and whether WHO has performed its role during the COVID-19 outbreak.</p> <p>Read the following: WHO https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1</p> <p>A Timeline Of Coronavirus Comments From President Trump And WHO https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/15/835011346/a-timeline-of-coronavirus-comments-from-president-trump-and-who</p> <p>WHO Director ‘regrets’ Trump’s decision to halt funding over coronavirus response & China ties https://www.thesun.co.uk/news/11405090/who-organization-coronavirus-press-conference-response-trump-defunded/</p> <hr/> <p>International Panel – Decide on a list of criteria to assess the presentations of the sub-groups so that your group can decide on the UN’s resolution.</p> <p>Read the following: WHO https://www.who.int/health-topics/coronavirus#tab=tab_1</p> <p>A Timeline Of Coronavirus Comments From President Trump And WHO https://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2020/04/15/835011346/a-timeline-of-coronavirus-comments-from-president-trump-and-who</p>

Figure 2. Sample instructions for Activity 2

Each group nominated a group member to present to the International Panel. After the presentations, the International Panel held a discussion before presenting the group's resolution. The preservice teachers were asked to reflect on the CLT task and offer their views on whether they would use the same task when teaching secondary students.

6 Outcome of Training Preservice the CLT Approach Using Zoom

The Zoom CLT lessons covered the same content as face-to-face sessions to ensure parity in teacher training. In terms of preservice teachers' ability to carry out the assigned tasks, there was no apparent difference between face-to-face and online synchronous sessions. The preservice teachers, who could speak English fluently and with conviction, found the CLT tasks engaging. One even commented on the authenticity of the task, saying, "Meeting with the MP - very applicable in real-life". This was in line with how CLT encourages creative, unpredictable and purposeful use of language in communication to prepare learners for the real world (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Following the two activities, the preservice teachers were asked to reflect on the online activities as they would have been asked in a face-to-face setting. Although the preservice teachers found the authentic tasks engaging and facilitated the learning of CLT, the general consensus was that both CLT tasks could be rather challenging for secondary students, especially for the person taking on the role of the MP, who had to summarise the main ideas and offer opinions in Activity 1. However, some of them thought that the task could be modified by changing the context. Secondary school students could be asked to discuss the COVID-19 problem in the context of a school setting where the participants could play the roles of a teacher, a parent and a student. The teachers also expressed concern that even the role of a principal could be challenging for secondary school students. This echoes what Thamarana (2015) has highlighted regarding how

The CLT approach is great for intermediate student and advanced students, but for beginners some controlled practice is needed. Students with low levels of proficiency in the target language may find it difficult to participate in oral communicative activities (p. 97).

In an informal survey on the use of Zoom for the 'Language Teaching Approach' module (as feedback for enhancing my Zoom lessons), the preservice teachers commented that they had learnt language teaching approaches and theories through the synchronous Zoom sessions. The preservice teachers especially enjoyed learning about teaching using the CLT approach as the designed activities were pitched at their level. They made comments such as "The CLT ones! They were very interactive and engaging", "CLT. Interactive, interesting, imaginative", "Meeting with the MP - very applicable in real-life", "I like the role play scenario with the different profiles. It is interesting to listen to the different pitches" and "I enjoyed the CLT ones best! They were very interactive and fun, and we picked up strategies we could use in class".

That the preservice teachers did learn the CLT Approach and picked up strategies they could use in teaching secondary school students was demonstrated in their application of the approach to material adaptation and development for a group assignment. The preservice teachers were given a choice of language teaching approaches and theories learnt from the online sessions for the assignment involving the adaptation of materials to teach Secondary Four Express students. One group adapted the given teaching material by adding a debate (a CLT activity) and another group created a Town Hall Meeting activity similar to Activity 1 to enable students to use language for real life communication purposes.

However, in the informal survey of Zoom lessons, most still expressed preference for face-to-face interactions. Two commented that Zoom lessons were 'not as good as in-person' and how "Face to face. It's more fun and interactive". This could be explained by how as "social beings, we will always miss the social interaction of meeting up physically, which is irreplaceable, and can only be poorly approximated in virtual interactions" (Lim, 2020, p. 7). It could also be a case of them missing "the joy of being with another human being" (Trinder, 2015, p. 94) and not being energized by direct contact. The participants in Vurdien's (2019) study on acquiring communicative competence through Zoom videoconferencing had unanimously preferred to communicate in face-to-face settings because of peers' instantaneous support; for them, without personal contact, virtual communication appeared somewhat cold.

7 Reflection on Face-to-face Versus Synchronous Learning for CLT Approach

From the perspective of a teacher trainer who has taught the CLT approach using authentic materials related to current affairs for more than a decade in face-to-face sessions, the CLT methodology shared can be easily adapted for use by other ELT practitioners (teacher trainers and teachers for ELT) for synchronous online teaching. For instance, the preservice teachers could adapt the task in Activity 1 to a different context and two groups even adapted teaching material for teaching using the CLT approach. However, the onus is on the instructor to plan authentic tasks dealing with current issues to engage students. In designing CLT tasks, the instructor has to ensure that the task on current issues (such as COVID-19 for 2020) are suitable for preservice teachers and yet offer potential for adaptation to a different teaching context.

The instructor has to be prepared for technical issues that might occur with any online platforms such as lagging or losing connectivity during the session. Still, Zoom can be used as a platform for face-to-face interaction. Although it may be argued that the Zoom lessons can be conducted in a very similar manner as the face-to-face classes, there are differences because of the technology involved with delivering the material. In designing teaching activities, assigning tasks for the CLT approach and using breakout rooms, instructors have to keep in mind features of Zoom's functionalities that are specific to the synchronous online tool:

- Teaching tools: audio, video, text chat, whiteboard, polls (external and instructor created) and breakout rooms
- Audio: (i.e., only one person can speak at a time)
- Video images (via webcam): large picture of speaker and small thumbnail images of all participants. Simultaneous screen sharing (selected or gallery view)
- Joint creation of text and images (whiteboard)
- Parallel use of audio, video, text chat and whiteboard possible
- Showing of slides and videos
- Automatic recording of sessions (allowing participants to re-view)

As a synchronous tool for teacher training, Zoom has a fairly comprehensive set of features for teaching purposes: audio, video, text chat, whiteboard, polls and breakout rooms besides the parallel use of audio, video, text chat, polls and whiteboard. Therefore, I could introduce the preservice teachers the key tenets of Communicative Language Teaching Approach using PowerPoint slides and videos before engaging them in the two CLT activities. The automatic recording of sessions (if the instructor chooses this option) means both the instructors and participants can re-view the lessons.

Although the online sessions on CLT seem to be similar to face-to-face sessions in terms of learning outcomes, there are differences in lesson delivery and interactions. In face-to-face teaching, in assigning each group the specific task, the instructor can just distribute the role play cards and the groups can immediately start their discussions. Although Zoom has breakout rooms to enable pair or group work, the instructor has to assign the groups into the breakout rooms manually for instructor-selected grouping. According to Blum (2020), it can be time consuming to use breakout rooms as she has used

Zoom's small-group breakout room for some tasks to some effect, though it is cumbersome. In one class, where they are in project teams, I have to manually put the students into groups, and it takes measurable minutes, and then joining groups takes a little while, and then exiting each group takes time.

The instructor has to plan how to issue the specific task for each group. This can be done after they are in the breakout rooms which entails the groups waiting for the tasks to be issued group by group. The tasks can be shown on the slides to the class before they go into the breakout rooms but this might take away the element of surprise.

An instructor is a facilitator of learning for the CLT Approach, according to Larsen-Freeman (2000), as well as a monitor of learning. However, I have found that in the context of Zoom, a facilitator going into the breakout room can be more intrusive than a facilitator who is monitoring students from a distance in a face-to-face setting. The instructor has to choose to enter and the presence is marked by the students' greeting as a mark of respect for the instructor. Similarly, out of courtesy, instructors have to let the groups know they are leaving, unlike a face-to-face setting where instructors can choose to just listen to a group for a short while and use paralinguistic cues to indicate they are moving to another group without disrupting the group discussion. Students are used to such movements of the facilitator for monitoring of learning in a face-to-face setting.

In CLT lessons, a teacher has to move from group to group to offer advice, answer queries, monitor students' performance and make notes regarding errors to be worked on in accuracy-based activities at a later time (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The preservice teachers in this study were motivated articulate students who did not require close monitoring. However, in the context of secondary school students or ESL/EFL students, the nature of the breakout rooms might pose difficulties for the monitoring of language performance. In a face-to-face classroom with multiple groups, a teacher can easily see if all groups are engaged in the given tasks and can hear which language(s) are being spoken. In Zoom, the teacher has to enter each breakout room to check that students are on task and using the target language. Students might use the target language only when the teacher is in the breakout room. Thus, the teacher might not be able to assess the natural use of language in communication to identify errors for accuracy-based activities.

The online sessions on CLT are not similar to face-to-face sessions in interactions due to the video images of participants. Zoom presents video images and a choice of thumbnail video images of participants (selected or gallery view). My experience and accounts by other participants and instructors tell me that this Zoom feature can be obstructive. Firstly, with a class of 30 or more, instructors can find monitoring the whole class to assess the students' attentiveness while giving a presentation challenging as they have to 'read' multiple real-life videos. When showing video images of participants, on a mobile phone, if more than ten participants show real time videos of themselves, the participants appear tiny on the small screen.

Secondly, even when the instructor can see video images of all participants, Zoom does not allow more than one person to speak (Hampel & Stickler, 2012) at any time as "the platform is made for a single speaker at a time" (Blum, 2020). It could be argued that this also happens in face-to-face sessions when "[o]nly one student can respond and interact with the teacher at any one time, with the others listening in" (Lim, 2020, p. 6). However, for Zoom sessions, at times I found myself facing awkward silences and could not immediately nominate another speaker to follow up on comments. This is because the instructor sees small multiple thumbnail videos and only the facial expressions. The instructor cannot assess body language to invite interested students to comment on classmates' contributions as one can in face-to-face interactions, where instructors can pick up subtle cues from both facial expressions and body language as I normally do in a physical classroom. Hampel and Stickler (2012) have similarly found the video conference tool *FlashMeeting* not ideal for making meaning through body language because of the miniscule thumbnail videos on a small screen.

Thirdly, I noticed that when I did not insist that students show videos of themselves, most chose not to do so. One possibility could be they found it tiring to keep looking directly into the web camera to project attentiveness during class. They might have to do this for hours if they have back-to-back lessons. Another possibility has to do with students feeling uncomfortable about having the camera switched on all the time, like two-thirds of the 46 students surveyed by Nicandro, Khandelwal and Weitzman (2020) did. Either they were self-conscious or they were not in private spaces (e.g. not having a room in which they can close the door). Students may not necessarily want to show their current living situations, although they can use virtual backgrounds.

In fact, the capacity of Zoom to display multiple live videos has posed a new question related to whether it is mandatory for students to show their faces during the Zoom sessions (Reed, 2020). In discussions about teaching with Zoom with my colleagues, a few express the view that it should be mandatory. Reed (2020) notes that some professors have found it “disheartening in Zoom to talk to a bunch of black boxes with names in them. Cold-calling those black boxes often results in silence, strongly implying that the student isn’t actually there”. According to Nicandro, Khandelwal and Weitzman (2020), professors have instituted mandatory video policies for various reasons: seeing student faces is more conducive to a teaching environment fostering collaboration, checking students’ behavior during class or surveying the classroom for participation and attention. One can argue it ought to be mandatory because students’ faces can be seen in face-to-face classes but with “Zoom (or whatever synchronous video app you’re using), there’s an element of visual overshooting; you see the background, as well as the student” (Reed, 2020).

The element of visual overshooting is also in students seeing other students’ faces all the time (Reed, 2020) which may be distracting or even voyeuristic. This is unlike a traditional classroom which can have more variations in seating arrangements. The instructor can have students facing the front, facing each other in a big u-shape or seated in clusters (pairs, trios and groups of four or five). One respondent in the study by Nicandro, Khandelwal and Weitzman (2020) reported being distracted by the friends’ faces when videos were turned on. The lineup of the videos resembles security footage (see Figure 3) with close-ups of all participants. There is also the feeling of being constantly under scrutiny as any deviation from looking directly at the camera (such as looking sideways or down) can be interpreted as inattentiveness or rudeness. Every movement is seen by all and if a video image lags and freezes, a captured freeze frame pose can be awkward (such as a yawn) or hilarious (such as an accidental comical grimace). There is potential for embarrassment if students laugh or even take pictures of such freezes and upload them on social media (even if the instructor disables recording by students). Students at Stanford University had written to the Office of Accessible Education to request permission for them to turn off their cameras during class too (Nicandro, Khandelwal & Weitzman, 2020). In response to such appeals, instructors could allow students the option of minimizing the videos if they find them distracting. In fact, Stanford Center for Teaching and Learning (2020) has this advice to offer regarding students showing videos of themselves to “foster better social connection, but normalize the many reasons students might prefer to keep their video off, such as unreliable bandwidth, not wanting visual distraction, or not wanting to share their current environment” (p. 4).



Figure 3. Security footage-like view of Zoom participants (drawing by Chiew Hong Ng)

8 Conclusion

In conclusion, to enable CLT, Galloway (1993) emphasizes the need for the teacher to set up real-life situations necessitating communication and which students are likely to encounter in real life. Teachers

planning to use the CLT approach have to keep in mind that activities that are truly communicative have these features: “information gap [when one person in an exchange knows something the other person does not], choice [the speaker has a choice of what she will say and how she will say it] and feedback” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 129) and authentic materials. Activities in CLT have to be carried out by students in small groups to “maximize the time allotted to each student for communicating ... [and] ... in various configurations: pairs, triads, small groups, and whole group” (Larsen-Freeman, 2000, p. 130). Classroom should provide opportunities for real life communication and develop spontaneity and improvisation through creative activities such as role plays, simulations, drama, games and projects (Thamarana, 2015).

This paper represents the view of one teacher trainer for a class of 15 preservice teachers for the teaching of CLT approach using synchronous online teaching so teaching implications drawn are not generalizable. Nevertheless, for the purposes of training preservice teachers in the CLT approach, this paper has demonstrated that preservice teachers can learn about teaching methodology from synchronous learning. However, using synchronous Zoom and the CLT approach will not preclude the possibility of the instructor engaging in “long monological turns” (Berglund, 2009, p. 202) because in face-to-face learning,

much of the interactions centre on the teacher in the classroom. There may be peer-learning through group discussion and activities, but the consolidation of learning at the class-level often orientates the discussion back to the teacher (Lim, 2020, p. 6).

This study has highlighted important differences between face-to-face discussions and in-class synchronous discussions in terms of the affordances of the synchronous video conferencing tools and interactions experienced by the instructor and preservice teachers. If Zoom is a technological platform providing some imitations of face-to-face interaction (Blum, 2020), there is the need for future studies to assess the differences between face-to-face interactions and video conferencing interactions. Studies can also look into how the presence of close-up video images impact teaching and classroom interactions. Such studies are relevant to the training of preservice teachers in the CLT approach with classroom tasks designed to be carried out in pairs or small groups.

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