ESL Primary Teachers' Perceptions on the Use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach to Teach CEFR Speaking Skill

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Abstract
As the world heads into digitalisation, the ability to speak fluent English has become increasingly important due to its emergence as an international language among speakers of different countries. Nevertheless, many ESL pupils have struggled to speak and convey their ideas well throughout the years despite learning English very young. Along with abolishing centralised exams like UPSR and PT3, the English curriculum in Malaysia was spontaneously reshaped by introducing the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR). Consequently, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach is being revived to sustain spoken interaction among the pupils. Despite countless studies on the CLT approach in ESL classrooms, there is insubstantial past research focusing on integrating CLT and CEFR curriculum in teaching ESL speaking skills. Hence, this study aims to explore ESL primary teachers' perceptions of the use of CLT in teaching speaking and their readiness to use the said approach. This study focuses on 305 English primary teachers teaching on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia. By adopting a cross-sectional survey design, data is collected quantitatively through purposive sampling. The research instrument used is an online questionnaire created via Google Form to be administered via a web-based survey procedure. The findings revealed at least 4.15 mean intervals across the first ten items and 4.07 and above for the following ten items, indicating that most respondents held positive perceptions and were ready to use the CLT approach in teaching speaking skill under the CEFR curriculum. Future recommendations included using localised CEFR textbooks and integrating Virtual Reality (VR).
Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), English as a Second Language (ESL), Speaking, Perception, Readiness.

Introduction
As the world heads into digitalisation, the ability to speak fluent English has become increasingly important due to its emergence as an international language. In view of this, speaking is considered the hardest language skill to be mastered as it involves a series of mental processes which requires both speakers and listeners to exchange ideas spontaneously (Wong & Yunus, 2021). Despite learning English from a very young age, many ESL pupils were

found struggled to speak and convey their ideas well due to lack of vocabulary and unfamiliarity of the language (Al-Jarf & Mingazova, 2020). In a study carried out by Tiwari (2021), non-native teachers were found reluctant to change their teaching preferences in which they often dominated classroom interactions, displayed inauthentic teaching methods and stressed too much on speech accuracy; causing their pupils failed to speak English naturally and confidently. In Malaysia, poor speaking skill has always been the top reason, contributing to innumerable jobless undergraduates in the country throughout the years (Rusli et al., 2018).

In 2021, the former Malaysia Education Minister Datuk Dr Mohd Radzi Md Jidin made a shocking announcement on the abolishment of 'Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah' (UPSR) and 'Pentaksiran Tingkatan 3' (PT3); which are the previous national achievement tests at primary and secondary levels in Malaysia (Education Minister: UPSR exams to be abolished; PT3 is cancelled this year | The Star, no date). As a result, it leaves School Based Assessment (SBA) as the only evaluation tool for the Malaysian pupils' performance learning benchmark. SBA is an effectual assessment administered mainly by Malaysian teachers through observations to get continuous feedback on pupils' strengths and weaknesses in daily classrooms (Yeh, 2021). Consequently, principles like speaking interaction, pupils-centeredness and purposeful learning are emphasised by ESL teachers to adopt meaningful speaking activities to achieve the learning outcomes.

Along with abolishing the centralised exam at the primary level, the English language curriculum in Malaysia was spontaneously reshaped by introducing the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) scales in aligning equal weightage of language skills towards ESL teaching and learning. Accordingly, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach is being revived alongside the new-aligned CEFR curriculum to sustain spoken interaction among the pupils (Foley, 2022). Hence, this study explores the use of CLT approach which promotes the use of authentic interactions and purposeful communication (Brown, 2004) within the CEFR curriculum as a complete guide to teach ESL speaking in a more meaningful and comprehensive manner. As seconded by Don (2020), the amalgamation of the CEFR syllabus and CLT approach has indeed breathed a whole new life into the Malaysia education system; by moving from an old-school exam-oriented system to an interactive learning approach in fashion.

Despite countless studies conducted on the CLT approach in ESL classroom contexts, there is insubstantial past research focusing on integrating CLT and CEFR curriculum in teaching ESL speaking skill. Hence, it has come to the realisation that there is an urgency to carry out this study as the researcher views positively the integrated CLT-CEFR curriculum, which serves as a fresh start for Malaysia education system to produce capable pupils who can speak English eloquently so that they are at par with the employability needs (Rao, 2019). Subsequently, it has come to the realization of the researcher that both CLT approach and CEFR framework hold similar principles in teaching English which are 'communication', 'purposeful learning' and 'pupils-centredness in teaching and learning' (Ministry of Education Malaysia, 2022). Therefore, this study aimed to explore Malaysian ESL primary teachers' perceptions of the use of the CLT approach to teach CEFR speaking skill as well as to investigate their readiness to use the said approach.

Literature Review

Transformation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach

A glimpse through the history of language teaching will provide a big picture of how one approach transformed the others significantly throughout the past century in foreign language teaching. The Grammar Translation Method (GTM), also known as the 'classical method', was recognised as the earliest teaching method in the European region since the 1840s (Siregar, 2018). At that point, language teaching did not emphasise oral communication. Instead, the learning goal was to gain reading proficiency in a foreign language (Brown, 2007). Consequently, GTM practitioners focused on teaching grammar by translating the targeted second language to the learners' first language.

In the early 1980s, the Direct Method came into the picture as Krashen and his working partner, Tracy Terell, proposed a naturalistic language approach by introducing communicative studies (Brown, 2007). Soon, many scholars reaffirmed that second language learning should occur naturally, whereby only the target language was permitted along the learning process (Richards and Rodgers, 2014). Direct Method eventually faded from practice as it was impractical to hire exemplary native-speaking teachers. Subsequently, it paved the way for the prevalence of the Audiolingual Method, an extension of GTM, emphasizing reading text translations instead of decoding word by word with grammar items explicitly taught by the teachers (Rilling, 2018).

The focus of language teaching is swiftly transformed into the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Approach, which is the most influential language approach in teaching English at the 20th century up until the current era. Despite not being new, as the approach had been used more than a century ago, it marked a considerable evolution in foreign language teaching; its ramifications are felt today. As Brown (2007) asserted, CLT is a classical affective-based technique that caters to the learners' emotional needs. The anxiety level can be reduced by conditioning the learners in a group of community support. In a way, it corresponds to Krashen's (1982) Affective Filter Hypothesis, whereby he proposed that comprehensible input of a second language can be easily attained as the mental block has diminished along the learning process.

CEFR Speaking Skill

Speaking skill is considered as one of the most essential attributes of human social life. To become a good speaker, one should be able to master a considerable amount of verbal language in conveying his/her feelings, thoughts and ideas (Halim et al., 2021). Subsequently, a person might fail to speak a language despite claiming that he/she can understand it well. Speaking involves a series of mental and physical processes which requires both speakers and listeners to exchange ideas spontaneously without preparation (Wong & Yunus, 2021). The Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) was established by the European Council in 2001 and is currently adopted in many countries around the world with transformation in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment (Tosun & Glover, 2020). It aims to supply general guidance for the expansion of language syllabuses, curriculum instructions, related assessments and coursebooks across Europe (Europe, 2001, p1).

According to the latest CEFR-aligned KSSR standard document, a major emphasis has been put on speaking whereby Malaysian pupils are expected to use effective strategies while interacting with others by the end of their school years (Ministry of Education Malaysia [MOE],

2020). Consequently, formative assessment was being practised by replacing the centralized examination system which had been rooted in the country for the past decades. Meanwhile, the levels of language proficiency are categorized into six categories, including Al and A2 as basic language users; B1 and B2 as independent language users as well as C1 and C2 as competent language users (Halim et al., 2021). Indirectly, it reflects the Malaysian government's noble efforts to promote oral productive skills, specifically in English due to the globally competitive market.

CLT Adoption to teach CEFR Speaking

Over the years, English has been spoken widely globally, thus attaining the status of 'Lingua Franca' (Lim and Yunus, 2021). Subsequently, non-native adult speakers begin to pay full attention to their children's education, starting at primary school. At this juncture, CEFR has appeared as a benchmark of standard policy in English language education across various nations worldwide (Ahmad Afip, Hamid and Renshaw, 2019). Speaking is often claimed to be the hardest skill to be taught among non-native ESL speakers since they often face impediments such as a first language barrier, an outdated teaching mindset and an assessment-focused learning system (Rao, 2019). Henceforth, introducing the CEFR framework into the existing English curriculum in a non-native educational setting is seen as a progressive move to cope with the said challenges in which the CLT approach is being revived to foster authentic learning and meaningful interactions among ESL learners.

The CLT approach is an amalgamation of structural and functional language teaching approaches whereby it emphasises the actual usage of language by embedding grammar within its practice (Maulana, 2019). The focus of the CLT approach on functional language does not mean that grammar is neglected along the learning process; instead, grammar is presumed to be taught inductively throughout the CLT lessons (Nowlan and Samuell, 2019). Nevertheless, CLT does not perceive language acquisition as a habitual offshoot; hence, learners are not pressured to avoid grammar mistakes in their speech since the language's meaning is the CLT approach's top priority (Smith and Loewen, 2018). Meanwhile, the levels of language proficiency are categorised into six categories, including Al and A2 as basic language users, B1 and B2 as independent language users, and C1 and C2 as competent language users (Halim and Permana, 2021).

Challenges Faced throughout CLT Implementation

Most of the assessment systems in Asian countries have prioritised grammar and writing tests in the past decade, resulting in hindrances in conducting speaking activities in ESL classrooms (Hashim and Yunus, 2018). Subsequently, CLT emerged as a revolutionary approach to zooming into learners' communicative competence by putting front the meanings rather than the form of the language (Razak et al., 2020). Nevertheless, many challenges arise as CLT is sometimes difficult to be implemented as it means differently across various educational contexts. As claimed by Lafta (2021); Alghamdi (2021), ESL teachers started to retreat to traditional methods like drilling and memorisation due to their habitual teaching practice and pupils' preference to learn vocabulary than communication. The 'real' CLT was not adopted, resulting in a 'disguise' CLT version whereby drilled sentence patterns were emphasised instead (Tiwari, 2021).

Students living in rural communities are often deprived of mastering English because of their poor socio-economic status and relatively low school attendance (Hoque et al., 2018; Nuby et

al., 2019). Meanwhile, many struggles to switch their mother tongue to English in daily communication as they fail to comprehend the meanings and necessities of speaking in English (Khoja and Mohapatra, 2017). The available findings also revealed the related impediments such as large class size; limited teaching resources; poor infrastructure, and crowded classrooms as the contextual reasons which hindered CLT application in ESL contexts (Rahmatuzzman, 2018; Takal et al., 2021; Abdelmageed and Omer, 2020). In a way, it kills teachers' creativity to plan their lessons and demotivates the pupils to perform authentic speaking activities due to the unfavourable classroom environment.

Past Studies
There has been a massive alteration in the teaching and learning field since CEFR was brought to the education system worldwide. Following this, it sheds light on using the CLT approach in ESL classroom settings (Nawai and Said, 2020). A descriptive study using the CLT approach at a local university in Indonesia showed that CLT activities like role plays and group discussions activated the passive pupils to communicate in English (Rijnan and Irwan, 2020). Similarly, a plethora of studies seconded the usefulness of the CLT approach by revealing a positive outcome in improving speaking abilities and self-confidence among ESL pupils (Harahap et al., 2021; Arrasul and Pole, 2021; Hengki and Ratna, 2019; Ervina and Kurniati, 2019; AL-Garni and Almuhammadi, 2019). The roles of teachers as facilitators were emphasised to provide metalinguistic feedback to the pupils through CLT strategies such as modelling, repetition, group work and elicitation, etc. (Toro et al., 2019). A similar finding indicated the benefits of the CLT approach, which considers pupils' roles as active learners to develop communicative competencies (Pitikornpuangpetch and Suwanarak, 2021).

In Malaysia, language skills were no longer taught in isolation under the latest aligned CEFR curriculum. Instead, different skills were integrated into the same lesson to achieve meaningful learning (Krishnan and Yunus, 2019). According to the Malaysia Ministry of Education (2020), the latest KSSR document standard specifically entailed the importance of communicative competence through the prescribed learning standards. It was identical to the principles of the CLT approach, which revolved around authentic materials, daily-life topics and classroom interactions (Ho, 2020). In a study to explore Thai teachers' attitudes towards CLT implementation, the results revealed that all respondents understood and supported using the CLT approach in teaching speaking (Promtara and Suwanarak, 2018). Nevertheless, Zulu (2019) manifested ESL teachers' negative attitude towards CLT adoption in teaching English due to their misconception that the CLT approach had forsaken the grammatical correctness of utterances as it has not adhered to the general demands of the assessment.

Methodology
Research Design, Population & Samples
This study adopts a cross-sectional survey design and the data was collected quantitatively through purposive sampling. The research population comprised 352 primary schools on the east coast of Peninsular Malaysia.in which an English teacher from each school who has taught at least a year of primary English under the latest CEFR curriculum was involved. This is to ensure that the respondents can provide meaningful responses based on their teaching experiences and background knowledge. Accordingly, it was found that the answered surveys from 305 respondents yielded an 86.7% response rate. It was found that the respondents'

experiences in teaching CEFR English ranged from 1 year (22 or 7.2%); 2 years (36 or 11.8%); 3 years (60 or 19.7%); 4 years (73 or 23.9%) to 5 years and above (114 or 37.4%).

Research Instrument
The instrument used was an online questionnaire, created via Google Form. Subsequently, the 20 survey items included were modified based on Gardner's (1985) Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) and a survey study conducted by Kok and Aziz (2019) respectively. The questionnaire adhered to a five-point Likert scale; starting from an ordinal scale from "Strongly Disagree" to "Strongly Agree" with "Disagree", "Neutral", and "Agree" in the middle.

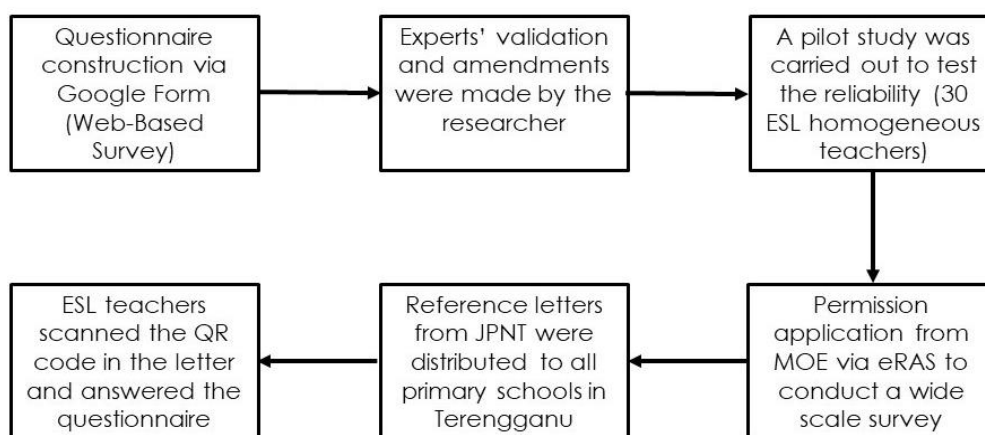**Data Collection Procedures**

Figure 1: Data Collection Procedures

As depicted in *Figure 1*, a web-based survey was used to administer this study. Before conducting the study, the researcher sought expert validation from a School Improvement Specialist Coaches (SISC+) district officer, a senior lecturer at the Teaching Institute of Education and a senior English primary school teacher to provide critiques for further amendments. Then, a pilot test was conducted amongst 30 homogeneous ESL primary teachers from Gua Musang, Kelantan and the Cronbach's coefficient alpha value was discovered to achieve the minimum value of 0.769, suggesting that the research instrument is reliable as the value is more than 0.70 (Bougie and Sekaran, 2019).

Afterwards, the researcher applied for permission from the Ministry of Education Malaysia (MOE) via the Educational Research Application System (eRAS) 2.0 website to conduct this survey. Subsequently, reference letters from the Terengganu State Education Department (JPNT) were distributed to all primary schools in Terengganu. Finally, the English teachers accessed the google form by scanning the QR code provided in the letters. They were expected to answer the questionnaire within four weeks, the designated time frame.
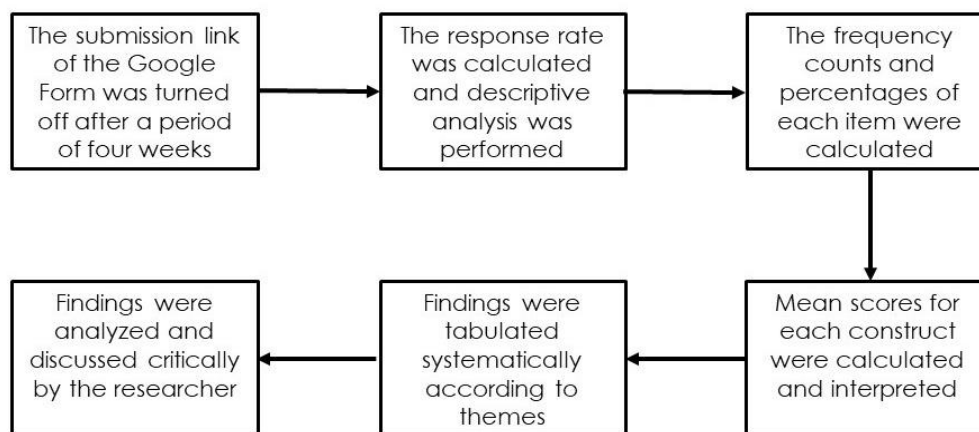
Data Analysis Procedures

Figure 2: Data Analysis Procedures

As shown in *Figure 2*, the submission link of the Google Form was turned off after four weeks. Consequently, the response rate was calculated, and the answered surveys from 305 respondents yielded 86.7%. Afterwards, descriptive analysis was performed to calculate the frequency counts and percentages of every item in the survey questionnaire. Meanwhile, the mean score for each construct was also calculated to identify the central tendency representing the central location of the distribution of a random variable (Beyer, 2021).

Subsequently, the findings were tabulated systematically into five tables according to themes. The first three tables responding to RQ1 on the use of the CLT approach in teaching CEFR speaking were tabulated by 'Communicative Competence', 'Motivation' and 'Teaching Principles'. The following tables responded to RQ2 on the readiness to use the CLT approach in teaching speaking skill under the CEFR curriculum and were tabulated by 'Familiarity in Use' and 'Future Use'.

Findings & Discussion
Based on the questionnaire, the findings of 305 respondents pertaining to their perception and readiness to use CLT approach in teaching CEFR speaking were collected. Owing to this, Table 1, Table 2 and Table 3 were used to answer RQ1 while Table 4 and Table 5 were used to answer RQ2.

ESL primary teachers' perceptions on the use of the CLT approach to teach CEFR speaking skill
The items in this section were used to answer RQ1 of this study. Accordingly, they were divided into three tables: Table 1 (Communicative Competence), Table 2 (Motivation) and

Table 3
(Teaching Principles)

Table 1 *Communicative Competence*

Item	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score Interval	Interpretation
A1	I think that Communicative Competence is important while teaching CEFR speaking as it allows real-life dialogues in the classroom.	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	36 (11.8%)	92 (30.2%)	176 (57.7%)	4.45	Very High
A2	I think that I can assess my pupils' Communicative Competence through daily classroom interactions with the existing CEFR descriptors.	0 (0%)	2 (0.7%)	63 (20.7%)	106 (34.8%)	134 (43.9%)	4.22	High
A3	I think that I can create an active and interactive learning atmosphere by integrating CLT approach in CEFR speaking classrooms.	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	56 (18.4%)	117 (38.4%)	129 (42.3%)	4.22	High

Based on Table 1, most respondents positively perceived using the CLT approach to teach speaking skills under the CEFR curriculum. Evidently, items A1 (*I think that Communicative Competence is essential while teaching CEFR speaking skill as it allows real-life dialogues in the classroom*) and A3 (*I think that I can create an active and interactive learning atmosphere by integrating CLT approach in CEFR speaking classrooms*) revealed relatively high mean scores interval, 4.45 and 4.22; indicating that most of them agreed that communicative competence was crucial to allow real-life interactions, active learning and interactive activities. It was consistent with Ho's (2022) study, whereby the core principles of the CLT approach focused on authenticity, real-life topics and meaningful interactions.

Another noticeable point was that approximately more than half of the respondents; which were 134 (43.9%) of them strongly agreed, and 106 (34.8%) agreed with item A2 (*I think that I can assess my pupils' Communicative Competence through daily classroom interactions with the existing CEFR descriptors*) despite 63 (20.7%) remained neutral. They believed that the existing CEFR descriptors adequately assessed speaking skill holistically. The notion was supported by Halim, Permatawati and Permana (2021); whereby they concluded that the documented language proficiencies in the CEFR syllabus with 'Al and A2 as basic', 'B1 and B2 as independent' as well as 'C1 and C2 as competent users' could effectively measure ESL learners' speaking proficiency. Therefore, by practising the CLT approach with the CEFR descriptors, communicative competence could be developed as active interactions which resemble real-life situations were created.

Table 2 *Motivation*

Item	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score Interval	Interpretation
A4	I feel that my pupils can speak confidently when I make a point to teach fluency over accuracy while teaching CEFR speaking.	0 (0%)	4 (1.3%)	77 (25.2%)	93 (30.5%)	131 (43%)	4.15	High
A5	I notice that my pupils speak more English phrases when I conduct authentic activities like role plays, language games and telephone conversations.	0 (0%)	6 (2%)	54 (17.7%)	108 (35.4%)	137 (44.9%)	4.23	High
A6	I notice that my pupils are more confident to speak when I use authentic activities which resemble their real-life situations.	0 (0%)	6 (2%)	55 (18%)	103 (33.8%)	141 (46.2%)	4.24	High
A7	I believe that it is important to take care of my pupils' feelings while conducting speaking activities with them.	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	40 (13.1%)	103 (33.8%)	159 (52.1%)	4.37	High

The findings from Table 2 manifested an overall high mean score interval (4.15 or above), proving that using the CLT approach in CEFR-speaking classrooms could substantially boost ESL pupils' motivation to speak in English. In relation to this, 131 (43%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 93 (30.5%) agreed with item A4 (I feel that my pupils can speak confidently when I make a point to teach fluency over accuracy while teaching CEFR speaking) as well as 137 (44.9%) strongly agreed and 108 (35.4%) agreed with item A6 (I notice that my pupils are more confident to speak when I use authentic activities which resemble their real-life situations). As ESL teachers habitually discussed authentic topics akin to the pupils' real-life situations, fluency was emphasised over the accuracy, raising their confidence as grammar mistakes were not extensively magnified. The finding was in line with a plethora of studies whereby ESL learners' self-confidence had proven to improve significantly while using the CLT approach to teach ESL speaking lessons (Harahap et al., 2021; Arrasul and Pole, 2021; Hengki, 2019; Ervina and Kurniati, 2019; AL-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019).

Nevertheless, it was difficult to ignore that 77 (25.2%) of the respondents were neutral to item A4 (I feel that my pupils can speak confidently when I make a point to teach fluency over accuracy while teaching CEFR speaking), whereby they were unsure about the usefulness of CLT approach. Among the feasible explanations were due to the non-native speakers' impediments, such as pupils' first language barrier, teachers' outdated teaching techniques and assessment-focused learning system (Rao, 2019). Another interesting note was that ESL pupils were found more willing to speak in English when CLT activities like role play and language games were carried out, whereby 137 (44.9%) strongly agreed and 108 (35.4%) agreed with item A5 (I notice that my pupils speak more English phrases when I conduct authentic activities like role plays, language games and telephone conversations). As the pupils' anxiety was alleviated, it resulted in attainable second language input, as Krashen's (1982) theory of the Affective Filter Hypothesis proposed.

Apart from that, item A7 (I believe that it is important to take care of my pupils' feelings while conducting speaking activities with them) revealed that more than half of the respondents, which were 159 (52.1%), strongly agreed and 103 (33.8%) agreed that it was fundamental to take care of the pupils' feelings while conducting speaking activities. It was in accordance with the principle of the CLT approach, an affective-based technique that caters to the learners'

emotional needs (Brown, 2007). To sum up, the findings evinced that the CLT implementation in CEFR speaking lessons significantly uplifted pupils' motivation. Fluency in the language was prioritised, authentic activities resembling real-life settings were created, and the learners' feelings were minded.

Table 3 *Teaching Principles*

Item	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score Interval	Interpretation
A8	I believe that meaning of the sentences should be the focus instead of grammar rules while teaching CEFR speaking skill.	0 (0%)	5 (1.6%)	45 (14.8%)	106 (34.8%)	149 (48.9%)	4.31	High
A9	I think that grammar is best combined through CLT speaking activities, rather than being taught separately in a grammar lesson.	1 (0.3%)	11 (3.6%)	47 (15.4%)	101 (33.1%)	145 (47.5%)	4.24	High
A10	I feel that it is important to get my pupils' opinions before assigning speaking activities to them.	1 (0.3%)	4 (1.3%)	64 (21%)	101 (33.1%)	135 (44.3%)	4.20	High

The data in Table 3 demonstrated an overall high mean scores interval across items A8 (4.31), A9 (4.24) and A10 (4.20), implying that the teaching principles of the CLT approach were consistently applied through the CEFR curriculum. The notion was in line with a study by Nawai & Said (2020), whereby they seconded that the CLT approach was re-emphasized while teaching CEFR speaking. Seemingly, 135 (44.3%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 101 (33.1%) agreed with item A10 (I feel that it is important to get my pupils' opinions before assigning speaking activities to them), despite 64 (21%) remaining neutral. It showed that the respondents respected their pupils before designing speaking activities. It was in line with an abundance of studies which recognized pupils' roles as active learners to learn speaking through CLT application (Pitikornpuangpetch and Suwanarak, 2021).

Meanwhile, 149 (48.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 106 (34.8%) agreed with item A8 (I believe that meaning of the sentences should be the focus instead of grammar rules while teaching CEFR speaking skill), where they chose to focus on the speech context instead of the speakers' accuracy. It was supported by Smith and Loewan (2018), who manifested that it was essential to prioritize meaning in teaching speaking skill. Nevertheless, it did not signify that grammar should be neglected; instead, it was taught concurrently with the speaking activities (Nowlan and Samuell, 2019). The finding in item A9 (I think that grammar is best combined through CLT speaking activities rather than being taught separately in a grammar lesson) proved that 145(47.5%) strongly agreed and 101 (33.1%) agreed that grammar should be learned simultaneously; despite 47 (15.4%) were being neutral and 11 (3.6%) disagreed. As Tiwari (2021) claimed, there were clear cases where 'disguise' versions of CLT were practised by drilling ESL pupils with fixed sentences, as many refused to change their learning methods. To sum up, the findings ratified that the teaching principles of CEFR were consistent with CLT propositions which encouraged pupils-centred learning, authentic interactions, task-based activities and purposeful communication (Brown, 2007).

ESL primary teachers' readiness for the use of the CLT approach to teach CEFR speaking skill
The items in this section were used to answer RQ2 of this study. Accordingly, they were divided into two tables, Familiarity in Use and Future Use.

Table 4 *Familiarity in Use*

Item	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score Interval	Interpretation
B1	I fully understand the usefulness of the CLT approach by putting forward meaningful communication rather than the form of the sentences.	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	47 (15.4%)	127 (41.6%)	128 (42%)	4.25	High
B2	I have no problems to understand the principles of CLT like meaningful interactions and pupils-centred learning as it is very similar to my current teaching styles.	0 (0%)	4 (1.3%)	64 (21%)	115 (37.7%)	122 (40%)	4.16	High
B3	I have no problems to use the CLT approach while teaching CEFR speaking to my pupils as I have been exposed to the related training or courses.	0 (0%)	8 (2.6%)	78 (25.6%)	103 (33.8%)	116 (38%)	4.07	High
B4	I look positively on the use of the CLT approach to replace traditional methods like memorization and drillings in teaching CEFR speaking lessons.	0 (0%)	4 (1.3%)	54 (17.7%)	102 (33.4%)	145 (47.5%)	4.27	High
B5	I fully understand that grammar is being taught along with speaking skill in a CLT-CEFR classroom.	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	53 (17.4%)	109 (35.7%)	140 (45.9%)	4.27	High

The findings from Table 4 revealed high scores of mean intervals on the whole; B1 (4.25), B2 (4.16), B3 (4.07), B4 (4.27) and B5 (4.27); suggesting the fact that most of the participating respondents were highly familiar with CLT-CEFR integration. For instance, 128 (42%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 127 (41.6%) agreed with item B1 (I fully understand the usefulness of the CLT approach by putting forward meaningful communication rather than the form of the sentences) as well as 122 (40%) and 115 (37.7%) strongly agreed and agreed with item B2 (I have no problems to understand the principles of CLT like meaningful interactions and pupils-centred learning as it is very similar to my current teaching styles) on the usefulness of CLT approach to prioritize meaningful communication and pupils centred learning as they were similar to their current teaching styles. This finding was consistent with a study by Razak et al. (2020), which emphasized that communicative competence could only be developed when the teachers put front the meanings rather than the form of the language.

According to item B3 (I have no problems to use the CLT approach while teaching CEFR speaking to my pupils as I have been exposed to the related training or courses), there were 116 (38%) of the respondents strongly agreed, and 103 (33.8%) agreed that they had not encountered problems to apply CLT approach in their teaching. Nonetheless, it was impossible to overlook that 78 (25.6%) were neutral and 8 (2.6%) disagreed with the statement. Similar circumstances occurred across several studies whereby it was found that CEFR teachers were not given adequate training, leading to misconceptions about CLT application (Hoque et al., 2018 & Nuby, 2019). Furthermore, item B4 (I look positively on the use of CLT approach to replace traditional methods like memorisation and drillings in teaching CEFR speaking lessons)

revealed positive attitudes of the respondents, which 145 (47.5%) strongly agreed and 102 (33.4%) agreed on the use of CLT approach as a suitable teaching method which contradicted the findings of a study which claimed that ESL teachers tended to rely on old-school techniques such as memorisation, drilling and translation (Alghamdi, 2021).

Last but not least, from item B5 (I fully understand that grammar is being taught along with speaking skill in a CLT-CEFR classroom), it was observed that 140 (45.9%) of the respondents strongly agreed and 109 (35.7%) agreed that they fully understood the urgency of infusing grammar items while teaching speaking to their pupils. The notion was seconded by Maulana (2019), who proposed that the CLT approach amalgamates a structural and functional language teaching approach that embeds grammar elements within its language practice. Grammar was not taught in isolation, so it served a bigger purpose for ESL pupils as they applied the related rules in their daily speech through meaningful communication. To sum up, the preponderance of respondents was beyond doubt that they were exceptionally familiar with the use of the CLT approach in a CEFR speaking setting by prioritising meaningful interactions, active learning and, at the same time, injecting grammar along the process.

Table 5 *Future Use*

Item	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree	Mean Score Interval	Interpretation
B6	I think I can understand and ready to use the CLT approach while teaching CEFR speaking.	0 (0%)	2 (0.7%)	56 (18.4%)	114 (37.4%)	133 (43.6%)	4.24	High
B7	I will try out some CLT strategies like Gallery Walk and group works while teaching CEFR speaking lessons to enrich my pupils' learning experiences.	0 (0%)	3 (1%)	41 (13.4%)	116 (38%)	145 (47.5%)	4.32	High
B8	I plan to adapt the speaking lessons with my pupils' topics of interests such as movies, songs, news, etc.	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	38 (12.5%)	113 (37%)	153 (50.2%)	4.37	High
B9	I will act as a facilitator to develop students' speaking competencies in future CEFR classrooms.	0 (0%)	2 (0.7%)	41 (13.5%)	114 (37.5%)	147 (48.4%)	4.32	High
B10	I will continuously apply the CLT approach in my CEFR speaking classrooms as it makes me reflect on my teaching and improve as an English educator.	0 (0%)	1 (0.3%)	49 (16.1%)	111 (36.4%)	144 (47.2%)	4.30	High

Based on Table 5, it was visible that the interval of the mean score across all items from items B6 to B10 was consistently at a high level (4.24 or above), suggesting a good prospect for the future use of the CLT approach among the respondents. Subsequently, item B6 (I think I can understand and ready to use the CLT approach while teaching CEFR speaking) revealed that 133 (43.6%) strongly agreed and 114 (37.4%) agreed that they could understand and were ready to apply the CLT approach in the future. The result was similar to a study among Thai ESL teachers whereby they supported the idea of using the CLT approach to develop their pupils' speaking abilities (Promtara and Suwanarak, 2018). Still, 56 (18.4%) remained neutral to take a stance on the matter, suggesting that they were unprepared to apply the CLT approach in their teaching classrooms. There were many probable reasons behind the uncertainties, including impediments such as large class sizes; limited teaching resources; poor infrastructure, and crowded classrooms (Rahmatuzzman, 2018; Takal et al., 2021 & Abdelmageed, 2020).

Furthermore, it was notable that a total of 261 (88.5%) respondents strongly agreed and agreed with item B7 (I will try out some CLT strategies like Gallery Walk and group works while teaching CEFR speaking lessons to enrich my pupils' learning experiences) as well 266 (87.2%) in total strongly agreed and agreed with item B8 (I plan to adapt the speaking lessons with my pupils' topics of interests such as movies, songs, news, etc). The data reflected the respondents' readiness to adopt CLT strategies based on the pupils' topics of interest. By designing CLT activities like language games, role-play and group discussion based on the pupils' learning preferences, it was hoped that the passive pupils could be encouraged to communicate more in English (Rijnan and Irwan, 2020). Other than that, item B9 (I will act as a facilitator to develop students' speaking competencies in future CEFR classrooms) evinced that 147 (48.4%) respondents strongly agreed and 114 (37.5%) agreed that they needed to act as facilitators in developing their pupils' speaking competencies. The finding was consistent with a plethora of studies which seconded the benefits of the CLT approach as it emphasised the teachers' roles as facilitators to provide metalinguistic feedback in elevating their speaking abilities (Pitikornpuangpetch and Suwanarak, 2021).

Not least of all, the finding from item B10 (I will continuously apply the CLT approach in my CEFR-speaking classrooms as it makes me reflect on my teaching and improve as an English educator) manifested high readiness among the respondents to apply the CLT approach in teaching CEFR speaking whereby 144 (47.2%) strongly agreed, and 111 (36.4%) agreed with the statement given. Hence, ESL teachers were trained to be creative and reflective. They subsequently brought new hope to Malaysia by transforming the exam-oriented system to an interactive learning approach (Don, 2020). No matter how 49 (16.1%) respondents remained neutral, 1 (0.5%) disagreed with item B10. It was due to the misconception of the CLT approach that they claimed it had forsaken grammatical utterances and did not adhere to the assessment demands (Zulu, 2019). In conclusion, most respondents were ready to apply the CTL approach through enriching speaking activities by considering the pupils' needs and playing the roles of facilitators to guide them in the teaching and learning process.

Recommendations for Future Research
Localised CEFR Textbooks
Since CEFR was introduced, all local textbooks were substituted with imported textbooks, and the question that arose was whether the universal textbooks were suitable for the local students in Malaysia. Subsequently, Nazari and Aziz (2020) argued about the suitability of the learning content used in Super Mind, Smart Plus Series, English Plus One and Academy Stars textbooks at the primary school levels versus the Malaysia context. Hence, it is recommended that the elements of local cultural contexts should be added to the existing CEFR textbooks so that the learners are exposed to political, social and economic understanding from both local and foreign perspectives (Nawai and Said, 2020).

Virtual Reality (VR) as an Aiding Tool for CLT Application
It is no enigma that E-learning has been the latest trend in the education system in which the use of technology is appreciated and expected at every layer of the system. As explained by Ahmet & Cavas (2020), Virtual Reality (VR) is a set of virtual tools which incorporates hardware devices such as smartphones, computers and Head-Mounted Display (HMD) as well as a designated software system like 360 VR videos, Samsung Gear VR system or Oculus Rift to immerse the participants through a three-dimensional simulated environment. At this

juncture, the researcher suggested that VR could be utulised as an aiding tool for CLT application since both learning tool and teaching approach hold similar agenda: enriching the pupils' learning experiences through authentic real-life applications. For instance, in an ESL speaking lesson, teachers could walk their pupils through a virtual field trip at a city by viewing YouTube's official 360-degree video channel through Google Cardboard headsets, (Bonner and Reinders, 2018).

Conclusion

In a nutshell, this research focused on 305 English primary teachers from the East Coast of Peninsular Malaysia to investigate their perceptions and readiness for using the CLT approach under the CEFR speaking context. Subsequently, the findings revealed at least a 4.15 score of mean intervals across the first ten items, as well as 4.07 and above for the following ten items. It manifested that most of the respondents held positive perceptions towards CLT-CEFR integration in teaching speaking skill as pupils' communicative competence was developed, their speaking motivation was boosted, and the teaching principles of the CLT approach was parallel to the CEFR curriculum. Meanwhile, the results also suggested that the respondents were highly familiar with the use of the CLT approach under the CEFR context which often prioritised meaningful interactions and active learning while infusing grammar teaching with other language skills. Most of them were proven to be ready to apply the CLT approach in their future CEFR classrooms, specifically in teaching speaking skill.

The uniqueness of this study was highlighted in the way that the results suggested the limitless possibilities of integrating CLT approach and CERR curriculum in teaching ESL speaking skill as they are highly similar in terms of their concepts and principles; which are authentic interaction; pupils-centred learning; task-based activities and meaningful communication (Brown, 2004). This study is expected to be highly beneficial to all Malaysian ESL practitioners as they would be able to inspect their readiness level in embracing the teaching methods proposed through the CLT approach in teaching CEFR speaking skill as well as calling for the attention among all CEFR practitioners on the possibilities of amalgamating CLT approach and CEFR curriculum while teaching English in their respective ESL classrooms. Future research is recommended to extend the investigation on localised CEFR textbooks and integration of Virtual Reality (VR) to enrich the teaching and learning experiences on CLT execution in CEFR classrooms. In short, the CLT approach has proven to be an effective method to improve the mastery of CEFR speaking among Malaysian pupils. Hence, it was anticipated that all ESL teachers should continuously apply the said approach to ameliorate as better educators.

Conflict of Interest
The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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