A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF GRADES 7 AND 8 STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD GRAMMAR-TRANSLATION METHOD AND COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE AT A PRIVATE CATHOLIC SCHOOL IN BANGKOK

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Abstract: This study aimed to investigate and determine whether there was a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method (GTM) and communicative language teaching (CLT) in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok. The study utilized a quantitative comparative research design. The Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching Questionnaire was adapted and used to collect the data from Grades 7 and 8 students in January 2020. There were 152 Grades 7 and 173 Grade 8 students who responded to the questionnaire. The collected data was analyzed first through descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) and then through inferential statistics (dependent and independent samples *t*-test). The findings of the current study revealed that overall, Grades 7 and 8 students had slightly positive attitudes toward GTM and positive attitudes toward CLT in learning EFL. The findings also indicated that there was a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT. Furthermore, the findings showed that there was a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward GTM while there was no significant difference between their attitudes toward CLT in learning EFL. Recommendations for students' support, teaching strategies, and future research are provided.

Keywords: attitudes; English as a foreign language; grammar-translation method; communicative language teaching; Bangkok

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Introduction

English has been playing an important role in Thai education for centuries (Darasawang, 2007). It was first made a compulsory subject for students in the reign of King Vajiravudh (1910-1925), the sixth king of the Chakri Dynasty of Thailand. The method used in English language teaching (ELT) at that time was mainly grounded on rote memorization and grammar-translation method (GTM) (Darasawang, 2007). However, in the educational reform of 1996, the new ELT method, communicative language teaching (CLT), was introduced to fulfill the needs for international communication, acquisition of knowledge, career advancement, and other important factors (Wongsothorn, 2000, as cited in Foley, 2005). In the present, the Basic Education Core Curriculum of B.E. 2551 (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008), currently used, continued emphasizing English curriculum for the development of linguistic ability and skills of students in expressing and communicating thoughts, understanding and feelings. It strongly promoted the learner-centered approach. The learners are expected to attain positive attitudes for foreign language learning (Ministry of Education of Thailand, 2008). According to Abidin, Pour-Mohammadi and Alzwari (2012) the achievement of learners in studying foreign language relies not only on intellectual aptitude but also their attitude toward language learning. However, the English proficiency of Thai people appears to never improve even after the development of the English curriculum. The Education First English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) shows that Thailand has been classed at a very low or low level of English proficiency from 2011 until 2018 (Education First English Proficiency Index, 2019).

The target school of the current study provides two English subjects for Grades 7 and 8 students—one categorized as the main subject, and the other as the English communication subject, categorized as an additional subject. The main English subject was taught by Thai native-speaking teachers employing the characteristics of GTM while the additional class was taught by English native-speaking teachers employing the principles of CLT in providing the instruction. As observed by this researcher, Grades 7 and 8 students lacked the ability to use English in communication in real-world situations. Moreover, the students seemed to have a negative attitude toward learning in GTM class while they seemed to have a more positive attitude toward learning in CLT class. Therefore, the researcher decided to develop a research study to examine and compare Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at the target private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Research Objectives

The following were the research objectives developed for this study.

- 1. To determine the level of Grade 7 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 2. To determine the level of Grade 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 3. To determine the level of Grade 7 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 4. To determine the level of Grade 8 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 5. To determine whether there is a significant difference between Grade 7 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 6. To determine whether there is a significant difference between Grade 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 7. To determine whether there is a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.
- 8. To determine whether there is a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Conceptual Framework

This study aimed to examine and compare within and between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok. The conceptual framework of the study is shown in Figure 1.

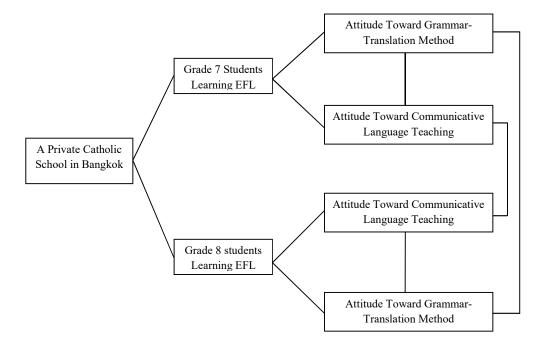


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study.

Literature Review

Gardner's Socio-Educational Model: Attitudes Toward the Learning Situation Gardner's socio-educational model of second language acquisition was developed by Gardner to understand and describe a process concerned in a second language learning in a formal environment. The model provides an understanding of the relation of attitudes and motivation which are different in individual learners and are important factors in the proficiency achievement of second and foreign language learners. The socio-educational model states that an important component in second language learning is attitudes of learners toward the learning situation, including the curriculum, the teachers, the individual course, the materials, and the time allocated to language instruction, the quality of the instruction, and the viewpoint and regulations of the school authorities. The learning motivation of individual learners is strongly influenced by these factors in the language learning context (Gardner, 2010).

Social Cognitive Theory: Triadic Reciprocal Determinism

Social cognitive theory recognizes that the differences in capabilities of each individual are produced and developed based on the diverse social practices. Bandura (1989) presented the triadic reciprocal determinism model to explain the causation of the development of the differences of individual abilities. The triadic reciprocal determinism model provides an explanation of the

interacting relationships of behavior, personal factors, including cognition and affect, and environmental influences that cultivate the individual differences in capabilities. Bandura (1989) stated that the personal factors and environmental influences shape and control behavior of humans.

Grammar-Translation Method

According to Brown (2001), grammar-translation method (GTM) is a classical method which was first used for teaching the classical languages, Latin, and Greek in the Western world. Brown (2001) stated that GTM emphasizes rules of grammar, memorization of vocabulary, translation of documents and drilling on written exercises. There is less emphasis on teaching learners to use language in oral communication. The native language of the learner is used for providing teaching and learning in GTM class (Celce-Murcia, 2014). According to Stern (1983), the native language of students is used as the reference system for them to learn the second language. Although GTM is an ancient method and does not have the theory in the fields of linguistics, psychology and education provided to justify it, it is still extensively practiced in foreign language learning classrooms (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

Communicative Language Teaching

Larsen-Freeman and Anderson (2011) stated that communicative language teaching (CLT) is applied from the theoretical perspective of the communicative approach within which the goal of language teaching and learning is communicative competence. According to Hymes (1972), for students to be able to communicate, they require more than knowing grammar rules and linguistic competence; they also require communicative competence, i.e., being able to use the language to communicate functionally and appropriately in real world contexts. Klapper (2003) stated that since CLT has no specifically prescribed classroom teaching techniques, it is flexible for the teachers to apply and use in the classroom. Therefore, language classrooms where CLT is practiced can differ widely from one another because CLT is highly flexible (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011).

Method

This study utilized a quantitative comparative research design. A questionnaire adapted from Savignon and Wang's (2003) Learners' Attitudes toward English Instructional Practices Questionnaire consisting of 10 items measuring students' attitudes to GTM and CLT was used to collect data from the target population of this study. The collected data was analyzed by using descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for Objectives 1 to 4. The statistical hypothesis testing (dependent samples *t*-test) was used to

address Objectives 5 and 6 while the statistical hypothesis testing (independent samples *t*-tests) was used to address Objectives 7 and 8.

Population and Sample

A population sample of 171 Grade 7 and 175 Grade 8 students was targeted but only 152 (88.9%) Grade 7 and 173 (98.9%) Grade 8 students responded to the questionnaire since there were students resigning and being absent on the day the researcher distributed the questionnaire.

Research Instrument

The research instrument used in this study was the Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching Questionnaire, adopted and adapted from Savignon and Wang's (2003) learners' attitudes toward English instructional practices in their junior high school questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 10 items measuring students' attitudes toward GTM (five items) and CLT (five items). Savignon and Wang (2003) piloted a binary version of their questionnaire with the different sample of Taiwanese students in 1998 and analyzed the internal consistency reliability scores by using Kuder-Richardson Formula 20 (KR20). The current study used a 6-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 6 (strongly agree) to find the level of students' attitudes scores. The internal consistency reliability scores of this study were analyzed using Cronbach's alpha. Table 1 shows the internal consistency reliability data of the questionnaire.

Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability Data of the Ouestionnaire

| Table 1. Internal Consistency Reliability Data of the Questionnaire | | | | | | | | |
|---|----------|-------------|------------|-------------|--|--|--|--|
| Subscale | Number | KR 20 | Cronbach's | Internal | | | | |
| | of items | reliability | alpha of | consistency | | | | |
| | for each | (Savignon | this study | reliability | | | | |
| | subscale | & Wang, | | | | | | |
| | | 2003) | | | | | | |
| Grammar-translation | 5 | .72 | .71 | Acceptable | | | | |
| method | | | | | | | | |
| Communicative | 5 | .93 | .78 | Acceptable | | | | |
| language teaching | | | | | | | | |

Table 2 below illustrates the interpretation of the mean scores of the Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching Questionnaire.

Table 2. Interpretation of the Mean Scores of the Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching Questionnaire

| Agreement level | Score | Scale | Interpretation |
|-------------------|-------|-----------|-------------------|
| Agreement level | Score | Scale | level of attitude |
| Strongly agree | 6 | 5.51-6.00 | Strongly positive |
| Agree | 5 | 4.51-5.50 | Positive |
| Slightly agree | 4 | 3.51-4.50 | Slightly positive |
| Slightly disagree | 3 | 2.51-3.50 | Slightly negative |
| Disagree | 2 | 1.51-2.50 | Negative |
| Strongly disagree | 1 | 1.00-1.50 | Strongly negative |

Findings

In this section, the research findings are presented according to the objectives.

Research Objective 1

Table 3 illustrates the mean scores, standard deviations and interpretations of Grade 7 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Table 3. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Interpretations of Grade 7 Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method in Learning English as a Foreign Language at a Private Catholic School in Bangkok (n=152)

| Variable | M | SD | Interpretation |
|--|------|-----|-------------------|
| Grade 7 students' attitudes toward GTM | 3.89 | .90 | Slightly positive |

Table 3 indicates that Grade 7 students had slightly positive attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok with the total mean score of 3.89.

Research Objective 2

Table 4 illustrates the mean scores, standard deviations and interpretations of Grade 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Table 4. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Interpretations of Grade 8 Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method in Learning English as a Foreign Language at a Private Catholic School in Bangkok (n=173)

| Variable | M | SD | Interpretation |
|--|------|------|-------------------|
| Grade 8 students' attitudes toward GTM | 3.54 | 1.01 | Slightly positive |

Table 4 shows that Grade 8 students had slightly positive attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok with the total mean score of 3.54.

Research Objective 3

Table 5 illustrates the mean scores, standard deviations and interpretations of Grade 7 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Table 5. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Interpretations of Grade 7 Students' Attitudes Toward Communicative Language Teaching in Learning English as a Foreign Language at a Private Catholic School in Bangkok (n=152)

| Variable | M | SD | Interpretation |
|--|------|-----|----------------|
| Grade 7 students' attitudes toward CLT | 5.02 | .76 | Positive |

Table 5 indicates that Grade 7 students had positive attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok with the total mean score of 5.02.

Research Objective 4

Table 6 illustrates the mean scores, standard deviations and interpretations of Grade 8 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Table 6. Mean Scores, Standard Deviations and Interpretations of Grade 8 Students' Attitudes Toward Communicative Language Teaching in Learning English as a Foreign Language at a Private Catholic School in Bangkok (n=173)

| Variable | M | SD | Interpretation |
|--|------|-----|----------------|
| Grade 8 students' attitudes toward CLT | 4.84 | .92 | Positive |

Table 6 shows that Grade 8 students had positive attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok with the total mean score of 4.84.

Research Objective 5

Table 7 illustrates the results of the dependent samples *t*-test comparing Grade 7 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok.

Table 7. The Results of the Dependent Samples t-Test Comparing Grade 7 Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching in Learning English as a Foreign Language

| Variable | N | M | SD | df | t | p |
|----------------------------|-----|------|-----|-----|--------|-------|
| Grammar-translation method | | 3.89 | .90 | | | |
| Communicative language | 152 | 5.01 | .76 | 151 | -12.51 | <.001 |
| teaching | | | | | | |

Note. There is a statistically significant difference in Grade 7 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language (statistical significance level set at p=.05, two-tailed).

The results of the dependent samples t-test shown in Table 7 reveals, as expected, that there was a significant difference between Grade 7 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language, t(151) = -12.51; p < .001.

Research Objective 6

Table 8 illustrates the results of the dependent samples *t*-test comparing Grade 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language.

Table 8. The Results of the Dependent Samples t-Test Comparing Grade 8 Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching in Learning English as a Foreign Language

| Variable | N | M | SD | df | t | p |
|----------------------------|-----|------|------|-----|--------|-------|
| Grammar-translation method | 173 | 3.54 | 1.01 | 172 | -13.66 | <.001 |
| Communicative language | | 4.84 | .92 | | | |
| teaching | | | | | | |

Note. There is a statistically significant difference in Grade 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language (statistical significance level set at p=.05, two-tailed).

The results of the dependent samples t-test shown in Table 8 indicates, as expected, that there was a significant difference between Grade 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language, t (172) = -13.66; p<.001.

Research Objective 7

Table 9 illustrates the results of the independent samples *t*-test comparing Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language.

Table 9. The Results of the Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Grades 7 and 8 Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method (GTM) in Learning English as a Foreign Language

| Variable | N | M | SD | df | t | p |
|--|-----|------|------|-----|------|------|
| Grade 7 students' attitudes toward | 152 | 3.89 | .90 | | | _ |
| GTM Grade 8 students' attitudes toward GTM | 173 | 3.54 | 1.01 | 323 | 3.26 | .001 |

Note. There is a statistically significant difference in Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language (statistical significance level set at p=.05, two-tailed).

The results of the independent samples t-test shown in Table 9 indicates that there was a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method in learning English as a foreign language, t(323) = 3.26; p = .001.

Research Objective 8

Table 10 illustrates the results of the independent samples *t*-test comparing Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language.

Table 10. The Results of the Independent Samples t-Test Comparing Grades 7 and 8 Students' Attitudes Toward Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Learning English as a Foreign Language

| Variable | N | M | SD | df | t | p |
|--|-----|------|-----|-----|------|------|
| Grade 7 students' attitudes toward | 152 | 5.02 | .76 | | | |
| CLT Grade 8 students' attitudes toward | 173 | 4.84 | .92 | 323 | 1.90 | .058 |
| CLT | | | | | | |

Note. There is no statistically significant difference in Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language (statistical significance level set at p=.05, two-tailed).

The results of the independent samples *t*-test shown in Table 10 indicates that there was no significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes

toward communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language, t(323) = 1.90; p = .058.

Discussion

Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method in Learning English as a Foreign Language

The findings from the Research Objectives 1 and 2 revealed that both Grades 7 and 8 students had overall slightly positive attitudes toward grammar-translation method (GTM) in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Based on the researcher's experience, the students may see the importance of GTM due to the fact that it was embedded in the Thai education system and used as the normal, traditional language teaching method in Thai schools, including the target school over the past several decades. Moreover, the content and skills taught in GTM class were used primarily in the midterm and final examinations of the target school and the high stakes national examinations Thailand uses to assess the English proficiency of the students. These findings agreed with the findings from the study done by Fereidoni, Baniadam and Tadayyon (2018) to investigate university students' attitudes toward GTM and communicative language teaching (CLT) in Iran. According to Fereidoni et al. (2018), GTM, being the classical language teaching strategy is a key factor affecting the attitudes of language students.

Attitudes Toward Communicative Language Teaching in Learning English as a Foreign Language

The findings from Research Objectives 3 and 4 indicated that both Grades 7 and 8 students expressed overall satisfaction with CLT in learning EFL in all aspects. These findings agreed with the findings in the studies investigating students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT of Fenton (2006) and Yoshida et al. (2011) in Japan. Yoshida et al. (2011) explained that the possible reasons for their findings could be because CLT was the primary and valued teaching technique the teachers at the school where they conducted the study used in providing the instruction. However, in the current study, CLT was only practiced in the additional English communicative subject which was less emphasized in the target school. The researcher assumed that the students of this study may have been satisfied with and preferred learning EFL in the class where they had opportunities to develop their communicative skills by using the language for real communication. This assumption was similar to that of Fenton (2006) whose findings showed that the Japanese students had genuine preference for CLT.

Comparing Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method and Communicative Language Teaching

The findings from Research Objectives 5 and 6 revealed that there was a significant difference in the attitudes of both Grades 7 and 8 students toward grammar-translation method (GTM) and communicative language teaching (CLT) in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). This study also found that both Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes were inclined towards CLT. The researcher assumed that Grades 7 and 8 students were satisfied with learning to use English for communication in simulated real contexts more than mainly learning grammar rules. These findings agreed with the findings of Abdullah and Shah (2015) which revealed that the secondary students in Malaysia showed favor for both GTM and CLT; however, their attitudes also leaned toward CLT. Moreover, the findings of this study revealed that both Grades 7 and 8 students were dissatisfied with learning in the class where they did not have to speak English while they were satisfied with the class where they could make trial and error with the attempts to interact in English. The researcher assumed from these findings that the students would like to learn EFL with the teaching techniques that could help them to be able to use English to communicate in real contexts.

Comparing Students' Attitudes Toward Grammar-Translation Method
The findings from Research Objective 7 indicated that there was a significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method (GTM) in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The findings of this study indicated that Grade 7 students showed a stronger preference for GTM than Grade 8 students. Based on the researcher's experience, since Grade 8 students were older and had more experienced in learning EFL at the target school, they may have realized that learning EFL involved not only learning grammar but also learning to use English in real contexts. They may have felt that after they had deductively learned grammar for about 8 years, they still could not functionally and fluently use English for communication either in or outside the classroom. These findings agreed with the statement of Savignon and Wang (2003) which stated that the students with more English learning experiences had stronger negative attitudes toward GTM.

Comparing Students' Attitudes Toward Communicative Language Teaching The findings from Research Objective 8 revealed that there was no significant difference between Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward communicative language teaching (CLT) in learning English as a foreign language (EFL). The findings indicated that Grades 7 and 8 students were satisfied with CLT in all aspects, similar to the study done to observe Malaysian students' attitudes

toward GTM and CLT by Abdullah and Shah (2015). Based on the researcher's experiences, the students had difficulties in the use of English to functionally and fluently communicate their thoughts, feelings or opinions in real world contexts after learning EFL for 7 or 8 years in the target school or in the Thai educational system which focused more on rules of language. The researcher assumed that the students may have realized that being able to use the language for real communication was the goal of EFL learning and participating in communicative activities in the CLT class could help them to achieve this goal.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this study will be provided to students, school directors and teachers, and future researchers.

Recommendations for Students

This research revealed that Grades 7 and 8 students had strong positive attitudes toward both GTM and CLT in learning EFL at a private Catholic school in Bangkok. Their attitudes were significantly inclined towards CLT in all aspects even if it was not the primary teaching method emphasized in the target school. The students wished that learning EFL in the school could help them to be able to fluently and functionally communicate in English in real world contexts. However, the students seemed to be afraid to learn in the class where the teachers used only English as the language of instruction which could also help them to develop all four language macro-skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing either directly or indirectly. Therefore, the students should encourage themselves to participate in the English language environments as much as they can either inside or outside the school. This could help the students to develop their communicative skills in the real contexts.

Recommendations for School Directors and Teachers

From the findings, although the students showed positive attitudes to both GTM and CLT, they obviously showed the preference for CLT in learning EFL. The school directors and the teachers should recognize the attitudes of the students as one of the important factors leading to the achievement of foreign language teaching and learning in the school. The students would be enthusiastic and work to learn and use EFL if they had more opportunities to learn in the class in which their preferred teaching method was practiced. Therefore, to respond to the needs of the students, the school directors as leaders of the school and the teachers should appropriately manage and balance the teaching methods: GTM and CLT, used to provide the EFL

instruction in the school in order to achieve the goal of language learning which is the ability to functionally use the language for communication.

Recommendations for Future Researchers

This study was conducted to identify and compare Grades 7 and 8 students' attitudes toward grammar-translation method and communicative language teaching in learning English as a foreign language at a private Catholic school in Bangkok. The researcher would like to recommend that future researchers to employ larger and more diverse samples to include more grade levels. This will enable a larger and more inclusive picture to be drawn regarding students' attitudes toward use of GTM and CLT methodologies in their English language learning. Moreover, the researcher recommends the future researchers to conduct the studies at different schools in Thailand and observing attitudes of English teachers toward these two teaching methods to get the more general findings and the findings regarding the teachers' attitudes since this study was done at the private Catholic school in Bangkok to observe only students' attitudes. Furthermore, the researcher recommends that the studies done in the future should be designed as a combination of quantitative and qualitative comparative research methodologies to yield findings of a greater depth of description and understanding of students' attitudes toward GTM and CLT.

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