

Impact of Communicative Language Teaching in Developing Communicative Competence of ESL/EFL Learners

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of Communicative Language Teaching in developing communicative competence of English language learners. It reports the outcome of a study carried out at Crescent Model College with 140 first year students in the city of Lahore, Pakistan. The efficacy of the model study was based on enhancing the language proficiency level of learners in the context of using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles and techniques in English language teaching classroom. Mixed method of research was involved. Quantitative and Quantitative data were collected through the pre-board results of the participants and interviews of students and teachers. The learners involved in this model study were college first year students taking English as one of the major subjects. The leading aim of the study was to explore the role of Communicative Language Teaching to develop the language proficiency level of the students. The findings of the study statistically indicated the learners studying ESL/EFL through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) showed better results in terms of their communicative competence. The results will be beneficial for teachers in terms of realizing their deficiencies and raising awareness toward the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to enhance the language proficiency level of their students.

Keywords: communicative, CLT, competence, language proficiency, approach

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1. Introduction

Since the emergence of communicative language teaching (CLT) in 1970s, there have been different definitions and interpretations of the communicative approach to second language (L2) instruction. Subsequently, the role of communicative language teaching (CLT) has been the center of attention in SLA research. It was partly in response to the lack of success with traditional language teaching methods and partly by the increase in demand for language learning. The field of second or international language teaching has undergone many shifts and trends over the last few decades. Numerous methods have come and gone. We have seen the Audio-lingual Method, cognitive-based approaches, the Total Physical Response (TPR), the Natural Approach, and many others (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that aims to achieve communicative rather than linguistic competence through learner interaction. CLT aims to make "communicative competence" the goal of language teaching and to develop procedures for teaching the four language skills, including listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Communicative language teaching (CLT), is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of study. According to CLT, the goal of language education is the ability to communicate in the target language. CLT also positions the teacher as a facilitator, rather than an instructor. Although there are other definitions of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as well, the basic idea remains the same. The advantages of CLT include learning with a clear purpose, fostering a student-centered approach, increasing student engagement, promoting lesson variability and creativity, and developing all core language skills. This approach is highly useful to develop communicative skills and functional competence in addition to mastering language structures of the learners.

In the context of Pakistan teaching of English has been a challenging task in terms of teaching methodology & pedagogy. Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has been the center of English Language teaching in general for a long time. In this method, the teachers usually have the students to translate whole texts word for word and memorize grammatical rules and exceptions as well as sets of words. This method relies on the activity of

reading and translating text. The prime role of the teacher has been lecturing for English language teaching where learners have been made to follow the teacher. Reading with translation and learning Grammar rules have been considered the standard of language competence over communicative competence. Accuracy in language production has been preferred to fluency and ability to contrary in numerous situations.

The importance of English is worldwide recognized as English is the language of international communication in all areas, such as politics, science, media or art and it is often the language of entertainment as well as socializing. Having a good command of English helps us to have more opportunities in life, first of all, our career. That is why, English is taught and used as a second language at school and university level in Pakistan. Nonetheless, the issue of teaching methodology/approach according to its effectiveness in the classroom still remains unsettled.

The current research reports the outcome of a study that was carried out at Crescent Model College with 140 male first year college students in the city of Lahore, Pakistan in order to get a deeper insight into the usefulness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in developing the language competence in (ELT) classroom. The effectiveness of the model study was based on enhancing the communicative competence of the learners.

1.2 Research Questions

1. How do students and teachers show their preference in terms of language teaching methods?
2. Which method of teaching is liked and followed by students in order to achieve competence in English?
3. What is the effect of Communicative Language Teaching on students' performance in target language?

1.3 Hypotheses of the Research

Based on the previous literature and the research questions, the following hypotheses can be drawn:

1. Students and teachers do not show their preference in terms of teaching methodologies.
2. No method of teaching is liked and followed by students in order to achieve competence in English.
3. There is no effect of Communicative Language Teaching on students' performance in target language.

1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main aim of the study is to explore the effectiveness of CLT for ESL/EFL college level students. What they find more effective in the ELT classroom in terms of teaching methodologies used by their teachers. What are some recommendations to be followed by teachers and employers on the basis of the research study?

1.5 Significance of the Study

The importance of this research could be analyzed in these ways.

1. It may be used as one of few empirical studies to investigate the role Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of acquiring language communicative competence and proficiency.
2. It can be used as a reference for EFL learners to note the teachers' potentials on the basis of their performance in an ELT classroom in the context of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Method.
3. Any ESL/EFL teacher regardless of his background can seek guidance and enhance professional development from the findings in order to teach through applying this Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

1. The respondents (students) are first year college students at the campus from a city background.
2. It only studies the result data of male students about their communicative competence who were taught English with the use of CLT.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching

The progress of CLT in the 1970s and the early 1980s was partly in response to the lack of success with traditional language teaching methods and partly by the increase in demand for language learning. "The work of the Council of Europe; the writings of Wilkins, Widdowson, Candlin, Christopher Brumfit, Keith Johnson, and other British applied linguists on the theoretical basis for a communicative or functional approach to language teaching. In 1966, the sociolinguist Dell Hymes posited the concept of communicative competence considerably broadening out Noam Chomsky's syntactic concept of competence.

In Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), "language teaching is based on a view of language as communication, that is, language is seen as a social tool which speakers use to make meaning; speakers communicate about something to someone for some purpose, either orally or in writing" (Berns, 1990). According to researchers (Maleki, 2007; Dörnyei and Thurrell, 1991, 1994; Tarone and Yule, 1989; Willems, 1987 language is best learned and taught through interaction.

2.2 Major Features and Aims of Communicative Language Teaching

Larsen-Freeman (2000) suggests that there are three characteristics of CLT: (a) communicative activities; (b) the use of authentic materials; (c) small group activities by the learners. Teaching language through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is pedagogically effective and conducive to language learning, and it provides learners more flexible and open environment for learning the target language being more interactional. As stated by Hymes (1972), the major aims of CLT are to develop communicative competence among the language learners. In other words, it is necessary to fully make use of real-life situations that require communication to be the outcome of CLT in order to enhance communicative ability. In teaching English as Second Language, CLT is the method that has put more emphasis on interaction as the final goal for language learning (Ying, 2010). Larsen-Freeman (2000) argued that CLT aims widely at the theoretical perspectives of a communicative approach from permissive communication.

A mismatch between learners' attitudes, teachers' attitudes, and classroom practices might affect learners' motivation, teachers credibility, and the learning process as a whole (Savignon & Wang, 2003; Schulz, 2001). Whereas, a number of researchers have been interested in teachers' attitudes (Savignon & Wang, 2003), few studies have investigated learners' beliefs (see, Schulz, 2001), and fewer still, learners beliefs about grammar instruction (see, Loewen et al., 2009). Nevertheless, learners' beliefs and attitudes are believed to play an important role in the learning process (Loewen et al., 2009; Savignon & Wang, 2003; Volkan & Dollar, 2011). Widdowson (1990, p.159) described Communicative Approach as follows: "...it concentrates on getting learners to do things with language, to express concepts and to carry out communicative acts of various kinds. The content of a language course is now defined not in terms of forms, words and sentence patterns, but in terms of concepts, or notions, which such forms are used to express, and the communicative functions which they are used to perform."

2.3 CLT and Communicative Competence

The concept of communicative competence was originally developed in the early 1970s by the sociolinguist Hymes D., Cazden, C. B., John, V. P. (1972). It was then further developed in the early 1980s by Canale and Swain. According to Canale (1983), communicative competence refers to "the underlying systems of knowledge and skill required for communication".

The CLT places emphasis on developing communicative competence, viewed as "the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language use which the speaker-listener possess" (Celce, 2009). Through the communicative teaching, learners are encouraged to "consider language not only in terms of its structures (grammar and vocabulary), but also in terms of the communicative functions that it performs" (Kasim, 2015). By giving opportunities to use the language for real communicative purposes the teacher helps them to develop strategies relating the structures of a language to the communicative functions they can perform. The CLT approach is a comparatively new approach that has become popular and widespread in the teaching English as second language in Malaysia. Wright (2007) stated that CLT is a hybrid approach to language teaching, essentially progressive rather than traditional.

In communicative classes, a wide variety of activities such as role plays, interviews, discussions, information gap activities, language games, language learning simulations, problem solving tasks, quizzes, and surveys are used. The focus is usually on developing language skills and functions in authentic contexts. Littlewood (1981) distinguishes two major activity types-functional communication activities and social interaction activities. Functional communication activities are aimed at developing certain language skills and functions, which involve communication. Social interaction activities include conversation and discussion sessions, use of dialogues and role plays.

2.4 Communicative Language Teaching: Approach versus Method

CLT is one of the approaches to second language education. It is an approach which views that second or foreign language teaching and learning should be based on promoting learners' communicative competence that involves the processes of expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon, 2006). This indicates that CLT does not belong to any particular method of teaching; rather, it is an approach that can give insights to the incorporation of any methodologies as long as they promote communicative competence of the learners. It is commonly accepted that the proponents of CLT see it as an approach and not a method (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Brown, 2009). As stated by Brown (2009), CLT is a consolidated yet mainly based theoretical position on the nature of language and language learning and teaching.

2.5 Communicative Language Teaching versus other Teaching Methods

Many methods such as Grammar Translation Method (GTM), Structural Approach, and Direct Method have been tried out. However, they have failed to enable learners to use English for practical benefits (e.g. to get a job) and everyday communication. In the current years, many teachers and language experts worldwide have started

making the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in ELT classrooms in private sector educational institutions as well as in public sector based educational institutions for the sake of developing communicative competence of ESL/EFL learners.

3. Method

3.1 Participants (Subjects of the study)

The current study was carried out at Crescent Model College, Lahore, Pakistan with 140 first year students who were taught English involving two methods / approaches: Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The respondent sample consisted of 140 male college level students; their ages were 17-19, and the number of years of studying English ranged from 10 to 11 years. These students were chosen because they were taught through both methods of teaching at the same time about 10 months to know their English language communicative competence. The teachers comprise to teach these first year college students are male with Master degrees in English literature, applied linguistics, or English. These teachers are aged between 29 and 57 having diverse experiences (5 to 32 years) of teaching English as a second / foreign language in various institutions at different levels. The students study a total of 8 contact hours of English per week, distributed among the four language skills. The students in the current study were the same in terms of their English language proficiency level at the time of registration belonging to the same college and age.

3.2 Measures and Research Design (Data Gathering Instruments)

The current study draws on quantitative and qualitative data (for analytical purposes) through the interviews of (students and teachers) and classrooms tests performances on the basis of teaching methodology. This section is analytic part of the work. It provides data acquired through different research tools. The findings are supported by different data samples and detailed examples. This part discusses the methods of data collection and techniques for analysis. The data was collected in two stages by means of interviews and pre-board exams results of the students. The validity and reliability of the tools were checked. Anyhow the data collected for the study follow two phases.

1. Interviews (Students and Teachers)
2. Result analysis of Learners / Teachers

3.3 The First Stage

The first stage consisted of interviews with 4 different groups of students each with 35 students and total 140 students who had experience of studying English by both the methods / approaches Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The interviews were conducted on random basis. The students were asked to give answers regarding the reasons underlying their preference for liking the teaching methods / approaches. The students were motivated and encouraged for providing any additional information or comment about their preference for Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) over other methods like Grammar Translation Method (GTM). Teachers were also asked about the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Grammar Translation Method (GTM) and their preference for using CLT in term of students' better learning and competence.

3.4 The Second Stage

At this second stage the students' pre-board results of 4 different group total 140 students where two groups were taught by such teachers who applied Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and two groups were taught by teachers who focused on Grammar Translation Method (GTM) to teach language skills to their students. The qualification level and teaching experience of the teachers were also equivalent.

4. Results

4.1: Analysis of Interviews

To find answer to the first research question "*How do teachers and students show their preference in terms of language teaching methods?*" Interviews' results with students related to this question show that the students mostly like to learn English in an interactive environment where a teachers' role is a teacher cum facilitator. Communal interactional activities include conversation and discussion sessions, use of dialogues and role plays. The students like to communicate in a relaxed classroom setting without any sense of fear of mistakes. CLT provides such environment to students where they have chance to use the target language. The major aims of CLT are to develop communicative competence among the language learners. In other words, it is necessary to fully make use of real-life situations that require communication to be the outcome of CLT in order to enhance communicative ability. In this regard teachers also reported that CLT is a powerful tool of language teaching in order to develop the communicative competence of the learners if we use effectively the principles /strategies and techniques of CLT. Through the results of the interviews with the teachers importance of CLT was widely

recognized and majority of the teachers realized the effectiveness of this teaching approach/method. They recommended the use of CLT for enriched teaching and learning of the target language.

To find answer to the second research question *"Which method of teaching is liked and followed by students in order to achieve competence in English?"* Interviews' results with students related to this question show that the students in general like to learn English with the teachers who use CLT in their language classrooms as this method encourages the learners toward interaction and communication as in communicative classes, a wide variety of activities such as role plays, interviews, discussions, information gap activities, language games, language learning simulations, problem solving tasks, quizzes, and surveys are used.

The interviews further reveal statistics about students and teachers preference in terms of language teaching methods. Many students answered "We like CLT as it is a very useful tool of language learning where we can enhance our language proficiency level. Another group of students said "We prefer GTM because here we can understand our teacher in Urdu well and we are free to ask questions in Urdu. The teacher can control the class better and students are always well disciplined to learn in his presence". A lot of students favoured Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in terms of acquiring language communicative competence and proficiency.

Table 1. Statistical analysis of students' responses toward CLT and GTM

Teaching Method	No. of Students	Mean	Mean diff
In the favour of CLT	140	0.69	0.38
In the favour of GTM	140	0.31	

Statistical analysis of the data collected on the basis of interviews show a substantial difference in students' likeness of CLT in terms of English language learning over GTM (Table 1). The mean difference between the two methods is 0.38 which indicates considerable preference to CLT over GTM. It shows that there is a substantial difference in students' likeness of those teachers who make the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their ELT classrooms as in CLT method the students are emphasized to communicate in target language for the daily and teaching learning activities. Therefore, this result provides the answer to the second research question "Which method of teaching is liked and followed by students in order to achieve competence in English?" This result is consistent with some studies such as (Celce-Murcia, 2001:5); (Larsen-Freeman and Anderson, 2011:14 &115; Wong, Kwok and Choi in Xerri 2012:43); according to these researchers students also showed likeness toward this communicative language teaching.

4.2: Result analysis of Learners / Teachers Performance based on Pre-board Exams

To find answer to the third research question *"What is the effect of Communicative Language Teaching on students' performance in target language?"* summary of pre-board exam result of 4 sections of English classes of the same level, taught by English teachers each group was analyzed to confirm the effectiveness of teaching methods. The exam results showed that learners who were taught by teachers used CLT as a teaching method with varying strategies and putting equal focuss on four skills RWLS performed much better compared to the learners who were taught in the conventional way by the teachers of English who used Grammar Translation Method (GTM). The summary of pre-board exam results of 4 groups at the same level is displayed in Table 2 (a), (b), (c) and (d). *The results reveal that there is a substantial impact of Communicative Language Teaching on students' performance in target language.*

Table 2(a). Students were taught by a teacher who used CLT for language teaching

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	Total
No. of Learners	06	13	07	05	04	35

Table 2 (a) represents the details of letter grades and marks of learners who were taught by a teacher who used CLT as a teaching method and maintained serious learning environment with varying strategies. It is clear from the grades of the learners that students learned well due to the method that was adopted for teaching the target language by the teacher.

Table 2(b). Students were taught by a teacher who used CLT for language teaching

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	Total
No. of Learners	07	14	07	04	03	35

Table 2 (b) represents the details of letter grades and no. of learners who were taught by a teacher who also used CLT as a teaching method with varying strategies. It is clear from the grades of the learners that students performed well due to the method of teaching (CLT) that was used by the teacher.

Table 2(c). Students were taught by a teacher who didn't use CLT for language teaching

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	Total
No. of Learners	02	06	10	12	5	35

Table 2(d). Students were taught by a teacher who didn't apply CLT for language teaching

Letter Grade	A	B	C	D	F	Total
No. of Learners	03	05	11	10	6	35

Table 2(c) and 2(d) indicate the average performance of learners who were taught by teachers who didn't use CLT but applied Grammar Translation Method (GTM) with no varying strategies. They just focused on translating the texts, allowed and used mother tongue for all the time in the class of learners who were taught English through GTM. As a result of that the performance of the learners is not as good as with that Table 2(a), 2(b) where teachers used CLT as a teaching method and maintained serious learning environment with varying strategies in order to enhance and improve the language proficiency level of the learners as all the four skills RWLS were put full importance and provided enough practice. As per Table 2(a), 2(b) the learners achieved high grades than the grades shown in Table 2(c) and 2(d). To summarizing the results of Table 2 (a) and 2 (b) clearly indicate better performance of students in pre-board Exam than the learners mentioned in Table 2 (c) and 2 (d). Moreover, learners obtained higher grades in Table 2 (a) and 2 (b) than those in Table 2 (c) & 2 (d). It is evident from the results that effectiveness of teaching methodology has great impact on the performance of learners in tests and exams. The results are consistent with many studies on the basis of using of CLT in the ELT classroom such as Huang, (2016); Sun, (2016); (Ballman & Larsen-Freeman, (1988); Hutchinson & Waters, (1984); Jacobsen, (2018); Richards, (2006) and Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2011.

5. Discussion

The results of the current study and other studies could be attributed to some differences due to certain reasons. Firstly, some of the previous studies learners were studying English as an intensive English language programme while in the current study learners have studied English as one of the major subjects. Secondly, the gender of subjects in the present study is only male while in most of the other studies are both male and female. Thirdly, the learning experience of the present study learners with the use of CLT is first time at college level for around 10 months while in other studies students studied English for two or more semesters. This present study was carried out in male campus and the learners were mere male at while most other studies were focused on both gender the male/female.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of the study was to explore the effectiveness of CLT for ESL/EFL college level students in terms of enhancing the communicative competence of the learners. Statistical analysis of the collected data show that there is a substantial difference in students' likeness of those teachers who make the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their ELT classrooms as in CLT method the students are emphasized to communicate in target language for the daily and teaching learning activities. Analysis of the exam results data show that learners who were taught by teachers used CLT as a teaching method with varying strategies and putting equal focuss on four language skills RWLS performed much better as compared to the learners who were taught in the conventional way by the teachers of English who used Grammar Translation Method (GTM). To summarizing the results of Table 2 (a) and (b) clearly indicate better performance of students in pre-board Exam than the learners mentioned in Table 2 (c) and (d). Moreover, learners obtained higher grades in Table 2 (a) and (b) than those in Table 2 (c) & (d). It is evident from the results that effectiveness of teaching methodology has great impact on the performance of learners in tests and exams and CLT is a very effective teaching Method. This view is emphasized by many researchers such as Huang, (2016); Sun, (2016); (Ballman & Larsen-Freeman, (1988); Hutchinson & Waters, (1984); Jacobsen, (2018); Richards, (2006) and Larsen-Freeman & Anderson 2011.

The attained results based on interviews and Pre-board Exams disclose a significant likeness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) over any other methods. As interviews with the students disclose their high likeness of CLT as they consider CLT provides an interactive environment where a teachers' role is a teacher cum facilitator. The students also like to communicate in a relaxed classroom setting without any sense of fear of mistakes. The major aims of CLT are to develop communicative competence among the language learners. In this regard teachers also reported that CLT is a powerful tool of language teaching in order to develop the communicative competence of the learners if the principles and techniques of CLT are used effectively. Statistical data of the Exam results has produced a convincing difference in terms of learners achieved grades on the bases of applied method of teaching. These results may also provide motivation to teachers towards enhancing their teaching styles and strategies. The employers may take these results into their consideration for training their teachers to make the use of CLT in the classroom vibrant and operative.

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