

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN ENHANCING SPEAKING SKILLS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS

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Abstract

This study explores the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in building secondary school students' speaking skills in rural Uzbekistan. While the students are introduced to English at an early stage, they are not fluent due to traditional, grammar-based methods. Taking a qualitative case study approach, the study followed two teachers as they taught CLT-based lessons for four weeks. The study found a tangible increase in the students' participation and confidence, which was supported by observations in the classroom and interviews. The findings of the study show that CLT provides a more meaningful and engaging setting for the practice of spoken English, particularly through purposeful interaction and real-life contexts. While resource constraints and large classes remain an issue, overall findings point to CLT as a valuable method of developing communicative competence in the English classroom. The study recommends increased support in teacher development and resource availability to successfully implement CLT in diverse teaching environments.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, speaking skills, English as a foreign language, student engagement, language fluency, secondary education, learner-centered approach, rural schools in Uzbekistan.

Introduction

In recent decades, a global shift from grammar-translation methods to communicative approaches in language teaching has reshaped classroom practices, and the **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** approach stands at the forefront of this transformation. CLT emphasizes that language is primarily a tool

for communication, not just a system of rules to be memorized. This approach prioritizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of language learning. English is introduced in early grades in Uzbekistan, yet students still have trouble speaking fluently after years of instruction. This poses profound questions about whether traditional approaches can adequately provide students with the capacity to use the language spontaneously in real contexts. While methods like grammar translation focus on written proficiency, CLT enables spontaneous speech, and students can practice speaking in more concrete and active contexts. My experience of things in secondary schools is that even though the students generally have a good understanding of English grammar, their speaking ability does not reflect this. The biggest issue is the lack of connection between passive learning and active speaking.

As **Richards and Rodgers (2001)** point out, CLT is rooted in the theory that language is for communication, not just about mastering rules. This is an important concept in Uzbekistan's context, where speaking fluency often takes a backseat to reading and writing. Therefore, exploring CLT's implementation is crucial to improving students' speaking abilities.

Methods

This study utilized a **qualitative case study** approach, which I believe was particularly effective for observing the dynamic and personalized nature of CLT in action. The study was conducted in a rural secondary school in the Samarqand region, where two English teachers were observed over four weeks as they implemented CLT-based lessons with their 8th-grade students. These lessons included role-plays, group discussions, and information-gap activities designed to foster communication.

From my experience, the flexibility of CLT was its strength, and the teachers applied these activities with much creativity. As an example, in one role-play, students acted out real situation scenarios such as scheduling a doctor's appointment or requesting the menu from a waiter at a restaurant. By doing this, the gap between textbook English and actual communication was filled. Information were collected via classroom observation, interviews with the students (n=12), and teacher reflection that allowed in-depth comprehension of how CLT influences speaking skills.

The theoretical framework was informed by **Littlewood (1981)** and **Nunan (1991)**, whose principles of communicative tasks and learner-centered instruction support CLT's emphasis on interaction and the active role of the learner. I chose these frameworks because they align with the core philosophy that language learning should not just be about memorizing but about using language to communicate. In evaluating speaking development, I used the **Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR)** criteria of fluency, interaction, and communicative competence, as it offers a standardized way to assess language proficiency while remaining flexible enough for diverse teaching contexts.

Results

The data collected from classroom observations revealed an **increase in student engagement and participation** throughout the four weeks. In Week 1, only 42% of students volunteered to speak in front of the class. However, by Week 4, that number had nearly doubled to 73%. This growth is a testament to the efficacy of CLT in fostering a more confident speaking environment. **From my own teaching experiences**, I've witnessed similar improvements, where students who are initially reluctant to speak in English begin to participate more actively as they feel supported by their peers.

Student interviews also highlighted a growing sense of confidence. One student shared, **"I am not afraid to make mistakes now because we work in pairs and help each other."** This reflects the collaborative atmosphere fostered by CLT, where students are encouraged to engage with language without the fear of making errors, a common barrier in traditional teaching settings. Additionally, **teachers reported that CLT activities helped students use English in more informal contexts**, such as in daily conversations, which is often a challenge in traditional classrooms focused on written grammar exercises.

Discussion

The findings of this study align with **Harmer's (2007)** assertion that fluency is built through frequent, low-pressure speaking practice rather than memorization. **From my perspective**, this aspect of CLT has significant benefits in real-life language use. Students are able to internalize phrases and expressions in ways that textbooks alone cannot achieve. By engaging in authentic communication tasks,

they learn to adapt structures they've studied to new contexts, making their learning more transferable to real-life situations.

However, the limitations of CLT must be understood in some contexts. Practitioners in this study alluded to time and resource limitations (e.g., audio hardware, printed texts) as barriers to full implementation. These issues are particularly relevant in rural schools where school resources might be limited. For my own part, accessibility to technology could be an issue, but despite the absence of high-technology tools, a basic exercise like pair work or group discussion can be of huge impact to speaking ability.

Furthermore, class size was an issue. Large classes are likely to interfere with the provision of individualized feedback in speaking activities, which is critical to the building of speaking confidence. Despite such limitations, the research supports Savignon's (2002) view that communicative competence is better learned from active language use rather than isolated grammar practice.

Conclusion

In conclusion, CLT application is a promising method of enhancing speaking ability among Uzbek secondary school students. By creating an encouraging and interactive environment, it compels learners to risk and use English for real communication. In my view, this approach can be revolutionary for learners who are prone to struggle with speaking fluency because it gives them a chance to practice communication in real life.

However, to make sure that CLT achieves maximum capacity, it is crucial that curriculum planners and education policymakers prioritize teacher training programs, which equip instructors with the tools and techniques to apply it effectively. Moreover, more investment in materials such as audio materials and interactive tools would assist in raising the effectiveness of lessons taught through CLT. Future research could explore the use of **quantitative data** to measure improvements in test scores or longer-term studies to assess the lasting effects of CLT on speaking proficiency. Nevertheless, the results from this study strongly suggest that, when applied thoughtfully, CLT can help bridge the gap between passive language knowledge and active communication abilities.



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