

The Effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Developing English Speaking Skills among EFL Learners

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Abstract

In the present day, when the world is globalized, communication is international, higher education and employment opportunities are available, and the ability to speak English is essential for twenty-first-century learners. As a result, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become one of the most effective methods in English Language Teaching (ELT) that focuses on the meaningful communicative use of the language and interaction among learners and between teacher and learner rather than on the memorization of rules. This research aimed to find out whether Communicative Language Teaching can be effective in developing the English-speaking skills of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students at the university level in Bangladesh. A quantitative descriptive survey approach was used to conduct the study, and the sample comprised 150 university-level students learning English as a foreign language. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale and then analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The descriptive statistical techniques, including frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation, were used for analyzing the learners' perception of the students' speaking confidence, fluency, classroom interaction, communicative competence, and challenges encountered while implementing CLT in learning. The results of the simulations suggest that CLT has a significant positive impact on the learners' speaking fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary usage, confidence, participation in class, and communicative competence. However, difficulties in implementing is still present, such as large class sizes, examination-based curricula, short

instructional time, lack of teacher training, and speaking anxiety. The study concludes that CLT is a successful pedagogical approach for improving English language proficiency when supported by appropriate pedagogical strategies, teacher training, and learner-centered classrooms.

Keywords: Communication, Speaking, EFL, Competence, Fluency, Interaction

I. INTRODUCTION

English is the language of international communication, of higher education and scientific research, of business, diplomacy, tourism, and digital technology. Globalization has made the world more connected in the economic, educational, and cultural domains, and English has become indispensable today in both the academic and professional fields, and in intercultural communication (Richards, 2022). Among the four skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), speaking is viewed as the most important skill because it is a skill that allows students to express their ideas, negotiate meaning, exchange information and participate in social and work situations effectively (Nunan, 2023). Therefore, the effective development of learners' speaking ability has emerged as one of the main priorities of English language teaching (ELT) in the world. While speaking is an integral part of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL), it is one of the most challenging skills for EFL learners to master. To communicate effectively orally, learners need to process information rapidly, organize their thoughts clearly, select the appropriate words, apply the appropriate structure to their sentences, and pronounce sentences clearly and accurately. In EFL contexts, where the language's cognitive and linguistic demands pose a challenge for students, opportunities for authentic use of English lead to anxiety and hesitation, which in turn result in a lack of confidence (Nation & Newton, 2020). Because of this, it is common for learners to be able to settle for a level of grammatical development without demonstrating the ability to communicate fluently in English. This is mainly because most of the EFL classrooms are still teacher-centered classrooms. Memorizing grammatical structures, translating, and repeating are the foundation of the Audio-Lingual Method and the Grammar-Translation Method, and the students' opportunities for meaningful oral communication are limited (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). These techniques indeed have language benefits but rarely result in students' acquisition of communicative competence because they do not perform in the target language. As a result, students will be able to take tests, but not be able to converse in English (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2020).

Like all the previous methods, the traditional method does not yield any results, which resulted in the creation of communicative language teaching (CLT). In CLT's view, language is not just a set of grammatical rules. Thus, the primary goal of language learning is to have students use English in authentic communicative situations (Littlewood, 2021). The theoretical approach of the CLT is based on Hymes's communicative competence model (1972) and later Canale and Swain's communicative competence model that included grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (1980). The theoretical shift away from learning grammatical structures towards meaningful communication in language teaching was manifested in these developments. Communicative language teaching is based on the principle of teaching for the learner; in the classroom, the students learn through interactive methods, such as pair work, group discussion, role-play, information gap, presentation, interview, and problem-solving. These activities enable students to share with others, apply English in authentic contexts, express their thoughts and opinions, think them through, and enhance their pronunciation, communicative competence (Ellis, 2022; Nunan, 2023), and fluency. This method is one in which teachers would essentially act as facilitators by setting up a conducive learning environment that would help students communicate without fear

of being wrong too much. Although many studies have shown that CLT can improve learners' speaking skills, the issue of implementing CLT still faces some problems, such as large class size, a syllabus that is examination-oriented, insufficient teacher training, inadequate teaching materials and learners' anxiety to speak (Butler, 2021; Derakhshan, 2022). Moreover, few empirical studies explore the quantitative perspective on university-level EFL learners' perceptions of CLT. Based on this, the current research is aimed at examining the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to increase the ability of learners in English speaking skills using a quantitative survey method. In the future, the findings may be utilized in research pertaining to communicative language instruction, in the development of new educational programs and schools, and in the formulation of guidelines that will assist both instructors and students of English as a foreign language (EFL) in improving their communication skills.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Under the concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), the communicative ability to convey meaning is more emphasized than grammatical structure, and thus, it has been one of the most influential approaches in the English language teaching field for over 40 years. The idea was developed from a dissatisfaction with the traditional language teaching methods, which focus on grammar, translation, and memorization but are not preparing learners for authentic communication. Richards & Rodgers (2014) see language as a vehicle for communication, and they view communicative competence as the ability to “communicate with others in the target language”. CLT employs language as a tool for communication and seeks to develop communicative competence of the learners by adopting interactive activities in the classroom as a means to simulate real-life communicative situations. The concept of communicative competence that CLT is based on originated in Hymes' 1972 proposal that language learning should include more than a knowledge of the rules of the language; it is also needed to know how to use that language appropriately in different social and cultural settings. Canale and Swain (1980) added four other elements in communicative competence, which were: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. These theoretical approaches transformed the approach to language instruction from a teacher-centered one to a more communicative, learner-centered one and impacted curriculum design, classroom instruction, and language assessment around the world.

These studies have been compelling and continue to show the effectiveness of CLT for the promotion of oral communication skills amongst EFL learners. From a communicative interaction perspective, Ellis (2022) argues that L2 acquisition is facilitated by learners' ability to negotiate meaning, obtain comprehensible input, and be required to generate comprehensible output. Furthermore, Nunan (2023) emphasizes the importance of employing the communicative method or technique in the classroom to build a communicative atmosphere, which can facilitate learners to speak confidently and spontaneously, such as the method of pair work, group discussion, role play, presentation, and information gap. A big advantage of communicative language teaching is the participation of the learners. The CLT approach in a traditional classroom setting, where the teacher is the primary source of classroom communication, encourages the students to actively participate in the classroom, building knowledge as a result of their own effort through collaboration and interaction with one another. Collaborative learning not only enables students to learn the language in a meaningful context but also contributes to developing their critical thinking, problem-solving and interpersonal communication skills, as noted by Littlewood (2021). Engaging in speaking in a learner-centered environment plays an important role in developing fluency in speaking, as students are

provided with opportunities to make statements, ask questions, clarify meaning, and reply to others.

Another important aspect of CLT is that it can impact the confidence and motivation of the learners. Speaking anxiety has always been known as one of the big hurdles in oral communication in EFL classrooms. MacIntyre, Gregersen, and Mercer (2023) claim that encouraging communication in a supportive environment helps to minimize learners' fear of making mistakes, as it is important for them to focus on communicating meaningfully rather than on grammatical correctness. Students slowly develop self-confidence, a willingness to communicate, and their own interest in engaging in real-life communication in English in various contexts. The use of educational technology has also helped in the successful implementation of communicative language teaching. As explained by Chapelle (2020), the digital platforms, virtual classrooms, online forum discussions, video conferences, and the application of AI allow learners to practice English outside the classroom in authentic contexts. These technologies will enhance the amount of communicative input students receive, contribute to cooperative learning, and promote independent language learning. Technology-based CLT is therefore increasingly emerging in higher education, particularly with the emergence of the fast-expanding online and blended learning contexts.

But several impediments remain to be overcome in the implementation of CLT in other EFL settings. The major issues encountered by communicative language teaching in the Philippines, according to Butler (2021), are the large class size, examination-oriented curricula, limited instructional time, limited teaching resources, and insufficient teacher professional development. Similarly, Derakhshan (2022) states that speaking anxiety, low self-confidence, inadequate vocabulary, and apprehension of negative evaluation of students are some factors that usually deter students from actively participating in class. The challenges highlight that the effectiveness of CLT is not only dependent on the CLT approach being used, but also on the support provided by the institution, the competence of the teachers in the field, and the readiness of the learners. To date, there have been sufficient studies concerning the merits of communicative language teaching; however, some gaps were identified from the literature. In many other studies, relatively small study groups were used for experimental or qualitative research designs, and few studies have used a large quantitative analysis to explore the perceptions of learners about different aspects of the CLL. Furthermore, empirical studies conducted at the university level in EFL environments, particularly in developing countries, are still rather scarce. Based on the information presented above, the purpose of this study is to address the gaps that have been identified, and by employing the quantitative descriptive survey approach, the researchers hope to gain insight into the success of communicative language instruction from the perspective of the learners to attain mastery of English-speaking abilities.

III. RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

This study aimed to examine the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) for the development of English-speaking skills of EFL learners at the university level.

IV. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a quantitative descriptive survey research design in exploring the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on the enhancement of the English-Speaking skills of the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students. A quantitative approach was employed because the learners' perceptions can be objectively measured with the help of

numerical data, which can be gathered and statistically analyzed. The participants of this study were 150 undergraduate students in the EFL (English as a foreign language) classes of various academic majors who had participated in Communicative Language Teaching for at least one semester in English classes. The participants were selected using a simple random sampling method, which aimed to ensure equal participation opportunities for the participants and to enhance representativeness of the sampling method. Data were gathered using a structured self-administered questionnaire, which was designed following a thorough study of related literature on CLT, communicative competence, and English-speaking skills. The questionnaire consisted of two sections, one including demographic information, and another comprising statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) that reflected some aspects of the learners' confidence, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary development, participation in the classroom, motivation, communicative competence, teacher facilitation, and difficulties in implementing CLT. The instrument was first evaluated by three experts in English language teaching (ELT) and applied linguistics, and a pilot test was conducted with EFL learners ($N = 30$) to test the content. Cronbach's alpha (CA) was used to determine the reliability of the questionnaire, which was 0.87, which is considered good internal consistency (George & Mallery, 2019). After getting approval from the institutions, data were collected electronically with Google Forms for 4 weeks. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and confidentiality and anonymity were ensured throughout the study. IBM SPSS Statistics Version was used to analyze the collected data, and descriptive statistical techniques were used to summarize the respondents' perceptions of the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in developing English-speaking skills, namely frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations.

V. FINDINGS OF THIS STUDY

The data gathered was analyzed in IBM SPSS Statistics Version 29. Descriptive statistical techniques such as frequencies, percentages, mean, and standard deviation were used to analyze the perception of the learners to examine the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in developing the speaking skills of the English language in this study. The results are reported based on the study objectives.

5.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

The first step in the analysis is the demographic profile of the respondents, such as gender, age, and involvement in communicative classroom activities. The aforementioned features give contextual information about the sample and show that its respondents had sufficient experience in communicative language teaching.

Table 1. Gender Distribution of Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	68	45.3
Female	82	54.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 1 shows that 54.7% (82) of the respondents were female and 45.3% (68) were male. Having an even split of genders makes the results more believable and representative.

Table 2. Age Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–20 Years	55	36.7
21–23 Years	61	40.7
24–26 Years	24	16.0
Above 26 Years	10	6.6
Total	150	100.0

Table 2 shows that most of the respondents (116, 77.4%) were aged 18-23 years. This meant that the majority of participants were undergraduate students who attended English language classes on a regular basis and knew about communicative classroom practice.

Table 3. Frequency of Participation in Communicative Classroom Activities

Participation	Frequency	Percentage
Always	50	33.3
Frequently	63	42.0
Occasionally	27	18.0
Rarely	10	6.7
Total	150	100.0

As seen in Table 3, 75.3% (113) of the respondents indicated that they were always or often involved in communicative classroom activities. This finding reaffirms that most learners were exposed to CLT sufficiently to be able to assess its effectiveness in their learning.

5.2 Learners' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching

To meet the first research goal, respondents were asked to rate their perceptions of CLT's effectiveness in the area of English speaking skills.

Table 4. CLT Improves Speaking Confidence

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	53	35.3
Agree	66	44.0
Neutral	18	12.0
Disagree	9	6.0
Strongly Disagree	4	2.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 4 shows that 79.3% agreed or strongly agreed that CLT helped them to be more confident in their ability to speak English. 8.7% disagreed, while 12.0% were neutral. The conclusion from these findings is that the communicative activities give a supportive atmosphere so that the learners can be more confident to express themselves in English.

Table 5. CLT Enhances Speaking Fluency

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	49	32.7
Agree	69	46.0
Neutral	19	12.7
Disagree	9	6.0
Strongly Disagree	4	2.6
Total	150	100.0

Of the 118 who responded, 118 (78.7%) felt that the CLT had greatly improved their fluency in speaking. There seems to be an increase in fluency and spontaneity in oral communication as a result of frequent practice in various communicative activities, including pair work, discussion, presentation, and role play.

Table 6. CLT Encourages Classroom Participation

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Strongly Agree	54	36.0
Agree	65	43.3
Neutral	17	11.3
Disagree	10	6.7
Strongly Disagree	4	2.7
Total	150	100.0

Table 6 shows that 79.3% of the respondents felt that communicative language teaching helped to increase participation in the classroom. Interactive activities encouraged students to participate in discussions and group activities rather than passively receiving information.

5.3 Overall Effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching

Descriptive statistics (mean scores and standard deviations) were used to explore students' general perceptions.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of CLT in Developing English Speaking Skills

Variables	Mean	SD	Interpretation
CLT improves speaking confidence	4.36	0.68	Very High
CLT enhances speaking fluency	4.29	0.72	High
CLT improves pronunciation	4.18	0.77	High
CLT develops vocabulary for speaking	4.24	0.71	High
CLT promotes classroom interaction	4.41	0.66	Very High
CLT increases learner motivation	4.33	0.69	Very High
CLT develops communicative competence	4.38	0.67	Very High
Teachers effectively facilitate communicative activities	3.87	0.84	High
Classroom environment supports communication	3.74	0.88	Moderate
Adequate instructional time is available	3.29	0.97	Moderate

The descriptive statistics showed that the learners' perceptions of the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) were very positive. Classroom interaction gave the highest mean score ($M = 4.41$, $SD = 0.66$); communicative competence ($M = 4.38$, $SD = 0.67$); and speaking confidence ($M = 4.36$, $SD = 0.68$) were the second and third most important variables, respectively. The results of these findings show that CLT is effective in creating active communication and learner engagement. The same is true of learner motivation, vocabulary development, pronunciation, and speaking fluency, which were highly rated and showed the positive impact of communicative classroom practices. But a relatively low score in the areas of classroom environment and instructional time suggests that institutional issues still impact successful implementation of CLT.

5.4 Challenges in Implementing Communicative Language Teaching

While respondents' perceptions of CLT were very positive, they were aware of some problems in implementing CLT in their university EFL classroom.

Table 8. Major Challenges in Implementing CLT

Challenge	Frequency	Percentage
Large class size	109	72.7
Examination-oriented curriculum	103	68.7
Speaking anxiety among learners	98	65.3
Limited instructional time	94	62.7
Mixed English proficiency levels	88	58.7
Inadequate teacher training	84	56.0
Insufficient teaching materials	76	50.7
Limited opportunities for speaking outside the classroom	72	48.0

According to Table 8, class size (72.7%) is considered the biggest challenge to successfully implementing CLT, followed by curriculum with orientation towards examination (68.7%) and speaking anxiety (65.3%). The limited use of instructional time, mixed proficiency, lack of training for teachers, lack of instructional materials, and limited opportunities to use English outside of the class were also cited as significant obstacles. The findings imply that the role of institutional support and the appropriate classroom conditions are necessary to make communicative language teaching effective.

5.5 Overall Perception of Communicative Language Teaching

Table 9. Overall Perception of the Effectiveness of CLT

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Very Positive	61	40.7
Positive	67	44.6
Neutral	15	10.0
Negative	5	3.3
Very Negative	2	1.4
Total	150	100.0

Table 9 reveals the result of respondents' perceptions towards communicative language teaching, with 128 participants, of which 85.3% perceived it as positive or very positive. Fewer than one in five (4.7%) said they had negative perceptions, and 10.0% were "neutral." This study is proof of CLT being a successful instructional method used to enhance the English-speaking skills of EFL learners at the university level.

VI. DISCUSSION OF THE FINDINGS

This study aimed to find out the effectiveness of the CLT approach in developing the skill of speaking English as a foreign language (EFL) for university students. The results indicate that CLT has a significant impact on learners' confidence in speaking, fluency, communicative competence, and participation in class discussion as well as motivation. The overall results of the study, however, show that the communicative, learner-centered teaching method has created an appropriate learning environment for learners to engage in meaningful learning in English and use their oral skills in academic and real-life contexts. The findings align quite closely with the fundamental principles of CLT learning: interaction, real communication, and engagement of learners are all vital to successful language learning (Littlewood, 2021). Perhaps the most striking finding in the study was that the vast majority of respondents expressed a substantial boost in their confidence in speaking, as a result of CLT. The communicative class activities have helped about 80% of the students overcome their fear of speaking English and gain confidence in expressing their ideas in English. This finding suggests that L2 acquisition will be easier if L2 can be acquired in a meaningful context in which the learner can use L2 as a communicative tool instead of focusing on the grammatical component of L2. This is similar to Ellis (2022), who announced that meaningful interaction is one of the various factors that might aid in gaining L2. Similarly, MacIntyre et al. (2023) claimed that a supportive communicative classroom is effective in diminishing language anxiety and enhancing the learners' motivation for communication, which eventually results in a high level of confidence in oral communication.

The results also indicate that CLT has a very positive impact on the fluency of learners' speaking. It is facilitated partly by the use of pair work, role play, presentation, debate, and information gap tasks to allow for multiple opportunities for the students to express themselves spontaneously. Pupils develop their fluency, pronunciation and vocabulary and communicate continuously. The results agree with Nunan (2023), who revealed that communicative tasks can be employed to facilitate the development of language skills as it provides opportunities for negotiation of meaning and meaningful interaction. Likewise, Littlewood (2021) pointed out that communicative activities allow L2 learners to communicate in L2 as closely as possible to native speakers, so that L2 learners will not only acquire linguistic competence but also acquire sociolinguistic competence. The other significant result is that the mean score for classroom interaction was the highest of all of the variables measured, suggesting a high level of respondents' confidence that CLT boosted active classroom participation. Communicative classrooms are classrooms where students are working together, talking, sharing ideas, brainstorming, problem solving in meaningful ways, and taking part in meaningful discussion, not classroom centers. Active learning aids in learning autonomy, critical thinking, and collaborative learning approaches, as well as real use of language. The results are consistent with Richards & Rodgers (2014), who stated that communicative language teaching is based on communicative competence, a condition of which is meaningful interaction.

The study then revealed that communicative teaching was also a positive influence on the learners' motivation. Most of the respondents indicated that the use of communicative classroom

activities made the English class better in terms of being enjoyable, meaningful, and relevant to the learners' studies and work. Through the interactive learning activities, students were actively involved in learning and motivated to learn English out of class. Butler (2021), likewise, uncovered that communication classrooms had a positive effect on the participation of students: the classroom activities are very practical and meaningful to students. Motivation is very important in such situations where opportunities for authentic use of English are limited in EFL contexts. This is good news, but there are several concerns in the successful implementation of CLT. The large classes, the test-prep education, the fear of speaking, the limited class time, mixed-level classes, lack of training for teachers, and limited teaching resources were considered the big challenges identified. In some instances, these constraints could be challenging for the teacher to include in the design of effective communication activities and for the learner to have limited opportunities for communication. The challenges suggested by Butler (2021) and Derakhshan (2022) also indicate that the implementation of CLT is not only a teaching method but requires the support of the institution, teacher competence, flexibility of the content, and proper classroom conditions. Finally, the results of the present study further corroborate the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in teaching speaking skills of EFL university students. This, however, depends on the co-operation of teachers, schools, curriculum designers and policy makers in ensuring conducive learning environments, improving teachers' professional learning, improving classroom learning conditions and making assessment systems congruent with the communicative goals of learning. Some of the contextual factors that need to be identified to maximize the potential of CLT and to ensure communicative competence that would be essential for the student to be successful in academic, professional, and global settings are identified in this study.

VII. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of this study have implications for the teaching of English, development of the curriculum, teacher training, and educational policy. Most of the respondents agreed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is effective in increasing the ability to speak English; thus, English language teachers are expected to use more communicative activities, such as pair work, role play, discussions, debates, and presentations, to make the learners more confident and fluent in speaking English. The English syllabus needs to be redesigned using a communicative approach to teach and assess English, incorporating speaking-based assessments and language-based assessments. The study also underscores the importance of ongoing teacher professional development programs to provide teachers with effective communicative teaching strategies and classroom management skills. Schools and colleges should create supportive learning settings through good instructional time, adequate teaching resources, and manageable class sizes. In addition, policymakers need to make language assessment systems more in line with communicative learning outcomes. Further research is needed with a larger variety and more diverse groups of students and with the application of mixed methods to gain a deeper understanding of the success of communicative language teaching in various educational settings. The following recommendations are made, based on the results of the study:

- a) English language teachers should make use of more diverse communicative classroom activities to give learners more opportunities to have real oral interaction.
- b) Higher education institutions need to restructure their English language program curricula to provide more time for speaking and listening, as well as for grammar, reading, and writing.

- c) Teacher training programs should regularly conduct workshops and professional development programs on communicative language teaching methodologies and teaching strategies in classroom management.
- d) Class sizes should be smaller than normal (if possible), and classroom conditions should be enhanced to support good pair work, group discussion, and cooperative learning in the classroom.
- e) Language assessment systems should contain the assessment of language performance as an indispensable part of the English language assessment to promote communicative learning.
- f) Schools need to incorporate digital tools, communication platforms, and AI-supported language learning resources to enhance opportunities for real-world English proficiency.
- g) English clubs, debates, presentations, seminars, and extracurricular events should be encouraged to provide opportunities for students to continue speaking English outside the classroom.
- h) Future studies are recommended to be longitudinal and mixed-method studies with larger samples in diverse educational contexts to further investigate the long-term effectiveness of communicative language teaching in enhancing English-speaking skills.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present study is an attempt to examine the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in promoting the English-speaking ability of the university-level EFL learners. The results indicated that CLT effectively increases speaking confidence, fluency, communicative competence, participation in class, and motivation of learners by providing meaningful and interactive learning experiences. Learners generally felt that CLT was an effective teaching method, although the problems of big classes, short class time, poor teacher preparation, and a curriculum focused on examinations continue to impact its application. Thus, the enhancement of communicative teaching approaches in the curriculum, teacher training, and supportive classroom can make a significant contribution to the English-speaking ability of EFL learners.

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