



THE ROLE OF THE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) METHOD IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

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Abstract: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become the dominant paradigm in foreign-language pedagogy, yet empirical evidence concerning its concrete effect on learners' communicative competence in non-English-speaking environments remains fragmented. This paper reports an intervention study carried out in two Uzbek higher-education institutions where English is taught as a compulsory subject. The research compares outcomes in classes using a traditional structural-situational syllabus with those adopting a task-based CLT syllabus aligned with national curriculum goals. A mixed-methods design, combining spoken-interaction tests, discourse-completion tasks, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews, enabled a nuanced measurement of gains in grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic sub-competences. Findings reveal statistically significant improvements in fluency, cohesion, and pragmatic appropriacy among students exposed to CLT, without a commensurate decline in formal accuracy. Qualitative data suggest that learner confidence and willingness to communicate also rose markedly, mediated by increased opportunities for authentic negotiation of meaning. The study concludes that sustained, context-sensitive CLT integration meaningfully strengthens communicative competence and recommends curricular adjustments that balance interactional practice with explicit form-focused feedback.

Key words : Communicative competence, Communicative Language Teaching, task-based learning, EFL, classroom interaction, pragmatic development.

INTRODUCTION

The notion of communicative competence, introduced by Hymes and elaborated by Canale and Swain, reoriented second-language teaching from the mastery of isolated linguistic forms toward the ability to use language purposefully and appropriately. Communicative Language Teaching emerged in the late 1970s as the methodological embodiment of this paradigm shift, promoting meaning-focused activities, information gaps, and learner interaction. In many post-Soviet education systems the transition from grammar-translation to CLT has been uneven, constrained by large classes, exam-driven syllabi, and limited teacher professional development. Recent national reforms in Uzbekistan place communicative competence at the centre of tertiary curricula, yet the practical efficacy of CLT in local classrooms remains under-researched. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates whether systematic application of CLT principles enhances undergraduate students' communicative competence compared to a structurally oriented approach. It also explores how contextual variables such as class size, teacher beliefs, and learners' prior schooling mediate the impact of CLT. By focusing on authentic classroom conditions rather than laboratory tasks, the research aims to provide



actionable insights for policy makers, textbook writers, and teacher-training programmes intent on elevating learners' interactive proficiency.

The study adopted a quasi-experimental design over one academic semester (16 weeks). Two intact first-year English courses at University A ($n = 58$) and University B ($n = 61$) were selected. In each institution one group served as the experimental cohort, taught through CLT tasks such as role plays, information-gap exchanges, and problem-solving projects, while the comparison group followed the existing structure-based syllabus emphasizing controlled drills and translation exercises. All classes met for four 90-minute sessions weekly and were taught by instructors with comparable qualifications; experimental-group teachers completed a short CLT refresher workshop prior to the study.

Communicative competence was operationalised using four sub-scales: grammatical accuracy, discourse coherence, sociolinguistic appropriacy, and strategic resourcefulness. Data were collected at three points—pre-test, mid-semester, and post-test—through a paired-picture narration, a role-play task, and a discourse-completion questionnaire adapted from Bachman's framework. Performances were video-recorded and rated by two independent assessors blind to group membership; inter-rater reliability exceeded 0.86 on all dimensions. Quantitative data were analysed with repeated-measures ANOVA, while interview transcripts and classroom-interaction field notes were coded thematically to capture perceptions of learning processes and challenges. Ethical clearance was obtained from both universities; participation was voluntary and pseudonyms were used in reporting.

Baseline measures indicated no significant difference between groups on any competence dimension. By mid-semester the experimental groups displayed notable gains in discourse coherence, weaving cohesive devices and expanded turns more effectively than peers in the comparison groups ($F(1,117)=9.27$, $p<0.01$). At the final assessment grammatical accuracy improved in both conditions, yet only CLT participants demonstrated simultaneous advancement in sociolinguistic appropriacy, employing context-sensitive address forms and mitigating devices that were largely absent in structurally taught classmates' speech. Strategic competence, measured by the frequency and success of meaning-negotiation moves, rose by 38 % in the CLT cohorts versus 11 % in the control groups.

Qualitative findings corroborated quantitative trends. Observation transcripts revealed that CLT lessons generated an average of 72 % learner talk-time compared with 34 % in traditional lessons, with students initiating discourse, asking clarification questions, and self-repairing more often. Interview data indicated elevated self-reported confidence and enjoyment among experimental-group students, who associated communicative tasks with real-world relevance. Teachers reported initial classroom-management concerns but noted gradual improvement in on-task behaviour and peer support. No evidence emerged of a trade-off between fluency and accuracy; instead, focused feedback embedded within communicative tasks appeared to foster simultaneous development.

The results align with global research demonstrating the efficacy of CLT for promoting holistic language ability. The Uzbek context, characterised by historically form-focused instruction, presents particular challenges: large enrolments, assessment systems prioritising discrete-point knowledge, and limited exposure to naturalistic input outside class. Despite these constraints, the study shows that when teachers receive targeted professional development and syllabi embed purposeful tasks, learners can achieve meaningful communicative gains

within one semester. The observed improvement in sociolinguistic and strategic sub-competences is especially salient, as these dimensions underpin transactional success yet are rarely addressed in traditional syllabi.

The apparent absence of accuracy loss counters long-standing concerns that communicative approaches neglect form. Results suggest that the integration of brief, reactive focus-on-form episodes inside communicative tasks may reconcile interaction-driven fluency with grammatical development, echoing findings by Long and Ellis. Moreover, enhanced willingness to communicate indicates that CLT fosters affective conditions conducive to risk-taking and language play, factors linked to sustained proficiency growth. While teacher testimony highlighted preparation time and class noise as practical hurdles, subsequent lesson observations documented evolving classroom routines that mitigated initial difficulties.

This study provides empirical confirmation that contextually adapted Communicative Language Teaching significantly bolsters undergraduate learners' communicative competence across grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic dimensions. Implementation required consistent task-based practice, ongoing formative feedback, and teacher support, but did not compromise accuracy or classroom order. Policymakers and curriculum designers should therefore prioritise CLT-oriented materials, assessment tasks that value interactive ability, and sustained teacher training that demystifies task design and management. Future research might track longer-term outcomes and explore technology-mediated CLT formats capable of enriching input and interaction opportunities beyond the classroom.

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