

Discussion of Communicative Language Teaching Approach

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Abstract

As an important language teaching approach, the core concept of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is to enhance communicative competence through interactive learning of the target language. It emphasizes the introduction of authentic texts and encourages learners to participate in the classroom with their personal experiences, making the learning process more focused and personalized. The merits of CLT lay a solid foundation for learners' future career development and social life. Although CLT also has some limitations, its remarkable effect in promoting communicative competence and personal development makes it one of the most important teaching approaches in language education nowadays.

Keywords

Communicative Language Teaching; EFL Teaching.

1. Introduction

As an approach to language teaching, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) puts the focus on the needs of learners, considerable interaction, and communication of "real" meaning. It is the communicative needs of learners that develop the framework for the program to form communicative competence. Besides, the sociocultural differences in learning styles are also a determinant of the program (Savignon, 2002). For further explanation, without ignoring teaching grammar and vocabulary, the core idea behind CLT is that language instruction emphasizes the study of meanings and functions of utterances in a variety of authentic contexts (Qasserras, 2023). The purpose of CLT is to facilitate learners to foster fluency and enhance communication skills across diverse environments by integrating grammar into meaningful contexts. Authentic resources are applied, and learners are motivated to actively participate in class discussions. Instead of being a person in control, the teacher plays the role of guide and facilitator.

This paper explores the historical background within which CLT was developed and elaborates on the features, merits, and limitations of CLT. The paper also gives implications in the English teaching profession.

2. Historical Background of CLT

The worldwide demand for language has created an enormous demand for quality language teaching. Learners set themselves high goals in learning it, and in turn, they expect teachers to provide excellent teaching (Richards, 2006).

The early methods or approaches give priority to the structure of language with the practice of drills and rehearsing speech acts. The principle is that language is acquired through habit formation and behavioral change which is the reason why they emphasize grammatical competence and view it as the basis of language proficiency. However, the priority of grammar in language teaching was questioned, since it was argued that language ability involved much more than grammatical competence (Richards, 2006). Linguists began to look at the language

itself, not as interlocking sets of grammatical, lexical, and phonological rules, but as expressing meaning (Nunan, 2003).

The origins of CLT are to be found in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s. At that time, the increasing interdependence of European countries required much more meaningful communication in the continent. Thus, together with the work of other applied linguists and teaching specialists in Britain, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged. Moreover, the Communicative Language Teaching approach was created in response to the realization that knowledge of grammatical forms and structures alone does not adequately prepare learners for effective and appropriate use of the language they are learning (Berns, 1990, p79). Born to make language teaching correspond with the communicative needs of learners, the CLT approach has been widely adopted in English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) classrooms worldwide (Liao&Zhao, 2012).

3. Discussion of CLT

Different from traditional approaches or methods, the CLT approach is characterized by flexibility and opportunities that learners can actively participate in authentic activities. In addition, teachers and learners view the CLT approach positively regarding its effectiveness in sustaining speaking skills in ESL classrooms despite the challenges faced (Hui & Yunus, 2023).

3.1. Features of CLT

Key features of CLT include the emphasis on meaning, communicative functions, authentic contexts, opportunities for interaction, fluency, and effective communication.

Nunan's (1991) five features of CLT include:

- (1) An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
- (2) The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
- (3) The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
- (4) An enhancement of the learner's own experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
- (5) An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom

The main features of CLT have been seen to revolve around learner-centered language learning and the development of learners' communicative competence through a variety of authentic activities.

3.2. Merits of CLT

According to Harmer (1988), the CLT approach offers many merits for both teachers and learners to seek to develop learners' language proficiency. Below are some of the possible merits.

- (1) The emphasis on improving communicative competence

The goal of CLT is the development of communicative competence, which includes both the knowledge about the language and the knowledge about how to use the language appropriately in communicative situations (Wang, 2006). This not only requires grammatical accuracy but also entails the capacity to comprehend and generate suitable language expressions in diverse contexts. Furthermore, real-life communication is highlighted as the means of developing learners' communicative competence involving learners in communication activities.

- (2) The development of cultural awareness

The CLT approach curricula explicitly teach learners about the values, beliefs, and customs of different cultures, which lays a good foundation for understanding both the language itself and the culture related to the target language. Additionally, CLT provides authentic materials, such as films, music, and literature, from different cultures to engage learners in the target culture. In this respect, learners participate in activities with peers from different cultures, sharing their perspectives learning from each other, reflecting on their experiences, noticing the cultural differences they encounter, and considering how these differences shape communication and interaction. Over time, this process of exposure and reflection leads to increased cultural awareness, as learners become more cognizant of the complexities and diversity of cultures. In turn, cultural awareness improves communication as individuals are better able to understand and adapt to the communication styles and norms of other cultures.

(3) The improvement of critical thinking ability

According to Hasibuan and Batubara (2012), the CLT approach is effective in improving learners' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Learners are provided with authentic materials or contexts that challenge them to analyze the language and content. They must dissect the information, identify the main details, and comprehend the fundamental meaning or concept. In addition, CLT also includes problem-solving activities that require learners to use language to figure out issues, propose solutions, and justify their choices. This process involves critical thinking skills such as creativity, decision-making, and critical analysis. By fostering critical thinking skills through interactive language activities and discussions, CLT prepares learners to become independent learners who can navigate complex situations and communicate effectively in a variety of contexts.

To conclude, the Communicative Language Teaching approach provides a learner-centered methodology for language instruction, which equips learners with the necessary skills for real-life communication and fosters their language proficiency purposefully and engagingly.

3.3. Limitations of CLT

No approach is without limitation. CLT is not without its problems and this has led to different critiques of the approach.

Firstly, the CLT approach emphasizes fluency over accuracy, which may contribute to the development of fossilized errors if accuracy-focused activities are neglected (Ellis, 2003). In addition, instead of balancing two factors of fluency and accuracy, CLT focuses too much on communicative competence while less emphasis is given to grammar and structure learning. It may be hard for learners to develop their reading and writing skills and perform well in written examinations.

Additionally, the CLT approach focuses on learner-centered learning, which means that teachers need to shift their role from traditional lecturers to facilitators and guides. Yu (2013) pointed out that teachers are expected to create a classroom atmosphere that promotes communication, motivating students to take an active role in discussions, role-playing exercises, and various interactive learning activities. This may lead to classroom chaos and difficulty in management, especially for large-scale classes. This requires teachers to have excellent classroom management skills, as well as the ability to engage and inspire learners. In a word, teachers need to have strong language proficiency, excellent classroom management skills, creativity, and a good understanding of language learning theories and teaching methodologies to effectively implement CLT in their classrooms.

It is critical to acknowledge potential constraints, such as the requirement for explicit instruction in language, the necessity for active production of language, and the acquisition of vocabulary. These factors have the potential to affect the overall effectiveness of language learning within the Communicative Language Teaching approach.

3.4. Implications of CLT for English Language Teaching

Firstly, in English language teaching, the authentic and appropriate learning materials should be taken into consideration. The CLT approach ensures that learners are immersed in authentic communicative tasks, thereby fostering their ability to communicate effectively for genuine purposes. Li (1989) suggested that the CLT approach emphasizes the authenticity of the language so that language materials used in teaching should be connected with real life and should be rich in content, with an emphasis on the introduction of different registers. Additionally, CLT puts the emphasis on interactive and collaborative learning activities, such as role-plays, discussions, and group work. Learners should be provided a variety of opportunities to participate in these activities with each other to develop their language skills in a natural way and make them prepared for further study. While difficult or inappropriate activities should be avoided since these activities may depress and frustrate learners who are not good at English. Therefore, meaningful contexts should be given to learners to make them feel safe and confident to actively express their opinions.

Secondly, learners' motivation and engagement should be enhanced. Differentiated from the traditional teacher-centered approaches, the CLT approach revolves around the idea of learner-centered principle, which endeavors to activate learners' motivation in language learning process. However, Wen (2011) pointed out that the learner-centered principle does not mean that learners completely dominate the whole class without the participation of the teacher. Hence, English teachers should act as guides and facilitators encouraging learners to actively engage in English language learning and to become creative English learners. Moreover, learners' own experiences should be enhanced as essential contributing elements to language learning. So that learners will be willing to actively participate in the communicative activities that are in line with their language proficiency.

Thirdly, performance-based assessment should be implemented in English language teaching. CLT emphasizes the assessment of learners' communicative skills, particularly speaking and listening. This shift away from traditional written exams ensures that learners' language proficiency is evaluated comprehensively. Additionally, assessment in CLT is often accompanied by detailed feedback and opportunities for reflection. Hu (2019) suggested that teachers should be patient with the mistakes that learners make and correct mistakes strategically and properly. It helps learners identify their strengths and weaknesses and plan for further improvement. Besides, teachers are expected to adapt their teaching strategies to cater to the needs of individual learners and to give proper feedback to them.

In summary, the CLT approach inspires English teachers to pay more attention to the use of authentic materials, the enhancement of learners' motivation, and the performance-based assessment.

4. Conclusion

Unlike language teaching methods that emphasize rote memorization and repetitive drills, CLT promotes active participation, authentic materials, and teacher roles as facilitators rather than controllers. Despite its merits, CLT also faces challenges and limitations. Implementing this approach requires careful planning, flexibility, and dedication on the part of teachers, who must constantly adapt to changing classroom dynamics. Communicative Language Teaching remains a valuable approach to language education, one that is grounded in the needs of learners and focused on fostering communication competence. While it may require additional effort and training for teachers, the benefits it brings to learners in terms of fluency, confidence, and real-world communication skills are invaluable. As language education continues to evolve, CLT will likely remain a cornerstone of effective language teaching.

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