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THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN DEVELOPING STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS

Akifa Abdullajonova Shuhrat qizi

3rd-Year Student, English Language Teaching, Philology and Language Teaching Department

Namangan State Institute of Foreign Languages, Uzbekistan

akifaabdullajonova@gmail.com

Abstract. Speaking is an important skill in learning English as a foreign language. However, many EFL learners find it difficult to express their ideas confidently and communicate fluently in English. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that focuses on communication and encourages students to use the language in real-life situations. This systematic literature review aims to explore the role of CLT in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. It focuses on the effectiveness of communicative activities, such as role-play, pair work, and group discussions, as well as the challenges teachers may face when using this approach. Relevant research studies will be reviewed to identify the main findings and understand how CLT can support speaking development. The review is expected to provide a better understanding of the benefits and limitations of CLT and offer useful insights for English language teachers.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, speaking skills, EFL learners, communicative activities, systematic literature review.

Introduction

English has become an important language for communication, education, and international cooperation. For this reason, learning English involves developing four main skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. Among these skills, speaking plays an important role because it allows learners to express their ideas, share information, and communicate with other people. However, many learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) experience difficulties in speaking. They may feel nervous when

speaking English, have limited vocabulary, or find it difficult to express their thoughts fluently.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that focuses on developing learners' communicative competence. Unlike traditional methods that mainly emphasize grammar rules and memorization, CLT encourages students to use English in meaningful and realistic situations. According to Canale and Swain (1980), communicative competence involves different aspects of language knowledge and the ability to use language appropriately in communication. In the classroom, CLT can include activities such as role-play, pair work, group discussions, interviews, and information-gap tasks. These activities provide learners with opportunities to practise speaking, exchange ideas, and interact with others.

The use of CLT may help learners become more confident and improve their speaking fluency and communicative ability. Through regular interaction, students can practise expressing their opinions, asking questions, and responding to different situations. Nevertheless, implementing CLT can also be challenging. Large class sizes, limited lesson time, students' low confidence, and insufficient opportunities to use English outside the classroom may affect the effectiveness of communicative activities. Therefore, it is important to understand both the potential benefits of CLT and the factors that influence its implementation.

Although CLT has received considerable attention in English language teaching, it is necessary to examine the available research specifically related to EFL learners' speaking skills. A systematic review can help bring together findings from different studies, identify common patterns, and highlight areas that require further investigation.

The aim of this systematic literature review is to examine the role of Communicative Language Teaching in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. Specifically, the review addresses the following research questions:

How does Communicative Language Teaching influence EFL learners' speaking skills?

Which communicative classroom activities are associated with improvements in EFL learners' speaking performance?

What challenges and contextual factors affect the implementation of CLT for speaking development?

This study adopts a systematic review approach to synthesize empirical research on CLT conducted in EFL contexts. The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) 2020 guidelines to ensure methodological transparency and rigor (Page et al., 2021). Following the PRISMA 2020 framework, the review consisted of three main phases: identification, screening, and inclusion. Relevant studies were identified through systematic searches of Scopus and Google Scholar. The search was conducted using combinations of keywords such as "Communicative Language Teaching" OR "CLT", "EFL classroom" OR "EFL context", "effectiveness" OR "impact", "implementation" OR "challenges", and "English proficiency" OR "language skills". Only peer-reviewed empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025 were considered. During the screening phase, titles and abstracts were first examined to exclude studies that were not related to CLT in EFL contexts. Studies were excluded if they did not focus on classroom implementation of CLT, were purely theoretical or conceptual, or did not involve EFL learners or teachers. The remaining articles were then subjected to full-text eligibility assessment. Only studies that explicitly examined the pedagogical effectiveness of CLT, its impact on students' English proficiency, or challenges in its implementation were included in the final review.

The PRISMA flow diagram (Fig. 1) summarizes the study selection process. A total of 1,153 studies were initially retrieved from the Scopus database, with an additional 37 identified through reference list screening, resulting in 1,190 records overall. After removing 628 duplicates, 562 studies were screened by title and abstract. Following this, 265 articles met the inclusion criteria and were retained for full-text analysis. All 265 studies were included in the final synthesis, which examined the application and

effectiveness of various input-based instructional (IBI) techniques for improving EFL learners' speaking proficiency.

Results

The Effect of Communicative Language Teaching on Speaking Skills

The reviewed studies indicate that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can contribute to the development of EFL learners' speaking skills. Akdağ-Çimen and Çeşme (2022) conducted a quasi-experimental study involving 56 Turkish second-grade students. The researchers compared CLT with Total Physical Response (TPR) and measured learners' speaking anxiety, oral proficiency, and vocabulary knowledge. The findings showed that students in the CLT group made significant improvements in oral proficiency. Their mean speaking score increased from 9.00 before the intervention to 13.69 after the intervention. These findings suggest that CLT can help young learners improve their ability to communicate in English.

Similarly, Adem and Berkessa (2022) examined English teachers' classroom practices related to CLT principles. Their qualitative case study involved four English teachers and classroom observations. The findings highlighted differences between the principles of CLT and actual classroom practices. Although teachers used speaking activities, their classroom implementation did not always fully reflect the communicative approach. This suggests that the effectiveness of CLT depends not only on the activities selected but also on how they are implemented.

The reviewed studies also identified several challenges that may limit the effective implementation of CLT. Adem and Berkessa (2022) found that learner-related factors played an important role in speaking lessons. These included limited background knowledge, insufficient experience in speaking activities, fear of making mistakes, low interest in speaking, and the use of the mother tongue during pair and group work. Curriculum-related and environmental factors also influenced teachers' classroom practices.

In addition, Al Asmari (2015) investigated the challenges faced by English

teachers at Taif University in Saudi Arabia. The study collected questionnaire data from 100 teachers. The findings identified several barriers to implementing CLT, including insufficient teacher training, limited access to teaching resources, students' low English proficiency, lack of motivation, and difficulties associated with examination systems and the assessment of communicative competence. These findings indicate that successful implementation requires appropriate teacher preparation, suitable learning materials, and assessment methods that support communication.

Speaking Anxiety and Vocabulary Development

Another important finding concerns the relationship between communicative teaching and learners' confidence. Akdağ-Çimen and Çeşme (2022) reported that speaking anxiety decreased in both the CLT and TPR groups following the teaching intervention. However, the reduction in anxiety within each group was not statistically significant. Therefore, the results suggest a possible improvement in learners' comfort when speaking, but they do not provide sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that CLT significantly reduced speaking anxiety in this study.

The researchers also reported improvements in vocabulary knowledge in both groups. Nevertheless, the overall findings should be interpreted in the context of the comparison between CLT and TPR rather than as evidence that CLT is more effective than every other teaching method.

Summary of the Findings

Overall, the three studies suggest that CLT can support the development of speaking skills, particularly oral proficiency, but its effectiveness is influenced by classroom conditions and learners' needs. The findings highlight the importance of providing regular opportunities for meaningful communication while addressing learners' confidence, language proficiency, and motivation. They also demonstrate that teachers need appropriate training, adequate resources, and assessment practices that value communicative competence. However, because the reviewed studies differ in their research designs, participants, and educational contexts, their findings should be

interpreted cautiously.

Discussion

The findings of this review suggest that Communicative Language Teaching can play an important role in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. The reviewed studies indicate that communicative activities provide learners with opportunities to practise English, express their ideas, and interact with others. These opportunities are important because speaking is a practical skill that requires regular use of language in meaningful situations.

The findings also show that the effectiveness of CLT depends on how it is implemented in the classroom. Although communicative activities may encourage students to participate in speaking tasks, their effectiveness can be limited by low confidence, fear of making mistakes, limited vocabulary, and insufficient language proficiency. Therefore, teachers need to create a supportive classroom environment in which students feel comfortable expressing their ideas and learning from their mistakes.

Another important issue is the role of teachers and educational institutions. The reviewed research highlights challenges such as limited teaching resources, insufficient teacher training, large classes, and examination systems that may place greater emphasis on grammar than communication. These factors suggest that successful CLT implementation requires more than simply using pair work or group discussions. Teachers also need appropriate training, clear learning objectives, and assessment methods that recognize students' communicative abilities.

The findings concerning speaking anxiety should be interpreted carefully. Although some learners showed lower anxiety after instructional interventions, the evidence does not establish that CLT always reduces speaking anxiety significantly. Similarly, improvements in oral proficiency should not automatically be interpreted as proof that CLT is more effective than every alternative teaching method.

This review has some limitations. The selected studies differ in their participants, educational settings, research designs, and teaching activities. In addition, the limited

number of studies considered in the current analysis may restrict the generalizability of the findings. Future research should examine CLT in different EFL contexts, include larger and more diverse samples, and investigate the long-term effects of communicative activities on speaking fluency, accuracy, confidence, and interaction.

Conclusion

This review examined the role of Communicative Language Teaching in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. The findings suggest that CLT can support oral proficiency by providing opportunities for meaningful communication and active participation in the classroom. Activities such as pair work, role-play, and group discussions may help learners practise expressing their ideas and interacting in English. However, the effectiveness of CLT depends on several factors, including students' language proficiency, confidence, teacher preparation, classroom conditions, and practices. Challenges such as limited resources, insufficient training, and fear of making mistakes may reduce students' participation in communicative activities. In conclusion, CLT can be a useful approach to speaking development when it is adapted to learners' needs and supported by an appropriate learning environment. English language teachers should provide regular opportunities for communication, encourage participation, and create a supportive atmosphere for speaking practice. Further research is needed to investigate the effectiveness of CLT across different educational contexts and to identify the most effective ways of implementing communicative activities.

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