

Enhancing English Learning Outcomes through Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): A Targeted Intervention in a Private College in Northern Mindanao



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ABSTRACT: This study explores how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can address identified learning gaps in English proficiency among students at a private college in Northern Mindanao. The research investigates students' difficulties in applying communication models, analyzing reading materials, and composing structured academic papers. Employing a qualitative research design, data was collected through focus group discussions, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that CLT significantly improves students' engagement, confidence, and comprehension, particularly in applying communication theories, structuring written outputs, and critical reading. The study proposes an intervention program integrating CLT principles to enhance language instruction effectiveness. This research contributes to English language pedagogy by demonstrating CLT's applicability in improving core competencies and fostering communicative competence among students in higher education.

KEYWORDS: Communicative Language Teaching, English Language Proficiency, Language Instruction, Higher Education, Learning Outcomes

INTRODUCTION

English proficiency remains a crucial determinant of academic and professional success. However, many students in higher education institutions struggle to achieve the necessary language skills for effective communication, particularly in critical reading, structured writing, and the application of communication theories in practical scenarios (Zhang & Liu, 2023; Richards, 2022). Despite existing efforts to enhance English instruction, traditional pedagogical approaches often fail to foster active learning and meaningful engagement among students. Lecture-based methods emphasize grammar and theoretical knowledge at the expense of communicative competence, resulting in a significant gap between theoretical understanding and real-world application (Johnson & Smith, 2023; Brown, 2022).

Recent studies highlight the persistent difficulties of English language learners (ELLs) in academic settings, emphasizing their struggles with reading comprehension, text analysis, and oral communication (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2022; Al-Mamari, 2021). Many learners exhibit limited engagement with communicative tasks, which hinders their ability to develop confidence and fluency in using the language (Gan, 2023). Moreover, research suggests that the gap in language proficiency among students is exacerbated by limited opportunities for authentic communication in the classroom (Teh, 2023).

This study investigates how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can bridge these learning gaps by offering a student-centered approach that emphasizes real-life communication, critical thinking, and collaborative learning. CLT prioritizes interaction and engagement, enabling students to develop fluency and confidence through practical application (Dos Santos, 2020). By integrating CLT strategies into English instruction, this research examines its effectiveness in improving students' ability to analyze texts, apply communication theories, and produce structured academic writing.

Research Framework

This study is anchored on two primary theoretical frameworks: Communicative Language Teaching (Brumfit & Johnson, 1979; Littlewood, 1981) and Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory (1986). CLT emphasizes real-life communication, student-centered activities, and fluency over accuracy, making it an effective approach for improving language proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 2023). It supports language acquisition by encouraging learners to actively engage in communicative tasks that mimic real-world interactions, enhancing both fluency and confidence (Qian, 2023). The framework of CLT aligns with contemporary language learning needs, particularly in bridging the gap between theoretical language knowledge and practical application in academic and professional settings.

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Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Theory underscores the importance of social interaction in learning, advocating for scaffolded instruction that gradually transitions students toward independent competence (Vygotsky, 1986; Qian, 2023). According to this theory, learning occurs through meaningful social exchanges, where students develop linguistic proficiency within their zone of proximal development (Lantolf & Thorne, 2023). By integrating CLT principles with scaffolded learning strategies, this study aims to assess how students can achieve communicative competence through structured yet flexible instructional methodologies. Together, these frameworks provide the foundation for evaluating CLT's effectiveness in enhancing students' linguistic and analytical abilities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has consistently demonstrated its effectiveness in fostering language proficiency among learners. CLT emphasizes interactive and task-based learning, which encourages students to actively participate in communication-based activities (Richards, 2022; Larsen-Freeman, 2023). According to recent studies, the shift from traditional grammar-focused instruction to communicative-based methodologies significantly enhances students' ability to engage in authentic conversations and apply linguistic knowledge in real-world contexts (Ellis, 2023; Gan, 2023). This transition aligns with contemporary language acquisition theories, which highlight the importance of meaningful interaction in developing language fluency and comprehension.

Several studies underscore the importance of communicative competence in academic and professional settings, noting that students who are exposed to CLT-based instruction demonstrate higher levels of confidence and engagement (Johnson & Smith, 2023; Brown, 2022). Task-based learning, a core principle of CLT, enables students to develop problem-solving and critical thinking skills while using language in context (Dos Santos, 2020). Research findings indicate that task-based communicative activities facilitate deeper cognitive processing and improve retention of linguistic structures (Al-Mamari, 2021). These insights highlight the need for integrating communicative approaches into English curricula to address students' persistent challenges in language acquisition.

Despite its benefits, the implementation of CLT presents certain challenges, particularly in large classrooms with diverse proficiency levels (Teh, 2023; Qasserras, 2023). Teachers often struggle with balancing communicative activities with structured language instruction, especially when assessment frameworks prioritize grammatical accuracy over communicative competence (Lantolf & Thorne, 2023). Addressing these issues requires tailored pedagogical interventions that ensure communicative activities are scaffolded appropriately to accommodate learners' needs.

Recent studies suggest that technology-enhanced CLT models can further improve student engagement and language learning outcomes (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Digital platforms facilitate collaborative learning, providing students with interactive opportunities to practice language skills beyond the classroom setting. This research builds on existing literature by examining how CLT can be effectively adapted to address specific learning deficiencies in higher education institutions and contribute to the development of communicative competence among English language learners.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research design was employed to capture in-depth insights into how CLT strategies influence students' language learning experiences. The study was conducted at a private college in Northern Mindanao, involving English language instructors and students enrolled in communication-related courses. A total of 100 students and three English instructors were selected through stratified sampling.

Data was collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) with teachers and students, semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans, student outputs, and assessment tools. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns and assess the impact of CLT on language acquisition.

Results and Discussion

The findings reveal that CLT significantly improves students' ability to apply communication models, critically analyze texts, and structure academic writing (Tweedie & Johnson, 2023). Students who participated in CLT-based lessons demonstrated higher levels of engagement and comprehension. Studies suggest that CLT fosters an interactive learning environment that allows students to process information more effectively and apply communication theories in authentic contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2022). By actively engaging in communicative tasks, students were able to develop stronger analytical skills and demonstrate greater confidence in oral and written discourse (Brown, 2023).

Further analysis of classroom interactions showed that students exposed to CLT techniques exhibited enhanced problem-solving abilities and critical thinking skills. Research indicates that CLT-based instruction encourages collaborative learning, which enables students to articulate their thoughts clearly and evaluate different perspectives in discussions (Larsen-Freeman, 2023). This aligns with findings from Dos Santos (2022), which suggest that student-centered approaches lead to higher retention rates and improved cognitive engagement. The integration of CLT has also been found to reduce anxiety associated with traditional grammar-heavy instruction, making students more willing to participate actively in classroom activities (Al-Mamari, 2022).

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Another key finding is that CLT positively influences students' ability to structure academic writing. Studies have demonstrated that learners engaged in CLT-based activities develop stronger writing coherence and organization due to frequent exposure to authentic language input and communicative writing exercises (Harmer, 2023). Instructors observed that students who engaged in dialogue-driven assignments produced more structured essays and research papers, demonstrating a clear application of rhetorical structures and logical flow (Ellis, 2023). These findings highlight CLT's role in fostering written communication skills that are essential for academic success.

Moreover, the impact of CLT extends beyond the classroom, as students demonstrated improved real-world communication skills. Research by Qian (2023) indicates that students who develop fluency through interactive tasks are better prepared for professional and social interactions. Instructors reported that CLT-trained students were more adept at participating in discussions, expressing opinions confidently, and engaging in structured debates (Teh, 2023). These findings underscore CLT's potential to bridge the gap between theoretical language learning and practical language application in diverse contexts.

Overall, the study affirms the effectiveness of CLT in fostering a comprehensive language learning experience that integrates speaking, reading, writing, and critical thinking. The positive outcomes observed in student performance align with existing research advocating for communicative-based instruction as an alternative to rote memorization and teacher-centered approaches (Zhang & Liu, 2023). Moving forward, continued exploration of CLT's long-term impact on language proficiency can further refine instructional strategies to enhance student learning outcomes across different educational settings.

CONCLUSION

The study confirms that CLT is an effective strategy for improving English proficiency in higher education. By addressing identified learning gaps, CLT fosters a more engaging and interactive learning environment, leading to improved fluency, comprehension, and critical thinking skills. The communicative approach encourages student participation, allowing them to actively construct knowledge through meaningful interactions. Findings indicate that students who engage in CLT-based instruction exhibit stronger language retention, more structured writing abilities, and greater confidence in oral communication. Furthermore, the study demonstrates that CLT's emphasis on authentic communication enhances learners' ability to navigate real-world language use, fostering their adaptability in academic and professional settings.

Beyond linguistic gains, CLT supports a holistic learning experience by promoting collaborative learning and critical thinking. The integration of interactive activities enables students to refine their analytical skills while developing social competence. Instructors observed that students exposed to CLT demonstrated increased motivation and engagement, leading to a deeper understanding of language structures and their practical applications. Despite these benefits, challenges such as classroom size, time constraints, and assessment limitations must be considered for more effective implementation. Future research may explore long-term effects of CLT in various educational contexts and its adaptability to different learning needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations may be considered to enhance the implementation of CLT in higher education. First, institutions may invest in professional development programs to equip educators with the necessary skills to effectively apply CLT methodologies. Continuous training may support teachers in designing communicative activities that align with curriculum goals and student needs.

Second, curriculum design may integrate CLT principles more explicitly by incorporating interactive lessons, collaborative projects, and real-world simulations. Course syllabi may prioritize communicative competence alongside grammatical accuracy to ensure balanced language development.

Third, educators may explore innovative assessment methods that align with CLT principles. Traditional written examinations may be complemented with performance-based assessments, such as oral presentations, dialogues, and peer evaluations, to accurately measure students' communicative competence.

Fourth, institutions may consider reducing class sizes or implementing a structured grouping strategy to optimize student engagement in CLT activities. Smaller learning groups may encourage more meaningful interactions and personalized feedback from instructors.

Finally, further research may investigate the long-term impact of CLT on students' academic and professional success. Longitudinal studies may provide insights into how communicative competence gained through CLT influences career readiness and language proficiency beyond the classroom.

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