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COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN EFL CLASSROOMS: BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

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Abstract. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one of the most influential approaches in modern foreign language education, emphasizing communication as both the means and the goal of language learning. This article examines the theoretical foundations of CLT and explores its benefits and challenges in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Using a qualitative review of pedagogical literature and classroom-based evidence, the study highlights how CLT promotes communicative competence, learner interaction, and meaningful language use. At the same time, it identifies key challenges related to teacher preparedness, classroom conditions, assessment practices, and contextual constraints. The article argues that while CLT offers significant advantages for EFL teaching, its effectiveness depends on informed adaptation rather than rigid implementation.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, EFL, communicative competence, language pedagogy, classroom practice

1. Introduction

Over the past several decades, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has played a central role in shaping language teaching theory and practice. Emerging as a reaction against grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods, CLT emphasizes the functional and communicative use of language rather than the memorization of grammatical rules. The primary goal of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence, enabling them to use the target language effectively and appropriately in real-life situations.

In EFL contexts, where learners often have limited exposure to English outside the classroom, the adoption of CLT has been both promising and problematic. While CLT encourages interaction and learner participation, its implementation is often constrained by institutional, cultural, and methodological factors. Many teachers struggle to balance communicative activities with the demands of exams, large class sizes, and rigid curricula.

The purpose of this article is to examine CLT from both theoretical and practical perspectives. Specifically, it aims to (1) outline the theoretical foundations of CLT, (2) analyze its pedagogical benefits in EFL classrooms, and (3) discuss the main challenges teachers face when implementing CLT in practice.

2. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative literature-based methodology. A range of authoritative sources, including books, peer-reviewed journal articles, and methodological studies on CLT and EFL teaching, were reviewed and analyzed. The selection of sources focused on works addressing communicative competence, classroom interaction, task-based learning, and challenges of CLT implementation in non-native English contexts.

The analysis involved synthesizing key theoretical concepts and identifying recurring themes related to the advantages and limitations of CLT. Classroom examples commonly reported in EFL literature are used to illustrate how CLT principles operate in real teaching contexts. No primary empirical data were collected; instead, the study aims to provide a coherent and critical overview of existing research.

3. Results

The literature review reveals several significant findings regarding the role of CLT in EFL classrooms.

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First, CLT is strongly grounded in the concept of communicative competence, which includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. Unlike traditional approaches, CLT views language as a tool for communication rather than a system of isolated structures.

Second, CLT promotes learner interaction through pair work, group work, role-plays, information-gap activities, and task-based learning. These activities create opportunities for meaningful language use and encourage learners to negotiate meaning, which is essential for language development.

Third, CLT increases learner motivation and engagement. When students participate in communicative tasks that resemble real-life situations, they tend to show greater interest and confidence in using the target language.

However, the results also indicate several challenges. Teachers often report difficulties in managing communicative activities in large classes, maintaining target-language use, and ensuring accuracy alongside fluency. Additionally, limited teaching resources and insufficient teacher training hinder effective CLT implementation.

4. Discussion

The findings suggest that CLT offers clear pedagogical benefits, particularly in developing speaking and listening skills. In EFL contexts, where learners may lack authentic exposure to English, communicative activities help simulate real communication and foster practical language use.

Nevertheless, the challenges identified in the literature highlight the need for contextual adaptation. One major issue is the mismatch between CLT principles and exam-oriented education systems, which often prioritize grammatical accuracy and written tests. As a result, teachers may feel pressured to revert to teacher-centered instruction.

Another concern relates to teacher competence. Effective CLT requires teachers to design meaningful tasks, manage interaction, and provide appropriate feedback. Without adequate training, teachers may misunderstand CLT as the absence of grammar instruction, leading to unstructured lessons and limited learning outcomes.

To address these challenges, a balanced approach is recommended. Integrating form-focused instruction within communicative activities can help maintain linguistic accuracy while preserving communicative goals. Moreover, professional development programs should equip teachers with practical strategies for implementing CLT in diverse classroom contexts.

5. Conclusion

Communicative Language Teaching remains a powerful and influential approach in EFL education. Its emphasis on meaningful communication, learner interaction, and real-world language use aligns well with the goals of modern language teaching and CEFR-based frameworks.

This article has demonstrated that while CLT offers substantial benefits, its successful implementation depends on teacher expertise, institutional support, and contextual sensitivity. Rather than adopting CLT as a fixed method, educators should view it as a flexible framework that can be adapted to local needs and constraints. Future research could focus on empirical studies examining how hybrid models of communicative and form-focused instruction affect learner outcomes in specific EFL contexts.

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