

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN IMPROVING SPEAKING SKILLS OF TERTIARY LEVEL EFL STUDENTS OF BANGLADESH

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ABSTRACT

In the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, students must be given a proper foundation of communication skills necessary in various dynamic real-world situations. This study investigates learner perception of the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in improving the speaking skills of tertiary-level EFL students in Bangladesh. A mixed-methods approach was used to collect and analyze data from 30 students, of different private universities of Bangladesh. The data was gathered by analyzing the results from the survey. The results of the study showed there was a statistically significant improvement in the speaking skills of EFL students after the CLT intervention. The students demonstrated an increase in fluency and complexity in their speaking performance. Furthermore, findings revealed that the students had positive perceptions of CLT and found it effective in enhancing their speaking skills. The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the benefits of using CLT as a teaching method in EFL environments. This suggests the importance of incorporating communicative and interactive activities in language classrooms to promote language learning and student engagement.

Keywords: Speaking Skills, CLT EFL Students, Communication, Improving, Communicative Competence

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing need for fluent communication skills in today's globalized world. Millions of people speak English as a second or foreign language, and it has been recognized as the world's language (Crystal, 2003). English language proficiency is considered an essential skill, and its importance has been recognized by many countries, including Bangladesh. Teaching foreign languages is becoming increasingly challenging in today's globalized world due to the demand for fluent communication skills. The students need to receive a solid foundation of communication skills that are required in various interactive real-world situations outside of the classroom. Language teachers throughout the world have taken into consideration the effectiveness of communicative teaching methods as a point of discussion in the current era.

This study aims to address CLT's effectiveness in speaking skills in EFL classrooms in Bangladesh. The study also aims to explore the students' perceptions of CLT and its impact

on their speaking performance. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to the development of effective language teaching methods in Bangladesh and promote the use of CLT in EFL classrooms.

In the 1980s, communicative language teaching emerged as a response to the growing need for a language curriculum that enables learners to use a second or foreign language in a real-life context. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT began with a theory of language as communication, with the aim of developing the communication communicative competence of students. A central component of CLT is communication. “Communicative language teaching can be understood as a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom” (Richards, 2006, p.6). By using repetitive oral practices and student-to-student cooperation, communicative language teaching methods prepare students to be confident communicators in different real-life contexts.

Interaction among students is crucial when implementing a communicative teaching method. Richards and Schmidt (2013) explained that a communicative language approach is used in teaching foreign or second languages. The goal of language learning is emphasized as communicative competence, focusing classroom activities on meaningful communication and language use. Eventually, the main goal of language is to facilitate communication. The interaction that takes place in a classroom-based foreign language course or online language learning session, where students spend the majority of the class period speaking and interacting in the target language, is the main focus of CLT. The effectiveness of CLT has been widely researched in various language skills, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing, and has been discovered to be more successful than traditional methods of helping students improve their language skills.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Improving Speaking Skills through Communicative Competence

According to Chaney & Burk (1998), Speaking is the process of building and sharing meaning in a range of contexts by using both verbal and nonverbal symbols. In recent years, it has been recognized that the aim of teaching speaking skills is to improve students' communication abilities so they may express themselves freely and interact with others in an effective manner (Kayi, 2012). The importance of establishing communicative competence is emphasized in the CLT approach. Hymes (1979) stated it as communicative competence; “the ability to use linguistic knowledge of language appropriately in a variety of social situations” p. 3. Enhancing practical communication ability requires the integration of productive (speaking & writing) skills (Boonkit, 2010). According to Zaremba (2006), speaking is the skill needed for communication. Rather than being a teaching method with an apparent and well-defined record of classroom activities, CLT is classified as a broad approach to teaching foreign languages (Banciu & Jireghie, 2012). Hymes emphasizes the significance of communicative ability (as cited in Dos Santos, 2020). According to the author, this word describes the knowledge and skills a learner requires to be able to utilize a target

language within a specific language group. Therefore, the primary purpose of CLT is to improve the communication abilities of learners, which enable them to communicate effectively in a foreign language (Halliday, 1975).

Bangladeshi EFL Context

Teaching English as a Foreign Language (EFL) presents several challenges, especially in developing countries like Bangladesh, where the traditional Grammar Translation Method is still prevalent in language classrooms. GTM mainly focuses on grammatical rules, memorization of vocabulary, and translation exercises, which fall short of giving students the linguistic skills they need to interact successfully in everyday situations. When teachers are expected to teach and implement a CLT curriculum, (Ali, Hamid, & Hardy, 2018; Rahman, Sing, & Pandian, 2018), it is noticed that following GTM earlier had a strong influence on them (Begum & Farooqui, 2008). Traditionally foreign language teaching has focused on grammatical competence, rather than developing students' communication and interaction skills. Whereas the current curriculum of Bangladesh requires the four main language skills should be taught with equal emphasis. It will help students to “use the competence for effective communication in real-life situations” (NCTB, 2012: p. 74).

Since British colonial rule, English has dominated higher education in Bangladesh as a medium of instruction (EMI). “English will remain as a medium of instruction in higher education along with Bangla” according to the national education policy. (Education Ministry, 2010: 24). Though the introduction of the Private University Act of 1992, does not address language or the medium of instruction, most of the universities have adopted English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) by default.

In 1995, Bangladesh's Ministry of Education adopted an English curriculum based on communicative competence. Developing the students' communication skills is the goal of the current curriculum. In fact, the National Education Commission (NEC) of 2003 observed that the education sector is “on the verge of a disaster” due to the lack of a definitive language policy (Rahman, 2010. p. 93). As a result, there is a growing need to adopt more effective and innovative teaching methods prioritizing communication and interaction in language classrooms. In addition to having few opportunities to speak English outside of the classroom (Zhang, 2009), EFL students also rarely get the chance to interact with English speakers (Boonkit, 2010). NCTB (2012) recommends that “class activities should be varied. Learners’ attention can be drawn through discussions, group works, story writing, drawing, debates, role-play, practical work, question answer, demonstrations” p. 17.

The University Grants Commission (UGC) of Bangladesh is the main organization overseeing higher education in Bangladesh. The University Grants Commission (UGC) must ensure equity and quality among these diverse entities while respecting their autonomy and diversity (Zaman, 2023). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is one such method that has grown in popularity recently. Therefore, the present scene is changing gradually. According to Hamid and Baldauf Jr. (2008), students in Bangladesh “are taught English communicatively using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology” officially. BD curriculum implies “creativity and critical thinking through English language” (NCTB, 2012: p. 74) should be developed.

METHODS

The selected participants fell within the age range of 18 to 22 years old and were undergraduate students. The study employed a targeted approach in which a questionnaire was distributed both physically and electronically (via Google Docs forms through emails). Purposeful sampling was utilized to select the study's target population, and subsequently, 30 respondents were chosen using the convenience sampling method. This method was adopted as it facilitated the inclusion of participants who were readily willing to contribute to the study. The majority of them agreed to take part in the research. All participants shared Bengali as their first language, and they were in the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). This focused and diverse participant group aimed to provide comprehensive insights into the learner perception dynamics within the tertiary level EFL context in Bangladesh concerning the enhancement of speaking skills through CLT.

A mixed method has been adopted to interpret the results according to the research needs to achieve the research objectives. To investigate, a 15-item questionnaire survey was formulated among 30 participants. A systematic sampling approach was employed to identify and engage participants from various tertiary-level educational institutions. The sampling pool was drawn from different private universities in Bangladesh, providing a diverse representation of tertiary-level EFL students. The e-questionnaire was filled out by participants who enthusiastically submitted their responses. This sampling strategy aimed to capture a refined understanding of learner perceptions regarding speaking skill enhancement through CLT in the context of tertiary-level EFL education in Bangladesh.

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Table 1. Students' Experiences and Perceptions of CLT (items 1.1-1.4)

SL	Questions	Yes	No
		Percentage (%)	
1.1	Have you ever received formal instruction in English speaking skills before enrolling at your University?	33.3	66.7
1.2	Have you ever experienced CLT in any of your language classes?	73.3	26.7
1.3	Do you think that CLT has helped improve your speaking skills in English?	96.4	3.6
1.4	Will you recommend CLT as a language teaching approach to other language learners?	100	0

The participants were asked in item no. 1.1 if they have received any formal instruction in English speaking skills before enrolling at their Universities. The majority of the participants (66.7%) answered they did not have. Although their NCTB board books were designed in the CLT approach, very few students get proper instructions, focused on listening and speaking skills. Most of the secondary and higher secondary educators focus on reading and writing instead. As a result, students lack formal instruction on speaking skills. However, 33.3% of participants answered they had received speaking skills

instructions before entering the tertiary level, which indicates that, some educators of secondary and higher secondary level still focus on speaking skills in their classrooms.

In item number 1.2 the students were asked if they had ever experienced CLT in any of their language classes. The majority of the students (73.3%) answered that they got the experience of CLT in their language classes. It signifies that the students are familiar with the teaching and learning method. When the students were asked if CLT had helped them improve their speaking skills in English in item no 1.3, the majority of them answered (96.4%) positively, which manifests that this method is beneficial for English-speaking skills. On account of this when they were asked in item no 1.4 if they would recommend CLT as a language teaching and learning approach to other language learners 100% of the participants answered positively. It signifies that the learners find CLT an advantageous learning method for speaking skills.

Table 2: Students' Insights of CLT (percentage) items 2.1-2.9

SL	Items	SA	A	N	D	SD
		Percentages (%)				
2.1	My preferred method of learning English is through group or pair interaction tasks (role plays, conversations, dialogues).	23.3	60	10	3.3	3.3
2.2	I believe that the most efficient and common way to communicate in day-to-day circumstances is through oral English conversation.	40	43.3	10	6.7	0
2.3	Based on how I performed in my English oral presentation, my teacher tells me what I did correctly or incorrectly and what I need to improve on.	13.3	70	10	6.7	0
2.4	Instead of grammatical explication, oral communication should be the main focus of the class activities.	33.3	36.7	16.7	3.3	10
2.5	My classroom experience of CLT as a language learning method was beneficial for my speaking skills.	33.3	40.7	25.9	0	0
2.6	Do you agree/disagree that CLT has improved your ability to understand and use English in different social and cultural contexts?	20	60	13.3	3.3	3.3
2.7	How much do you agree that CLT has encouraged you to take more risks and experiment with new ways of expressing yourself in English?	16.7	60	23.3	0	0
2.8	I think the CLT method helped me to develop my listening and speaking skills simultaneously.	30	36.7	16.7	13.3	3.3
2.9	Overall, I feel positive about CLT as a language-learning approach in the classroom.	73.3	13.3	13.3	0	0

In Table 2, SA - strongly agree, A – agree, N- neutral, D – disagree, SD - strongly disagree.

Table 3: Students' Insights of CLT (Mean & Standard Deviation) item 2.1-2.9

Item No.	1 (%)	2 (%)	3 (%)	4 (%)	5 (%)	Mean	SD
2.1	23.3	60	10	3.3	3.3	3.97	1.11
2.2	40	43.3	10	6.7	0	4.17	1.35
2.3	13.3	70	10	6.7	0	3.90	1.08
2.4	33.3	36.7	16.7	3.3	10	3.80	1.37
2.5	33.3	40.7	25.9	0	0	4.07	1.18
2.6	20	60	13.3	3.3	3.3	3.90	1.11
2.7	16.7	60	23.3	0	0	3.93	1.19
2.8	30	36.7	16.7	13.3	3.3	3.77	1.33
2.9	73.3	13.3	13.3	0	0	4.60	1.22

In Table 3, a five-point Likert scale was used for item no. 2.1 to 2.9, in which 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree.

In item 2.1, the majority of the students (60%) prefer learning English through group or pair interaction tasks such as role plays, conversations, and dialogues, indicating a strong inclination towards the CLT method. In item no 2.2, 43.3% of students believe that the most efficient and common way to communicate in day-to-day circumstances is through oral English conversation. 70% of the students agreed with the statement in item no 2.3, which states that based on how they performed in their English oral presentation, their teacher tells them what they did correctly or incorrectly and what they need to improve on. In item no 2.4, most of the students (36.7%) agreed to the statement that, instead of grammatical explication, oral communication should be the main focus of the class activities. While the majority support oral communication as the main focus, a significant minority still see value in grammatical instruction.

In item no 2.5, a large number of students (40.7%) experienced CLT as a beneficial language learning method for their speaking skills in the classrooms. Notably, no students disagreed or strongly disagreed, underscoring the perceived effectiveness of CLT among the participants. When the students were asked if they agreed/disagreed that CLT has improved their ability to understand and use English in different social and cultural contexts, in item no 2.6, the majority of the students (60%) agreed. In item 2.7, a significant majority of students (60%) agree that CLT has encouraged them to take more risks and experiment with new ways of expressing themselves in English.

In item no 2.8, a significant number of students (36.7%) agreed that the CLT method helped them develop their listening and speaking skills simultaneously. Additionally, 30% of the students strongly agreed with this statement, further emphasizing the effectiveness of CLT in fostering dual-skill development. However, 16.7% of the students were neutral, indicating some variability in individual experiences. A smaller percentage (13.3%) disagreed, and a minority (3.3%) strongly disagreed, suggesting that while CLT generally supports the simultaneous development of listening and speaking skills, it may not equally

benefit all students. In item no 2.9, the majority of students (73.3%) expressed a positive overall sentiment towards CLT as a language-learning approach in the classroom. Additionally, 13.3% of students strongly agreed with this statement, highlighting a generally favorable reception of CLT. However, another 13.3% of students were neutral, indicating that while the overall response was positive, some students might have had mixed experiences.

Moreover, the absence of any negative responses (0% in the "Strongly Disagree" and "Disagree" categories) suggests a high level of satisfaction and acceptance of CLT principles among the students surveyed. Overall, these results highlight the positive impact of CLT on students' language learning experiences and their willingness to engage in active communication and experimentation.

Chart 1. Rating English speaking skills before CLT intervention

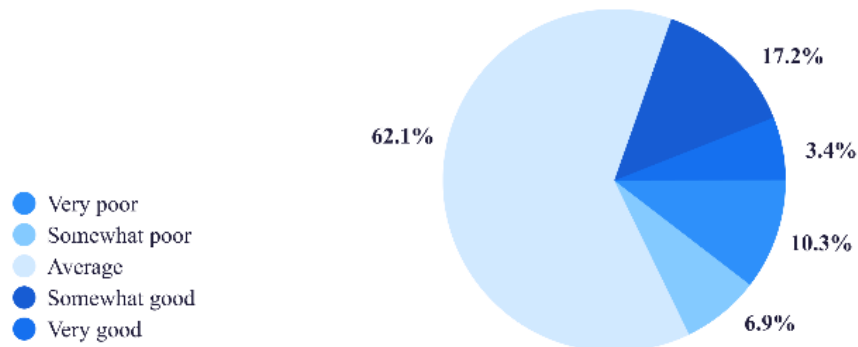


Chart 1 shows the results of item no 3.1, when the participants were asked to rate their speaking skills in English before the CLT intervention, the majority of students (62.1%) considered their skills to be average. Additionally, 17.2% rated their speaking skills as somewhat good, while 10.3% rated them as very poor. This distribution indicates that most students felt their speaking abilities were moderate before experiencing CLT, with a smaller proportion acknowledging weaker skills. Interestingly, no students rated their skills as very good, suggesting a general consensus of needing improvement prior to the intervention.

Chart 2. The aspects of CLT students find most helpful in language learning

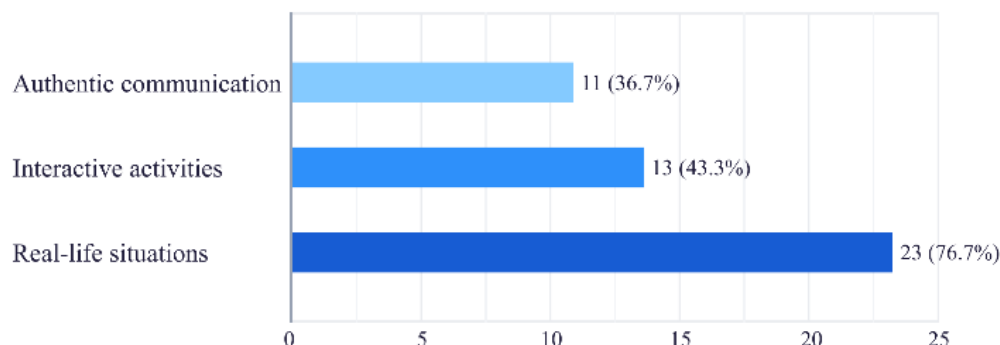


Chart 2. signifies the results of item no 3.2. The students were asked to identify the most helpful language learning aspects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The responses highlighted that real-life situations were the most beneficial, with 76.7% of students selecting this aspect. Interactive activities were also highly valued, chosen by 43.3% of the students. Authentic communication was considered helpful by 36.7% of the respondents. These findings suggest that students greatly appreciate CLT elements that simulate real-world communication and involve active participation. In order to familiarize and help students understand the real-life setting of the subject being taught, the CLT often incorporates authentic material (Hiep, 2005).

DISCUSSION

The data demonstrated a statistically significant enhancement in the speaking skills of the participants with the CLT intervention. This aligns with the findings of recent studies, on the use of CLT to teach speaking that demonstrated, CLT can help students improve students' speaking skills (Efrizal, 2012). Kelly (1980) believes that students are greatly influenced by their classroom environment. Therefore, spoken expressions are influenced by conditions in the classroom and beliefs.

This method places a strong emphasis on the value of real-world engagement and conversation in language learning, encouraging students to engage in meaningful communication and use the language in real-life situations. Students discover certain attitudes and beliefs about their real-world experiences through elaboration, which they use to understand text-world experience (Beach, 1998). In this study, students identified real-life situations, interactive activities, and authentic communication as the most beneficial aspects of CLT. This underscores the significance of contextual and meaningful language use in learning, as highlighted by Richards (2006), who argued that effective language teaching should prioritize communication in real-world contexts.

In the view that allowing students to speak and write for extended periods of time without interruption is the best way to inspire them. Educators like Krashen (1981) have emphasized the need to refrain from editing students' work completely. In CLT the students get the feedback after their complete output without interruption. A great deal of foreign language learners face difficulty adjusting to a new language and culture. Oxford (1994) used

the phrase "cultural texture" to refer to the multitude of aspects of culture that teachers must teach to their students. The results of this study reveal that CLT helped the learners in enhancing learners' ability to navigate different social and cultural contexts. This highlights the effectiveness of CLT in promoting not only linguistic competence but also sociocultural awareness.

The survey results show the majority of the students agree with practicing oral interaction in language classrooms as the main focused activity rather than grammatical explication, suggesting a significant endorsement that aligns with current educational trends that advocate for practical communication skills over theoretical knowledge of grammar. Although oral interaction is the main focus of CLT we cannot completely exclude grammar from EFL classrooms. While students are taught grammar deductively (Harmer, 2007:63. Larsen-Freeman, 2011:18. Brown, 2007:19) in traditional methods like GTM, Thompson (1996) emphasizes that teachers should teach grammar inductively or through a retrospective approach in the CLT method.

Apart from these, the techniques and materials used in CLT classes are "authentic material", "scrambled sentences", "language games", "picture strip story" and "role-play"(Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Additionally, the students agreed that CLT has encouraged them to take more risks and experiment with new ways of expressing themselves in English, highlighting the positive impact of CLT on learners' willingness to engage and explore the language. The majority of the participants of this study, (96.4%) perceived CLT as effective in improving their speaking skills, with 100% recommending it to other learners. This finding underscores the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in fostering a supportive learning environment that promotes confidence in speaking skills. By emphasizing meaningful communication and authentic language use, CLT encourages learners to step out of their comfort zones and explore different linguistic expressions.

The findings revealed significant improvements in students' speaking abilities and positive attitudes towards CLT, supporting the broader literature on the benefits of communicative approaches in language teaching. However, further research with more diverse perspectives and larger population samples is needed to enhance and expand these insights.

CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, this study indicates that CLT is an effective method for enhancing speaking skills. The positive perceptions and significant improvements observed among participants underscore the potential of CLT to transform language learning experiences. Furthermore, significant improvements reported by the participants suggest that CLT not only enhances language skills but also boosts learner motivation and engagement. This aligns with the broader educational goals of fostering autonomous, confident, and proficient language users. By highlighting the positive impacts of CLT in this setting, the research provides empirical evidence supporting the shift towards more interactive and communicative teaching approaches in Bangladeshi EFL classrooms.

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