

**An Examination of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT):  
Effectiveness, Challenges, and Contexts**

The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach was developed in the 1970s to address the limitations of earlier teaching methods, such as grammar-translation and audio-lingual approaches (Suemith, M. E., 2011, p. 2). These earlier methods focused heavily on correct grammar and memorization, but they didn't prepare students well for real-life conversations. Due to the growing need for effective language skills in Europe, British linguist David Wilkins sought ways to make language learning more practical. Wilkins analyzed the communicative meanings that a learner needs to express and understand, focusing on meaning rather than on traditional grammar instruction (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.2).

Language teaching, therefore, is grounded in the idea that communication is the primary purpose of language, enabling people to create meaning and achieve specific goals, whether through speaking or writing (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.5). Embracing diversity is essential to language learning and usage, as individuals bring unique backgrounds and experiences to their communication (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.5). Language proficiency is viewed as flexible and relative rather than fixed, recognizing that skill levels vary across different aspects of language (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.5). Multiple language forms, including dialects and varieties, can serve as valuable models for learning, reflecting the diversity of language itself. Culture also plays a significant role in shaping communicative abilities, influencing how people communicate in both their first language and any additional languages they acquire (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.5). This approach is adaptable, allowing for a range of teaching methods to support students effectively. Language learning, moreover, involves expressing ideas, engaging with others, and understanding various types of texts, all of which contribute to language development (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.5). Finally, learners benefit from task-based activities that let them use language in purposeful ways, reinforcing practical communication skills (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p.5).

Several language learning theories support CLT. Noam Chomsky's theory of competence suggested that language learning goes beyond memorizing patterns; learners have an innate ability to understand language, which helped shift CLT away from strict memorization (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p. 3). Dell Hymes introduced "communicative competence," the idea that knowing how to use language in social settings is as important as knowing grammar rules, which is central to CLT's goal of preparing students for real conversations (Suemith, M.E., 2011, pp. 3-4). Stephen Krashen's input hypothesis also influenced CLT by emphasizing that learners need exposure to understandable language that slightly challenges them, helping them acquire language skills naturally (Suemith, M.E., 2011, p. 4).

CLT's primary strength lies in its focus on meaningful communication, allowing learners to use language in realistic contexts rather than merely learning grammar rules (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 64). This approach emphasizes fluency and encourages students to engage in activities that simulate real-life interactions, such as role-playing, problem-solving, and cooperative learning. By prioritizing communication, CLT helps students build confidence and improves

their ability to express ideas in a foreign language. Additionally, the method's flexibility in allowing teachers to adapt to the needs of students is seen as a significant benefit, especially in multilingual and multicultural classrooms (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 65).

However, CLT is not without its criticisms. One common critique is that its focus on fluency over accuracy can lead to students developing weak grammatical skills (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 83). This emphasis on communication may result in learners who are proficient in conversational skills but lack a strong understanding of grammatical structures. Furthermore, the implementation of CLT can be challenging in classrooms where teachers are non-native speakers or lack sufficient proficiency in the target language, as the method requires them to facilitate open-ended communication (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 83). Another challenge with CLT is its reliance on resources and materials that mimic real-life situations, which may not always be available in resource-limited environments (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 81).

CLT is especially effective in settings where the primary goal is to develop communicative competence rather than focus on linguistic precision. This makes it suitable for ESL (English as a Second Language) settings where students are likely to have more exposure to the language outside the classroom and can practice in natural settings (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 82). CLT is also beneficial in contexts where student engagement and interaction are priorities, such as in classrooms with diverse language backgrounds or where learners need to develop practical language skills quickly. However, CLT may be less suitable in environments that rely on standardized, grammar-based testing, as the approach does not prioritize explicit grammar instruction (Richards & Rodgers, 1999, p. 83).

By focusing on interaction and adaptability, CLT offers a way for students to engage meaningfully with language, preparing them for real-world communication.

## REFERENCES

Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (1999). *Approaches and methods in Language Teaching*. Cambridge University Press.

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