

## The usage of Communicative Language Teaching at the Secondary School

Normumiova Khulkar Abduvasiyevna, Mahmudova Maryam Asad qizi

Uzbekistan state world Languages University

**Annotation:** English ranks the fourth among languages that have the most people officially speak and it is the most popular language for international communication. Therefore, teaching and learning English is always a concern by educators and researchers worldwide, especially teaching English for secondary school students entering the workforce right after graduation. There are still many challenges raised with it that not all the teachers are implementing in the classroom efficiently. Hymes' (1971) theory and other authors' theories lead to a new breakthrough in developing communicative language teaching in teaching and learning a second language. This paper focuses on the overview of CLT in teaching English as a second language. Moreover, it highlights both advantages and disadvantages of CLT, current trends of CLT, obstacles in applying CLT in the secondary school context comparing with traditional methods. Since then, it helps teachers have a better understanding of CLT also suggests implications of teaching English with CLT in the context, including designing and developing classroom activities.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching; CLT; secondary school students; advantages and disadvantages; CLT classroom activities

People may think that secondary school students will achieve and gain enough English language proficiency during secondary school period. But in fact, it differs due to some conditions. However, in Vietnam and other Asian countries, the English level of secondary school students are various because of their educational background and ability. Coming from different places, including city, countryside, rural area or even mountainous village, most of them find English one of the most challenging subjects although they want to be good at English to find a better job. In general, the outcomes of students in Vietnam are relatively low, which is also found in other countries like in the researches of Abahussain (2016), Al-Nasser (2015), Alsalmi (2014), Batawi (2007). There are other reasons to explain the poor performance of secondary school students in second language learning like teacher's teaching ability and quality, lack of actual chance of communicating with native people in English, which is supported by the research of Souriyavongsa et al. (2013) in the National University of Laos. Therefore, to increase the quality of teaching and learning English in Secondary schools, many changes in different aspects need to be considered. Teaching methods should be specially discussed because teachers normally take the role of instructor and directly influence the learning process in the classroom.

English teachers need appropriate teaching methods to engage and motivate their students to improve their English ability. In terms of teaching method or approach, most English teachers are familiar with traditional teaching methods like the Grammar-Translation method, Direct method, Audiolingual, Community Language Learning, (De) Suggestopia Silent Way, or Total Physical Response. When traditional methods cannot satisfy the requirement of communication and interaction outcome (Dos Santos, 2019), modern teaching methods have been introduced to meet the need of recent learning and teaching English, including CLT, CBI (Content-Based Instruction), TBI (Task-Based Instruction). CLT, which requires spoken output, is proving its effectiveness when it meets learners' need for communicative competence. However, CLT has not very popular,

especially in the secondary school setting. By synthesizing above mentioned information, there are some questions which should be considered in order to utilize:

1. What are the advantages of CLT in teaching and learning English as a second language?
2. What are the disadvantages of CLT in teaching and learning English as a second language for secondary school students?
3. How to implement CLT effectively in teaching English as a second language in a secondary school context?

CLT is the result of new demand in learning and teaching English. GTM had been dominant for a long time before the introduction of CLT. Many linguists claim that learning a language will be more effective when following natural methods. According to Richards and Rogers (2001), “believers in the Natural Method argued that a foreign language could be taught without translation or the use of the learner’s native language if the meaning was conveyed directly through demonstration and action” (p.11). Learning a language is efficient when learners have more chance exposing to it, using it in real conversation. This process is not very different from learning their mother tongue. Therefore, the traditional methods that emphasize grammatical aspects and translation seem not to create a spontaneous environment for learners. Thompson (1996) claims that CLT is an alternative for the traditional teaching method GTM because it involves meaningful communication and requires communicative input and outcome. Learning with traditional methods, students may be good at grammar and vocabulary, but they are not confident to communicate with English speakers because they rarely have a chance to use their English knowledge in real conversation. English is a language, so if learners do not use it often, it is hard for them to memorize vocabulary and without real-life situation practices, their English cannot be a tool to communicate, but a subject at school. Widdowson (1990, p.159) describes CLT as an approach that allows learners to use language to do things, which means that tasks are seen as concepts, notions, and meaningful activities instead of a particular grammar point or separated language skills. Nunan (1991) includes five main features of CLT:

1. Concentrating on learning to communicate in the target language.
2. Using authentic texts in learning activities.
3. Providing opportunities for learners to develop their language and learning process.
4. Encouraging personal experience as an essential element for classroom activities.
5. Attempting to connect classroom tasks with outside classroom activities.

Based on these features, Canale and Swain (1980, p. 4) introduce four communicative competence of CLT, including “grammatical competence”, “sociolinguistic competence”, “discourse competence”, and “strategic competence” while Bachman (1990) divides it into “organizational competence” and “pragmatic competence”. CLT basically refers to the ability to use language “receptively and productively” in real-life situations (Kiato and Kiato, 1996). CLT aims to exploit the ability to use much different knowledge, both general and linguistic, into meaningful tasks and activities which simulate real-life situations in order to develop learners’ language aspects such as maintaining conversation despite the limitation in language knowledge, using language for different purposes and functions, using and understanding different types of texts, using appropriate language for a different setting like formal and informal situations (Richard, 2006). CLT method is also a good way to enrich learner’s general knowledge like Doughty and Long (2003) states, “new knowledge is better integrated into long-term memory, and easier retrieved if tied to real-world events and activities” (p. 58). Authentic materials with tremendous knowledge of

culture and different aspects from science to daily life of many different nations and even the universe provide learners updated information necessary for them to be successful in their work and life.

In using GTM for teaching English, the lesson is teacher-centered and in that learning environment, students are not as active and flexible. Whereas, in CLT class is learner-centered, students are allowed to be at the center of teaching and learning process. It means students in CLT classes gain the initiative in classroom activities because the more they work hard in CLT classes, the more benefits they can gain, which is supported by Kennedy (2002) when he claims that CLT gives both teacher and students opportunity and flexibilities in a wide range to do activities. Teachers act the role of monitor and facilitator in classroom activities to engage students and support them when needed to motivate them to attend these activities actively.

In practicality, the application of CLT in a particular context of universities in different countries faces various obstacles that need discussing to find solutions. As a normal phenomenon, a new method often faces difficulties and opposition. Firstly, teachers know the effectiveness of CLT, but they do not know how to apply it appropriately in their class (Dos Santos, 2016, 2017). Furthermore, Tomlinson (2001) also adds more evidence for the less common of CLT which is the domination of materials. Not all the contents in the textbook are designed for CLT because they provide a wide range of collaborative activities and some are not related to the context of the lesson. When teachers want to implement CLT in their classes, they need more extra content outside the textbook. Therefore, if the teacher sticks to activities in the textbook, it is very hard for them to turn a normal class into CLT class, whereas if they do not base on the content of the textbook, they may be criticized by the supervisors. Ozsevik (2010) points out that teachers who are “abandoned and unpaid” do not adapt CLT in teaching. The obstacle also comes from students, which is concluded through Walia’s (2012) study. Students hesitate to CLT activities and the ‘time constraints and the budget for CLT activities contribute to other disadvantages of implementing CLT method (Walia, 2012). In West’s (2016) research, he points out that the instruction and the complication of vocabulary cause the problem for CLT activities.

In addition, during the implementation of CLT, there are several misunderstandings by educators. Thompson (1996) points out that CLT means not teaching grammar, pair work is the same as role-playing in CLT, and CLT brings a lot of pressure for teachers because they have to face unpredicted situations with high demand ability to debate. However, Thompson explains that CLT allows teaching language implicitly through other activities instead of ignoring linguistic aspects like grammar completely. When he mentions role play, Thompson distinguishes between pair work and role play for a simpler level repeating exactly the samples while pair work refers to the real interaction and real decision between attendants. However, for the last misconception, the researcher does not have a clear answer because CLT is designed by native speakers and served their teaching. It is a reason for rejecting CLT, but it also a good way for teachers to improve their teaching and enhance their belief and practice. He also gives another reason for this misunderstanding: teachers who do not want to change their current teaching method.

CLT is one of the most effective methods in teaching and learning a second language because it provides opportunities for learners to practice and improve their communicative competence in pedagogic and real-life situations. Although it has not widely implemented in secondary schools yet, teachers and students have a positive attitude towards this method because of its benefits. The real practice of CLT in secondary school has shown advantages and disadvantages or difficulties both inside and outside the classroom. Therefore, teachers need to consider the real situation at their school to have effective implementation of CLT classes.

Although CLT has introduced and been applied since 1970s, it has not widely been implemented in Vietnam and other Asian countries, especially at the tertiary level. Therefore, it is very difficult to conduct quantitative or qualitative research at a particular secondary school. This article would like to analyze some important aspects related to the implication of CLT into secondary school context by collecting information from more than fifty articles and research on CLT in teaching English as a second language or foreign language in Asian universities because the contexts in these research are rather similar to Vietnam so that the results of analysis and suggestions will be more practical and valuable for future implementing of CLT in teaching English for secondary school students in Vietnam. Based on the literature review, the article aims to discuss three main questions mentioned in the introduction by analyzing the advantages and disadvantages of CLT in teaching and learning English as a second language. Since then, the author makes suggestions about implementing CLT effectively in teaching and learning English at the tertiary level.

According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), “methods should not be understood as prescriptions for classroom behavior and imposed on teachers as a strict set of procedures to follow. Rather, they should be used to help “expand a teacher’s repertoire of techniques” and “provide an avenue for professional growth” (p. x). Therefore, the overview of CLT, including the related aspects, obstacles in implementation, the attitude of teachers and learners towards it, aims to supply a general view as well as encourage English teachers to adapt this method in their secondary school context. Each method has its strengths and weaknesses, and the real application may lead to issues in a particular context. With its goals, main characteristics, and principles, CLT is a good way to foster secondary school students’ communicative competence. Effective implementation of CLT can bring a lot of benefits to teachers and students because this method exploits many different aspects of language knowledge and general knowledge to enhance sociolinguistic and strategic competence. During the history of CLT, this method causes several difficulties due to the conflicts of context, teacher and student’s belief, lack of CLT training, and other minor factors. By synthesizing research on CLT in secondary schools, the author hopes that secondary school teachers understand more about CLT and confidently register training course about designing CLT activities for their classes. These mentioned application of CLT method in the secondary school environment are suggestions and they need further research to test the effectiveness. The article also suggests that future research on CLT focuses on students’ point of view to analyze it from a different perspective to have more solutions for implementing CLT effectively in ESL classes in general and in the Asian context in particular.

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