DEVELOPING COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS: APPROACHES AND STRATEGIES

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effectiveness of Traditional Language Teaching (TLT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in enhancing communicative competence among English Language Learners (ELLs). Using a mixed-methods approach, entry and final tests assessed speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills, while student surveys explored perceptions of instructional methods. Results showed no significant differences at the outset, but the CLT group outperformed the TLT group in the final tests, with higher gains in high grades (A, B) and greater reductions in low grades (D, E). CLT also improved speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills by 15-18%, aided by its learner-centered approach, cooperative learning, and technology integration. Students found CLT more engaging and effective, underscoring its potential to foster communicative competence. Future research should explore the long-term effects of CLT and its integration with modern teaching tools.

Keywords: Communicative competence, English Language Learners (ELLs), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Traditional Language Teaching (TLT), Language assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Language is a structured system based on clear or implicit principles. It is highly flexible and adaptable, evolving according to the changing needs and perspectives of its users. It can be comprehended as an arrangement of conventional spoken or written symbols through which humans, as individuals and members of a social group, interact and participate in society [1, 2]. Any language, both verbal and non-verbal, serves as a system of symbols that allow people to facilitate communication within diverse social and cultural contexts [3]. Generally, any language that human

use for communication purposes comprises fundamentally of verbal sounds. It is articulator, disciplined, representative and subjective.

In communication context, the importance of foreign or second language skills cannot be overstated. As learners become more mobile as potential workers, they must be able to interact freely and efficiently across borders. Globally, English, in the context of second language in non-English speaking countries, is often treated as a second language or a compulsory subject in schools and colleges, especially at the foundational level, where it has become the dominant language of science and technology. Generally, in academic context, since the establishment of English language teaching, there have been ongoing assessments and adjustments to instructional approaches, reflecting the need to adapt to evolving educational contexts and circumstances [4].Besides academics, English also holds significant social and economic importance due to its status as a global language.

In Pakistan, academic instruction is divided between two mediums: English and non-English. Generally, students complete their education up to the intermediate level in their native or national language (Urdu). However, at the undergraduate level, English is the medium of instruction for all programs, creating significant challenges for students from non-English medium backgrounds. This shift increases the demand for English language learning. Even students from non-English medium schools are expected to possess a basic awareness of productive and receptive language skills to pass university entry tests and gain admission to undergraduate programs. Unfortunately, the primary goal of learning English in Pakistan often remains limited to passing exams. As a result, students who lack competency in the language frequently view it as a burden[5, 6]. Consequently, the role of professional English language teachers become significant in schools and at any level of education in Pakistan.

The definition and expectations of an English teacher may vary across the globe. In Pakistan, the role of an English teacher is often defined by fluency in the language. For instance, teachers with an academic background in English literature or those teachers who can communicate in English are commonly seen as qualified to teach the subject. However, this perspective fails to consider the crucial balance between linguistic proficiency and effective English language teaching methodologies. This issue is not exclusive to Pakistan but also affects other countries where English is treated as a second language, where the professional profile of English teachers is often underdeveloped and poorly defined [7].

The learning environment plays a crucial role in language acquisition. Traditionally, the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) has been widely used for teaching English, focusing primarily on translation and grammar rules. Although this approach has proven effective in specific contexts, it has often fallen short in fostering English proficiency, especially for students preparing for competitive exams and university students who are expected to demonstrate language proficiency in academic settings. These challenges are further linked to the historical lack of teacher training programs tailored to English Language Teaching (ELT), leaving students with deficiencies in writing, oral communication, listening, reading aloud, and comprehension. Furthermore, a well-structured curriculum remains vital for enhancing English language proficiency outcomes [8]. Teachers' teaching approaches, methods, and techniques significantly influence students' learning, particularly in language acquisition. Previously, fundamental skills like reading, writing, speaking, and listening were often overlooked, with textbooks serving as the primary source of learning material. This reliance on teaching approaches overlooks important skills

limited learners' competencies and their natural ability to acquire second language. It is therefore important that English language teachers prioritize the development of language skills. Achieving proficiency in English requires a comprehensive understanding of contextual vocabulary, sentence structures, and cultural nuances, besides expertise in productive and receptive skills which are key to effective communication [9].

Communicative competence, encompassing linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence, is pivotal for effective language use. For ELLs, developing this competence is crucial for academic success, social integration, and professional advancement [10]. This research paper aims to explore effective approaches and strategies to foster communicative competence in ELLs.

Methodology

A comprehensive literature review was conducted to identify relevant research studies, articles, and books on the topic of communicative competence in ELLs. The search focused on peer-reviewed journals, academic databases (e.g., JSTOR, ERIC, Google Scholar), and reputable educational organizations.

Research Design

To reach our goals, we used a combination of quantitative, statistical, qualitative, and descriptive research approaches [11]. We used quantitative and statistical methods to analyze test results from students in two experimental groups: traditional language teaching (TLT) [12] and communicative language teaching (CLT) [13]. The study used a qualitative approach to get student feedback on the lesson's difficulties. A written questionnaire was used to assess the efficacy of the CLT strategy. The students' questionnaire and study data were analysed using a descriptive approach.

Population

The research involved six academic groups of six semester students from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan. Two experimental groups of students were created from the six academic groups. In one experimental group, three academic groups (50 students) received grammar instruction utilizing the TLT approach. Three academic groups totaling fifty students were part of the other experimental group, and they used the CLT approach to study grammar. During the first term of 2024, 100 bachelor's degree candidates from The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan enrolled in an experimental grammar class. The experiment was conducted with the subjects' agreement. 34 academic hours (2 academic hours each week) were included in the study. The ABCDEF scale (A= 90-100 points, B= 82-89 points, C= 75-81 points, D= 66-74 points, E= 50-65 points, and F= less than 50 points) was used to evaluate the outcomes.

Procedure

Three stages of the experiment were proposed to students at The Islamia University of Bahawalpur, Punjab, Pakistan in order to assess the importance of developing linguistic competence:
1) Diagnostic: entrance exams designed to assess the linguistic proficiency of first-time English language learners
2) Training period: The test conducted during the training period.
3) Checkout: The last exam aimed to evaluate the linguistic proficiency of advanced English language learners. At the start of the learning process, an entrance exam was administered to assess students' initial linguistic abilities as first-time English language learners. A last exam was conducted during the third stage to measure their progress. They might receive a maximum score of 100 on both tests. About 90 minutes were required to evaluate the linguistic competency levels.

The diagnostic and final examinations, titled *Testing the Linguistic Competence of English*

Language Learners, consisted of three sections with comparable activities. Part 1 (Word Use in Sentences) included exercises designed to evaluate students' ability to use contextually appropriate words in the correct forms and positions. Part 2 (Sentence Processing) focused on assessing the students' skill in constructing sentences relevant to specific speaking scenarios. Part 3 (Sentence Functioning) comprised three tasks: Discussion, Individual Work, and Team Work, to evaluate practical application and interaction skills.

Through group work, students were tested on their ability to construct a dialogue in one of the suggested scenarios using some of the indicated grammar patterns. Use grammatical patterns to discuss the subject from several angles. The students utilized the given grammatical phenomena to describe the images.

The purpose of individual work was to assess students' abilities to present essays, stories, and other types of writing. Tasks to regulate students' communicative abilities in comprehending various situations were added in the section on discussion, where students were asked to express their perspectives. Groups of students were intended to combine vocabulary and grammar in scenarios that were similar to real-world communication during the second stage, or training period. The identical grammatical problems based on the same themes' vocabulary were studied in both groups.

The group receiving grammar education through the Traditional Language Teaching (TLT) technique followed standard instruction methods. These included writing essays, completing both written and oral assignments, and learning new terms and concepts. The teacher acted as the primary authority, managing and supervising all student activities throughout the process.

Students in the second group, which employed the CLT approach, practiced almost every grammar phenomenon in groups. Instructors advised pupils to employ techniques including questioning, summarizing, forecasting, clarifying, and

supporting, among others. The development of communication and collaborative skills received particular attention. As a result, the assignments' scenarios were created to be as realistic as possible. In the context of a particular real-world issue, ELL students used the grammar modules they had studied to interact with one another. Giving students as much independence as possible and only offering assistance when necessary was the teacher's main goal. Three grammar curriculum periods were incorporated in the entire learning period: 1) the teacher's explanation of the phenomena, 2) language practice, and 3) communicative practice [13].

Students were exposed to new grammar units throughout the first period, which prompted them to participate in the explanation and rationally connect new phrases or structures to the ones that had come before. Fill in the blanks, changing the structures, re-enacting real conversations, and evaluating the texts' content were the tasks for the language practice session.

Tasks like filling in the blanks in sentences or texts, choosing a solution to a problem, responding to open-ended questions, logically analyzing structures, discussing diagrams and pictures, creating dialogues, practicing role-plays, and recoding the information were all part of the communicative practice session.

Students were encouraged to develop their comprehension of the formal aspects of the grammar units they had studied, integrate them into their semantic cognitive foundation, and apply the phenomena they had studied in discourse by the language and communicative practice assignments. Students completed a variety of communicative tasks that reflected a range of real-life scenarios during the last group activity hour. In this group, the teacher played a slightly different role—that of a helper rather than an instructor.

In order to establish a cooperative classroom as opposed to a competitive one, the collaborative interactive technique was the dominant one [14].

By listening to their peers, asking questions, and supporting one another, students were able to succeed. The most successful collaborative types of group work were identified by the cooperative strategy, which predominated in the communicative language education approach [15].

Results and Discussion

The results of the entry test revealed no remarkable differences in the levels of communication skills in both groups (Figure 1). To assess the results the ABCDEF scale was used (A=90-100 points, B=82-89 points, C=75-81 points, D=66-74 points, E=50-65 points, F=lower than 50 points). Both groups had the same percentage of students who achieved grades A: 6%, B: 6% and 8% of students, respectively, C: 52% and 54 % of students, respectively, D: 28 % and 26 % of students, respectively both groups had the same percentage for grade E: 6% of students, respectively. The final test results testified to the considerable rise in both groups. However, the percentage of students who got high grades (A, B) in the group increased

significantly (twice) compared to the group that used TLT approach (by 14% vs 8%, 18% vs 8% respectively). Also, the percentage of students who received low grades, D and E, decreased more significantly in the group with CLT approach than in the group using TLT approach (by 22 % vs 8%, 6% vs 2%, respectively). The graph was also drawn to show the pictorial difference among the results (Figure 1 C, D). So CLT approach is a learner-centered teaching method that focuses on developing students' communication skills. The goal of CLT is to help students develop communicative competence [16], which means being able to communicate effectively and confidently in real-world situations. CLT uses authentic texts and materials to help students learn the language [17]. According to our research the CLT method was more authentic and reliable to get better result in English language learning process because it is modern way and use many practical and realistic approaches.

A

Grades	Entry Test		Final Test		Difference
	No of Students(50)	% age	No of students(50)	%age	%age
A	4	6	7	14	8
B	3	6	7	14	8
C	26	52	24	48	-4
D	14	28	10	20	-8
E	3	6	2	4	-2
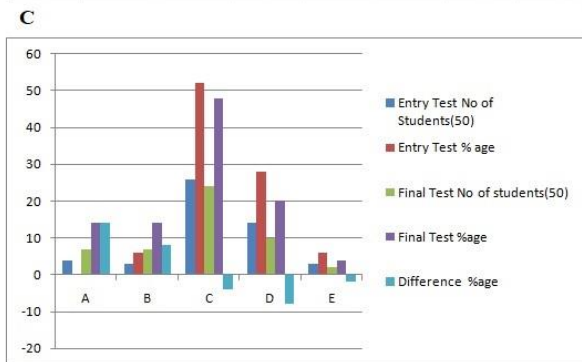
B

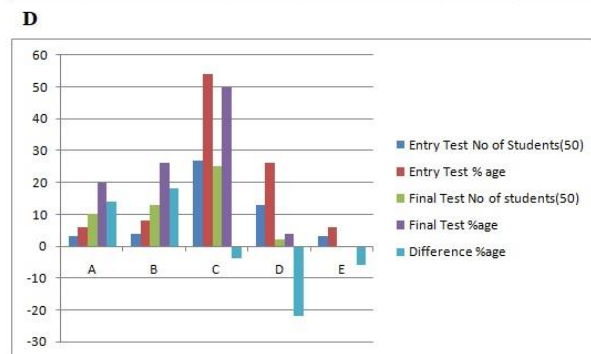| Grades	Entry Test		Final Test		Difference
	No of Students(50)	% age	No of students(50)	%age	%age
A	3	6	10	20	14
B	4	8	13	26	18
C	27	54	25	50	-4
D	13	26	2	4	-22
E	3	6	0	0	-6

C

D

Figure 1: Comparison of TLT and CLT approaches. Table A explain the Entry test and final test results in the group with TLT approach used in the grammar course and chart C explain it with graphical representation. Table B Entry test and final test results in the group with CLT approach used in the grammar course and chart D depicts its graphical presentation.

Impact of CLT learning on different communication skills of the participant

The speaking skill in final test in according with entry test was 82.7% vs 65.2 %, Listening: 80.1% vs 68.5, Reading: 85.4% vs 72.3 and Writing was 83.9% vs 69.7% respectively (Figure 2 A, B). There graph also explain their pictorial views to explain the results in broader spectrum (Figure 2 C, D).

According to the test results, the experimental group's members had favorable opinions of the teaching strategies employed. They claimed that technological integration, cooperative learning, and CLT improved the effectiveness, relevance, and engagement of learning.
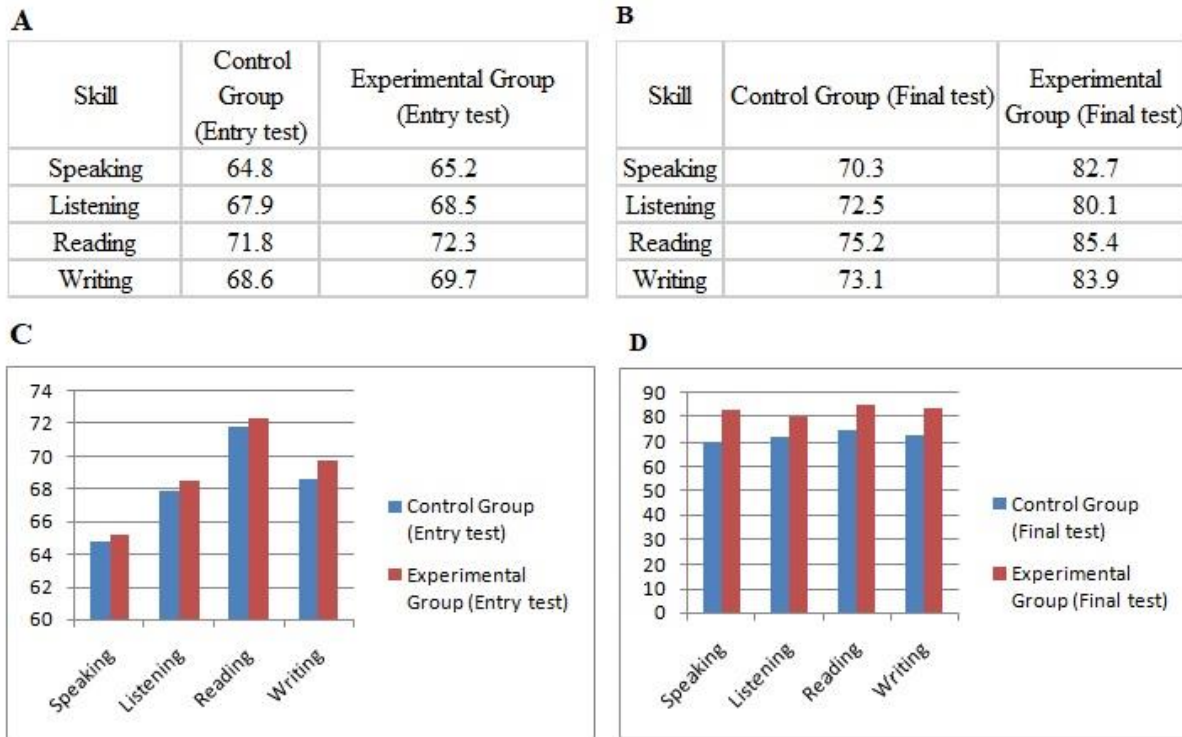
A

Skill	Control Group (Entry test)	Experimental Group (Entry test)
Speaking	64.8	65.2
Listening	67.9	68.5
Reading	71.8	72.3
Writing	68.6	69.7

B

Skill	Control Group (Final test)	Experimental Group (Final test)
Speaking	70.3	82.7
Listening	72.5	80.1
Reading	75.2	85.4
Writing	73.1	83.9

C

D

Figure 2: Impact of CLT on participant's communication skill. The table A and B explain the communication skills result %age and chart C and D represent these results in graphic form.

Impact of CLT, Cooperative Learning, and Technology Integration

The results of the entry and final tests revealed a significant improvement in the communicative competence of the experimental group compared to the control group. The experimental group demonstrated greater gains in speaking fluency, accuracy, and complexity, as well as improved listening comprehension, reading comprehension, and writing skills.

The survey results indicated that participants in the experimental group had positive perceptions of the instructional approaches used. They reported that CLT, cooperative learning, and technology integration made learning more engaging, relevant, and effective.

Key Approaches and Strategies
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

This method encourages students to utilize language in realistic ways to solve issues or accomplish objectives by focusing on real-world tasks [18]. By encouraging active participation and critical thinking, this method gives students the confidence to take charge of their education. Learners are exposed to natural language use and cultural contexts through the use of real-world resources such as songs, movies, and news article.

Cooperative Learning

Peer collaboration offers chances for feedback, meaning negotiation, and language practice. Focused communication, error correction, and mutual support are made possible while working in pairs [19, 20]. Cooperative learning is a powerful pedagogical approach that involves students working together in small groups to achieve a common goal [21]. This approach has been widely used in language classrooms to enhance language acquisition and promote social skills.

Error Correction

Indirect forms of feedback, such rephrasing statements or using gestures, might be more efficient and less intimidating [22]. Encouraging students to see and fix their own mistakes fosters independence and linguistic awareness. Error correction is a critical aspect of language learning. It provides learners with the opportunity to identify and rectify mistakes, leading to improved language accuracy and fluency [23]. Error correction approach can help teachers to develop ELLs language skills and achieve their full potential

Technology Integration

Apps for language learning provide instant feedback and individualized practice [24, 25]. Virtual language exchange opportunities and a wide range of language learning resources are accessible through online platforms [26, 27]. Technology has revolutionized the way we learn

languages. By integrating technology into language classrooms, teachers can create engaging, interactive, and personalized learning experiences [28]. This approach also improved ELLs Competence according to modern age learner should use modern technological tools to broader its thinking.

Factors Influencing Communicative Competence

Language acquisition can be greatly impacted by individual variations, including motivation, learning preferences, and past language experience [29].

Good teachers employ suitable teaching techniques, establish encouraging learning settings, and give clear instructions [30].

Language learning results can be influenced by the socio-cultural setting, which includes community support, educational materials, and language policies [31].

Limitations

Given that only one university students participated in the experiment and that only six semester students' accomplishments were evaluated, it is appropriate to stress that the study's evaluation methodology was constrained.

Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate the effectiveness of CLT, cooperative learning, and technology integration approaches in developing ELLs' communicative competence. By incorporating these approaches into language instruction, educators can create engaging and effective learning experiences that empower ELLs to become confident and proficient language users. Accordingly, teachers of ELLs students should focus on the practical application of the knowledge base in communication and process communicative competences of students at each university class. The promotion of grammatical

competence as the basic one within the set included into the communicative competence is an integral part of the foreign language acquisition in the University course. To achieve this goal there are still perspectives for further research of other types of communicative or socio-cultural competences all in particular and together aimed at students' progressing in using language units in different speech situations. For future these different modern techniques can provide better result for any foreign language competence.

Conflict of interest
None

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