



## Challenges Regarding Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching At Higher Secondary Level In Pakistan: ELT Teachers' Perspectives

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### Abstract

*This qualitative phenomenological study aims to explore English language teachers' perceptions about uses of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its implementation challenges at higher secondary level. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews from 5 ELT teachers from Sindh, Pakistan. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. According to the findings, teachers perceived CLT as a student-centered interactive approach to develop speaking fluency and communicative competence. Teachers' perceived CLT implementation challenges were lack of teachers' professional training and difficulty in time management; students' low English language proficiency and lack of motivation; exam-oriented education, over-crowded classes, inappropriate seating arrangement in classes, improper timetable, lack of materials and resources, classroom confined language practices; and lack of adequate tools to assess and evaluate students' communicative competence. These findings can provide useful insights regarding CLT's prospects to ELT teachers, academic administrators, and educational leaders, and also a way forward to effective CLT implementation at higher secondary level.*

**Keywords:** *Communicative Competence, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English Language Teaching (ELT), Higher Secondary Level*



## **Introduction**

English language is a source of communication round the globe (Abrejo et al., 2019). English has its worth in the field of education (Isadaud et al., 2022). Production of English as second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL) is a complex phenomenon which demands effective teaching of the language (Abrejo et al., 2019). Pakistan's National Curriculum for English Language recommended the development of students' communicative competence in English language (Government of Pakistan, 2006). Students at higher secondary level in Pakistani public colleges are non-native speakers of English language, therefore, they need to be taught English language in an effective manner so that they can effectively communicate in English. To assure effective acquisition of the English language by non-native speakers, selection of appropriate teaching approach is essential (Kamola, 2023).

Teaching methodology eases and enables teachers to teach in an efficient way (Tamura, 2006). Akram and Mehmood (2011) argued that in comparison to other teaching methods generally, and the Grammar Translation Method (GTM) particularly, CLT method provides a strong link between experience and expression of English language. CLT enhances learner's fluency to speak the target language (Lumy, 2018; Savignon, 2018) and to enhance students' communication skills (Al-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019; Owen, et al., 2019; Rashidova, 2023). The local researches in Pakistan regarding effectiveness of CLT showed different inferences. For instance, Ahmad and Rao (2013), Rana (2014), and Zeeshan (2013) revealed that CLT is effective than GTM while Memon, et al. (2016) discovered that GTM was favored more than CLT in three districts of Sindh, i.e. Jamshoro, Shikarpur, and Jacobabad. Moreover, CLT adoption in Pakistan has been found contradictory, as Panhwar et al. (2017) found that CLT adoption is difficult in Pakistani context, while Khan et al. (2016) found that CLT is appropriate in Pakistani context. This scenario indicates the need for exploration of the phenomenon in depth through other districts' teachers' perceptions to explore that why CLT is being used by the teachers and what are the challenges regarding implementation of CLT.

The study of teachers' perceptions regarding implementation of CLT in EFL contexts is essential as these perceptions can act like change agents to accomplish innovations (Li, 1998). In support, Borg (2003) confirmed that teachers' perspectives significantly affect teaching practices. The present qualitative phenomenological study aimed to contribute to the existing literature by filling the population gap focusing the perspectives of ELT teachers at higher secondary level in



public colleges of district Sukkur about the uses of CLT, and the challenges for the implementation of CLT.

### **Objectives of the Study**

1. To explore ELT teachers' perceptions regarding the uses of CLT at higher secondary level.
2. To explore the challenges encountered by ELT teachers regarding the implementation of CLT at higher secondary level

## **Literature Review**

### **Definitions of CLT**

Oxford Learners Dictionary (2020) defined CLT as a foreign language teaching method mainly focusing learning of the communication of information and ideas in the language. Larsen-Freeman (2000) defined CLT as a learner-centered approach to learn the target language via tasks and activities for the achievement of communicative objectives. Adding to this definition, Richards (2001) explained that the function of CLT is enhancement of communicative process with the help of interactions, conversations, and negotiations. Briefly, CLT can be defined as an umbrella term that covers all the teaching approaches which target communication in language (Wong & Barrea-Marlys, 2012).

### **Background of CLT**

The conceptual bases for CLT were laid in 1970s by Michael Halliday who worked on function and grammar, and by Dell Hymes who focused communicative competence. According to Hymes (1972), CLT purposefully focuses the use of language within societies in specific situations for communication through interpretation of messages and negotiation of the meaning of those messages to others. From the beginning, communicative language teaching has gone through various phases. Richards (2006) explained that while CLT was in its first phase, it urged the basic need of syllabus designing and as an approach for communicative competence, then it was proposed to organize syllabi regarding notions and functions instead of structures of grammar. Later, the need for learners' communication was accounted because of which the methodology for communication involved the activities for implementation of CLT. These activities included working in group, completion of tasks, and the activity of information-gap (Richards, 2006).



## Characteristics of CLT

Nunan (1991) has noted five distinguished characteristics of CLT, i.e. stress on interactive communication; use of authentic text; provision of learning opportunities that consider language as well as the process of learning; self-experiential learning in classroom; and linkage of inside and outside classroom activities for language learning.

## Some Common Classroom CLT Activities

*Information-gap-* In this activity, learners exchange the information to each other or one another that is unfamiliar or new to someone in the class to fill the gap of the required information. This interactive activity gives confidence to students (Ismaili & Baijrami, 2016) through providing chances of speaking to others (Utomo, 2016).

*Language Games-* Language games are either cooperative or competitive games for language learning which involve the students in active communication through three things, i.e. rule, goal, and fun (Hadfield, 1990, p5). These games are sources of language learning through interaction and communication (Al-Bulushi & Al-Essa, 2017).

*Role-play-* Role-play is used for communication in the target language in a socially different context and socially different roles through which students avail the learning opportunity by practicing dialogues of the given characters (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

*Group Discussion-* Discussion employs orderly group interaction among participant students in which knowledge is used, views are expressed as well as explored, and values and attitudes are reflected via exchange of ideas (Hoyles, 1985 as cited in Killen, 2009).

*Presentation-* In presentations, students acquire learning opportunities for communicating spontaneously their opinions on the assigned topics (Vishvanathan & Selvam, 2015, p.176). Moreover, the interaction between the presenter and the audience during question-answer session, provides students the opportunity to learn the target language.

*Dialogues-* Dialogue is organized real life situation for interaction between students or student/s and teacher through short conversations (Nita & Syafei, 2012). Sometimes, teacher asks students to describe a given picture, then teams are formed to observe the picture and then share information through dialogues which helps in language learning.



## **Relevant Studies**

In Pakistan, Panhwar, et al. (2017) found that CLT is a beneficial language teaching approach, however, contextual problems in educational institutions, large classes, and excessive use of traditional lecture method hindered the implementation of CLT. Similarly, in Punjab, Ahmad and Rao (2013) found that CLT proved to be more effective than GTM at higher secondary level, however, lack of training, lack of resources, large class size and examination system hindered the implementation of CLT. In addition, Zeeshan's (2013) study at Quetta (Balochistan) found teachers' and students' positive attitudes for CLT, however, completion of lengthy course, insufficient teaching material, and examination practices hindered CLT implementation. Moreover, Khan, et al. (2016) concluded that CLT is appropriate at public colleges for the students with English medium schooling background.

Beside Pakistan, other countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Libya, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, and Afghanistan conducted CLT related researches. Christianto (2019) found that Indonesian teachers favored CLT to develop students' communicative competence. Similarly, in Malaysia, Alharbi and Aldaba (2018) found that teachers perceive CLT as learner-centric approach which focuses fluency than accuracy via communication in the target language, however, novice teachers, discipline maintenance, large classes, and cultural differences hindered the implementation of CLT. In Jeddah (Saudi Arabia), Al-Garni and Almuhammadi (2019) found that the CLT treated experimental group achieved higher scores than the controlled group. In Libya, Owen, et al. (2019) concluded that communicative activities increased students' English speaking skills. In Pinrang (Indonesia), Asik (2016) concluded that integration of visual aids in CLT method improved students' speaking skills. In Iraq, Hashim (2016), through a quantitative study found that misconceptions about CLT, lack of command over English, time shortage, lack of training on the part of teachers, students' low proficiency, lack of motivation, large classes, grammar driven examinations, lack of proper account of EFL for teaching CLT and lack of proper assessment tools for CLT were the reported problems. In UAE, Taha and Salamah (2016) concluded that teachers' heavy workload, large class size and students' low proficiency hindered the proper implementation of CLT. In Afghanistan, Noori (2018) concluded that lack of facilities, teachers' workload, exam pattern, students' lack of motivation and low proficiency hindered CLT implementation. In Malaysia, Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) concluded that lack of facilities and exam focusing practices hindered proper CLT implementation.



The synthesis of the reviewed relevant literature revealed that CLT is a useful approach for teaching English language, however, CLT's adoption is difficult in developing countries due to contextual constraints such as use of traditional teaching methodologies, exam-driven teaching practices, insufficiency of materials and resources, and ELT teachers' training.

### **Research Methodology**

The present study was explorative in nature, therefore, it adopted qualitative approach with phenomenological design. Qualitative approach provide rich description and detailed information about the phenomenon using peoples' experiences and perspectives (Hopeful, 1997, Mack, et al., 2005, p.1). Phenomenological design is used for extraction of the essence of the phenomenon via informants' lived experiences (Teherani, et al., 2015. For obtainment of the most relevant information about the phenomenon, Creswell (2007) recommended a homogenous group of experienced informants, therefore, the population of the study included all the ELT teachers using CLT at higher secondary level in public colleges of district Sukkur while the higher secondary school teachers were not included due to separate administrative departments for colleges and for schools. Following the guidelines of Creswell (1998) for a sample in phenomenological design, 5 ELT teachers were selected. For selection of the sample, purposive sampling technique was applied as this technique is appropriate for collection of data from the informants matching to the predefined criteria (Mack, et al., 2005, p.5). The data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews as this interview technique is suitable when an explorative study requires informants' personal experiences, feelings, opinions, and perspectives (Mack, et al. (2005, p.30). The study employed thematic analysis which according to Braun and Clarke (2012), is a flexible technique that employs thematic coding of transcribed interviews for provision of rich description of the data (p.58).

### **Findings**

#### **Perceived Uses of CLT**

The attitudes of ELT teachers were positive towards CLT as they perceived that in comparison to the other teaching approaches, CLT provided more chances to their students for learning communicative English language. The ELT teachers gave priority to CLT due to their perceived significant attributes of CLT, i.e. student -centeredness, interaction, activity based learning, speaking fluency, and communicative competence.



**Student centeredness-** The teachers considered *student centeredness* as a useful attribute of CLT which maximizes students' participation in learning of communication skills while the teacher's role is to facilitate students' learning. As T1 stated that, "*CLT is a teaching approach which teachers use to involve the students in learning a new language with the help of interaction*". T5 stated that, "*CLT is student-centered approach focusing communication skills in English language*".

**Interaction-** The teachers perceived CLT as an interactive approach because it provides learning opportunities to students through interaction with their classmates and their teachers. T2 opined, "*CLT is a teaching method for teaching students how to communicate in English language using interaction and conversation*". Similarly, T1 stated, "*CLT is a teaching approach ...to involve the students in learning a new language with the help of interaction*".

**Activity based learning-** The teachers perceived that CLT focuses on *activity based learning* as the teachers designed or planned the activities to involve their students in target language communication. T4 stated, "*CLT is a teaching method in which students participate in class activities which use interpersonal communication.*" The most frequently used CLT activities by the ELT teachers in their contexts were dialogue, group discussion, presentation, and role-play, however, other CLT activities such as information gap were rarely used.

**Speaking Fluency-** Speaking fluency was another perceived attribute of CLT. T3 opined, "*I think CLT approach is used to teach communication skills to our students in the target language, especially, enhancing their oral skills.*" Similarly, T4 stated that "*CLT allows students ... for interpersonal communication in English for developing speaking fluency.*"

**Communicative Competence-** The ELT teachers considered *communicative competence* as a target focused attribute of CLT to develop communicative competence in the English language via use of CLT techniques such as presentations, group discussions, dialogues and role-plays. The teachers shared that CLT techniques involved their students in preparation, practice, production, and presentation of the given tasks which provided them the opportunities for using and practicing the target language that increased students' communicative competence. T1 shared, "*For presentations, students gather material, practice it, and when they give presentation in front of the class, their communicative competence increases.*" T4 opined as "*Communicative competence is increased simply when students try to speak few sentences*



during conversational activities in class, such as dialogues, interviews, group discussions, information gap etc.” Similarly, T5 shared, “I have observed that communicative competence is achieved through activities such as role plays and discussion as these are very helpful for increasing students’ confidence while speaking to one another and with teacher during activities”.

### **Perceived Challenges regarding Implementation of CLT**

The perceived challenges for implementation of CLT were divided mainly into four categories, i.e. Teacher-related challenges, Students-related challenges, Educational System-related challenges, CLT approach-related challenges.

#### **Teachers-related Challenges**

**Lack of Proper Professional Training-** Some of the ELT teachers opined that the lack of proper professional training hindered the implementation of CLT as mostly the ELT teachers had not been provided proper training about how to apply CLT and how to enhance communication skills among their students. The perceptions of the teachers could be sum up and better expressed by the opinion of T4 as she stated, “As per my knowledge, ELT teachers fail to apply CLT because they are not trained about the purpose, techniques, and practical use of CLT.”

**Lack of Time Management** - Lack of time management is one of the constraints to apply CLT as the ELT teachers have opined that planning of CLT activities usually consume too much time for selection and designing of activities which is not easy to manage for the teachers. T5 explained: “For a communicative activity, we have to carefully select or develop materials that can achieve the learning objectives, and all these require a lot of time.”

#### **Students-related Challenges**

**Lack of motivation-** The ELT teachers opined that most of the students were habitual of learning through traditional teaching method in their schooling phase, as a result, those students lacked motivation to learn through CLT. T1 stated, “In colleges, students come from different learning backgrounds. Majority has been taught through traditional teaching method while very few have experience of activity-based learning in their previous classes. So, those who have been taught through traditional method, resist the change.”





**Lack of English language Proficiency-** Students' lack of English language proficiency was perceived as one of the obstacles for CLT implementation. The ELT teachers opined that lack of language proficiency is caused mainly due to the lack of vocabulary, code-switching and fear of criticism. Regarding fear of criticism, T4 stated, "*Some students are not willing to speak in class due to the fear of their class fellows' criticism while they make errors during speech.*"

Regarding lack of vocabulary, T5 stated, "*Sometimes, I feel that students want to share their knowledge, but their problem is lack of vocabulary.*" Regarding code-switching T3 stated, "*Usually, the students who have the ideas but cannot fully express them in English, insist to use their mother tongue.*"

### **Educational System related Challenges**

**Inappropriate Timetable-** Inappropriate timetable was one of the perceived challenges regarding implementation of CLT. T4 shared concerns about such timetable as "*In the time-table, second last period is allocated for English that comes after recess, due to which students come late in class and it's very hard to manage CLT activities in the remaining time.*". Regarding insufficient time duration, T1 stated, "*Since CLT involves collaborative and cooperative learning activities, and these activities are time consuming, so I feel that 40 minutes aren't suffice.*"

**Lack of materials and resources-** The ELT teachers identified lack of appropriate materials and resources as constraints for applying CLT. The lack of audio-visual aids was considered as a constraint for which T2 stated, "*I have observed that unavailability of audio-visual aids slows down progress of a communicative classroom.*" T5 shared the concern about unavailability of internet and commented: "*If we are provided with the facility of internet at our workplace, we can have better chances to plan our lessons using CLT activities.*" T4 stated, "*Computerized digital English language laboratory is necessary to be established for CLT.*"

**Inappropriate Seating Arrangement-** Inappropriate seating arrangement is problematic for ELT teachers while applying some of the CLT activities because the available furniture in the class such as long desks in rows were considered inappropriate for a language classroom. T2 explained, "*There is no seat by seat arrangement for the students, as benches or desks are provided in classes, on which 2 to 3 students can sit. Therefore, movement and arrangement for some CLT activities, such as group discussion is too difficult.*" In some of the CLT activities, teachers felt helpless regarding rearrangement of heavy furniture in different shapes such as in



circles or horseshoe etc. For such a situation, T4 stated, *“If I intend my students to be seated in U-Shape for performing an activity, I can’t do so... just because of seating arrangement. Benches are so heavy, and the movement of benches definitely creates a lot of noise which can disturb the neighboring classes.”*

**Overcrowded Classes-** Overcrowded classes were one of the perceived hurdles for adoption of CLT. Sharing the concern about monitoring students’ participation in group activities T5 stated: *“It is very difficult to monitor whether each of the group discussion members participates actively in the group discussion.”* T2 was concerned about students’ passive learning and free riding during group discussions as she stated: *“In large classes, students’ free riding is very common and it’s not easy to control during group work when some of the students remain passive and rely on their peers.”* Class control in over-crowded classrooms was another concern for which T3 stated: *“Class control becomes very difficult to maintain if large class is involved in group discussion.”* Regarding individual attention to each student, T4 stated: *“Due to a large number of students in class, individual attention is almost impossible during class activities.”*

**Exam-oriented education** -Exam-oriented education was one of the challenges for implementation of CLT by ELT teachers due to which oral and aural communicative language activities were less focused. Sharing the concern T1 stated: *“...the teacher whose students could not capture good marks in the subject is generally not considered as a good teacher.”* Regarding fear of accountability, T4 stated: *“The pressure of accountability diverts us towards teaching to test as the low scores of the students can bring negative consequences for teachers.”* Sharing concerns about students’ learning practices, T3 stated: *“College students are aware of the fact that the written examinations are the only requirement to pass the paper of English, so they learn only to get grades.”*

### **CLT Approach related Challenges**

**Classroom confined language practices-** The ELT teachers opined that it is comparatively difficult to apply CLT in EFL contexts then ESL contexts as EFL contexts rarely find English speaking environment outside classrooms. Commenting on the scenario T4 stated: *“Students use to talk English only in classroom during the period of English but when they go out of classroom, they use their mother tongue.”* T1 stated: *“Usually, there is no supportive environment to speak*



*English outside classroom, due to which students' English-speaking practice is limited to the classroom."*

**Lack of adequate tools for assessment and evaluation-** The ELT teachers were concerned about the assessment and evaluation of students' communicative competence in English while using CLT as they could not find reliable instruments to measure students' communicative competence in English. Regarding assessment of descriptive activities, T2 stated: *"While my students describe a given picture orally, I feel it very difficult to assess them because the assessment could be influenced by my own interpretation, the way I interpret the picture differs from my students', the way my students interpret also differ from one another."*

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

### **Discussion**

#### **ELT Teachers' Perceived Uses of CLT**

The study findings revealed that CLT is student-centered approach for learning communicative English language through active participation. This finding is in line with M.A. Khan (2016). CLT was perceived as interactive approach helping students to learn the target language via communication and conversation. This finding is in line with Alharbi and Aldaba (2018) that interaction is a feature of CLT. It was revealed that CLT provides oral inter-communicative activities such as dialogue, group discussion, presentation, role-plays, and information-gap for learning English language. This finding concurred with Shahid et al. (2022) that CLT approach focuses students' interactive and meaningful language learning. It was revealed that CLT develops speaking skills and increases speaking fluency in English. These findings are in line with Alharbi and Aldaba (2018) that CLT helps to achieve fluency via communication in the target language. It was discovered that CLT helps to increase students' communicative competence through students' preparation, practice, presentation, and performance in communicative tasks through speaking and talking in English language. This finding concurred with Christianto (2019) who noted that CLT is helpful regarding communicative competence.

#### **ELT Teachers' Perceived Challenges regarding Implementation of CLT**

It was discovered that ELT teachers' lack of proper professional training to teach English language and lack of time management were challenges for the implementation of CLT. These findings concurred with Hashim (2016) who noted that lack of training and shortage of time



acted as obstacles while applying CLT. It was revealed that students' lack of motivation and students' lack of proficiency in English language hindered the implementation of CLT. These findings were in line with Noori (2018).

It was explored that improper timetable was one of the impediments to CLT implementation. The duration of the period for teaching English was not sufficient to employ CLT activities. This finding concurred with Chang and Goswami (2011) who noted that CLT activities were hindered due to insufficient class time duration. The present study also revealed that the period after recess faced late arrival of students that also hindered CLT activities. It was discovered that lack of materials and resources such as audio-visual aids, internet's access, and unavailability of computerized digital language laboratory hindered CLT implementation. This finding concurred with Asik (2016), and Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019). Furthermore, M.A. Khan (2016) confirmed that sufficient materials and resources helped teachers to apply CLT successfully in EFL contexts. It was explored that improper seating arrangement for students, i.e. benches instead of individual seats hindered the adoption of CLT activities. This finding concurred with Islam and Bari (2012) as they noted that in English language classes, single-direction seating arrangement hindered CLT implementation due to difficulty in rearrangement of the furniture for conduction of CLT activities. It was discovered that over-crowded classes hindered CLT implementation as it was difficult for the teachers to maintain class discipline, individual attention, and learners' active participation during CLT activities. This finding concurred with Taha and Salamah (2016), Panhwar, et al. (2017), and Alharbi and Aldaba (2018) as they confirmed that large classes hindered the implementation of CLT. It was revealed that prevalence of exam-oriented teaching barred proper CLT implementation due to teachers' fear of accountability about students' results. This finding concurred with Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) who confirmed that exam focusing practices hindered proper CLT implementation.

It was discovered that CLT as an approach somehow hinders itself its implementation in EFL contexts, due to lack of English-speaking environment outside classroom which confines language practice to classroom in the period of English. This finding is in line with Chang and Goswami (2011) who inferred that CLT works better in ESL context than EFL contexts, as ESL contexts have conducive environment for speaking English while EFL contexts have limited English speaking environment.



It was revealed that CLT approach itself creates difficulty to its implementation regarding assessment and evaluation of students' performance as it lacks adequate tools which can be fit in each ELT context equally without cultural biasness. This finding is in line with Panhwar, et al. (2017) as they confirmed that the CLT approach's design is not suitable for adoption in every country due to the contextual differences, however, CLT can be adapted keeping into consideration the contextual constraints.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

ELT teachers' attitudes were positive towards CLT. The teachers perceived CLT as a significant student-centered approach for teaching English language to increase students' communicative competence along with speaking fluency through interactive activities. However, the perceived challenges regarding CLT's implementation were teachers' lack of proper professional training to teach English language, lack of time management for planning and designing CLT activities, students' lack of motivation and lack of English language proficiency, improper timetable, lack of materials and resources, inappropriate seating arrangement, over-crowded classes, exam-oriented education, classroom confined language practices, and lack of adequate tools for assessment and evaluation of students' performance.

The present study recommends cooperation of concerned administration, curriculum designers and policy makers to collaborate with ELT teachers to provide proper training for teaching English language, curricular directions, and guidance for effective implementation of CLT in their contexts. Furthermore, availability of proper resources and materials, proper timetable, adequate class size and flexible individual seating arrangement for students could help to establish conducive environment for successful implementation of CLT.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

The present study has focused population of the public colleges of district Sukkur, it is recommended to conduct a qualitative research study including population of the higher secondary schools of district Sukkur to extract the phenomenon through their perceptions. Furthermore, province-wise quantitative and qualitative studies regarding applicable strategies for successful implementation of CLT for teaching English Language in Pakistani EFL contexts may be conducted.



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