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## **Communicative Approach**

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## **Introduction :**

This blog article aims to provide language educators an overview of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT in short) methods with encouragement and tips on how to integrate CLT methods into their classroom activities.

The growing need for fluent communication skills in today's globalized world creates a challenge for English and foreign language teaching. Students must be given a proper foundation of communication skills that are demanded in different interactive real-world situations outside of the classroom. Students need to be prepared for real-life scenarios instead of just helping them to pass a superficial ESL, ELT or modern language exam. Traditional language teaching methods focus on grammar and vocabulary, with less emphasis on communication skills and are therefore criticised as they do not develop students speaking and listening skills adequately.

Communicative teaching methods are currently a popular point of discussion and their effectiveness in building students' fluency and communication skills have been taken into account by language teachers all over the world. As our mission at Sanako is to build language teaching tools that help teachers to create a more speaking-based language classrooms and help their students to develop stronger communication skills, we also see CLT as one of the most effective and important language teaching strategies currently.

We also published an instructional video for language instructors about the communicative language teaching approach, its conception, application and including some example language learning activities to best help you get the most out of your class! You can check the video below and on Sanako's Youtube Channel.

## **What is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)?**

Communicative language teaching methodology emerged in the 1980s as a response to the growing demand for a language curriculum that would enable learners to use the second language in real-life situations. Previously, foreign language teaching (or English language teaching for non-native English speakers) has predominantly had its emphasis on grammatical competence, especially because grammar-translation was the most accepted teaching method, rather than actually focusing on developing students' communication and interaction skills.

At the end of the day, language does principally exist to make communication possible. CLT methods primarily focus on the interaction during a classroom-based foreign language class or remote language learning session, in which language learners actually produce speech and engage in conversations for most of the classroom time using the target language.

The main purpose behind communicative language teaching methods is to prepare students to be confident communicators in different real-life contexts, through repetitive oral practices and student-student cooperation. In CLT, communication is the end and the means of the teaching method. You can read more about the advantages of the CLT approach here: “What are the advantages of Communicative Language Teaching?”

“One can master the rules of sentence formation in a language and still not be very successful at being able to use the language for meaningful communication (Richards 2006).”

-Encourage student-student interaction with role-playing and collaborative tasks

-Student-student interaction plays an essential role in applying a communicative teaching approach. As the more traditional teaching styles have usually been rather teacher dominant with students mainly learning through passive listening, student-student interaction, on the contrary, focuses on the active interaction among the students themselves during language classes.

Student-student interaction embraces the strategies of cooperative learning in which each student's learning success is dependent on the whole group's input during the classroom sessions. This is an effective way of engaging the whole class as such exercises engage all students, not just the minority of active students who typically participate in a regular class.

One popular CLT activity is role-playing. There is a playful component in role-playing that helps students practice speaking without feeling pressure. You can for example assign parts to your students, or let them decide on a specific setting. Choose a topic that is relevant to students, or one that connects to other topics explained in class. This will ensure that role-playing is an integral part of language lessons and not only a stand-alone experience.

Collaborative tasks like assigning student groups to solve a puzzle using only the target language are also popular activities in CLT. This type of exercise allows not only to enhance students' communication skills and language skills but also to experiment with the peer-learning approach, which is useful in strengthening relationships among students.

## **How to make use of communicative language teaching in your language instruction?**

Although a teacher's role is not as dominant during exercises that emphasize student-student interaction, it certainly is substantial in making the interactional learning space as functional for the students as possible.

In order to implement CLT methods successfully, it requires more than simply placing students into pairs and groups. To quote Felder and Henriquez (1995: 25):

“The benefits of the approach are fully realized when the group work is structured to assure such features as positive interdependence, individual accountability, and appropriate uses of teamwork and interpersonal skills”.

Each student in a language classroom has individual needs, levels of abilities, and interests. Therefore, having different tasks designed to meet the needs and skills of different students is essential in CLT. Also, providing a supportive learning environment makes participation easier for students, especially those who easily feel shy about active participation.

Some of the challenges that teachers may face when implementing this method in their language classrooms are:

Large class sizes: CLT is most effective in smaller groups where students can actively engage in communicative activities. In large classes, it can be challenging to manage and facilitate meaningful interaction between all students and the teacher's time might not be sufficient to provide feedback and support for all student pairs/groups.

Limited resources: Implementing CLT may require additional language learning resources, such as authentic materials, audio-visual aids, or digital tools. Inadequate access to these resources can hinder the effective application of CLT in the classroom.

### **7 practical tips towards applying the communicative language teaching method:**

Have plenty of communicative student-student activities (pair discussions, role-playing, puzzle-solving, and other collaborative tasks) so that each student is constantly exposed to the target language.

Communicative activities should include a clear situation or context, the roles of the speakers, and a communicative purpose.

### **Practice different formal and informal interactions through games, role-play, and problem-solving tasks.**

Teachers should concentrate on providing a supportive learning atmosphere and selecting personalized tasks for students in terms of their individual level, needs, and interests. The teacher should see themselves more as a facilitator than a lecturer.

Focus on fluency before accuracy. Encourage students to prioritize fluency and communication. Obviously as a teacher you should also address accuracy when necessary but it is good to keep the priority and emphasis on fluency. Provide feedback and corrections in a supportive manner that encourages continued communication.

Encourage self-reflection and self-assessment: Help students develop metacognitive skills by encouraging them to reflect on their language learning progress and set goals for improvement. This fosters a sense of responsibility and autonomy in their learning process.

Use the right tools for creating and assigning speaking-based language learning activities. For example, you can use modern language teaching software tools like Sanako Connect that allow recording each students' individual speaking practices and group/pair work. Software tools like this also enable important self-evaluation by allowing students to listen back to their own speech and recordings.

If you'd like to learn more about how to use CLT in your foreign language teaching you might also want to read our other articles that expand on this main article's key points:

### **Eight reasons why teachers should use the Communicative Language Teaching .**

**Student expectations:** Some students might have a traditional view of language learning, expecting a focus on grammar and vocabulary. They may be resistant to the communicative approach or feel frustrated by the emphasis on speaking-based activities.

**Cultural barriers:** In some cultures, students may be hesitant to speak up or engage in communicative activities due to societal norms, inhibitions, or concerns about making mistakes in front of their peers.

**Assessment challenges:** Traditional language assessments and exams often focus on reading, writing and grammar skills rather than communicative competence. Teachers may find it difficult to assess students' progress in a way that aligns with the goals of CLT and they might need to spend extra time redesigning their assessment and examination processes.

