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EFFECTIVENESS OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) IN DEVELOPING FLUENCY AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

The prestige of the English language is recognized globally, as well as within the ESL domain, such as in Pakistan. The study aims to investigate the effectiveness of the communicative language teaching approach in enhancing English language speaking proficiency and fluency among Pakistani secondary school students, who face limited oral proficiency due to the dominance of the grammar translation method, despite English being a compulsory subject. Grammar translation method is a traditional and foundational learning approach; however, in contrast, the communicative language approach has a functional view and an interactional nature, which emphasizes authentic communication, learnercentered activities, and fluency over mechanical accuracy. We use quasi-experimental research to evaluate the fluency outcome of two groups. The experimental group is taught using a communicative approach, and the other group is taught using GTM. The CLT instructions were based on the involvement of speaking proficiency, group discussions, information gap activities, and real-life communicative tasks. Data is gathered by pre- and post-speaking assessment, classroom observation, learner feedback, and a seven-point Likert scale questionnaire. The six students' samples were taken from each of the ten higher secondary schools. The findings indicate that students who are exposed to communicative language teaching have significant improvement in confidence, fluency, and communicative competence, paralleled by their counterparts who were taught by the traditional method. The research contributes to applied linguistics in Pakistan by providing the superiority of communicative language teaching. It further offers insights to educators and stakeholders for reforming syllabus design and classroom environment as a step towards improvement of pedagogy at the secondary school level.

Keywords

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Fluency Development; ESL Education; Secondary Schools; Pakistan; Language Pedagogy; Communicative Competence.

Introduction

Today, in the age of a globalized world, English language proficiency is an indispensable skill used in all domains of life (Stein-Smith, 2018). It not only serves as a medium of communication and academic achievements but also is a fundamental tool for professional mobility (Semchuk et al., 2022). English holds a prestigious social status in Pakistan, being a compulsory language subject at the secondary level and is recognized as an official language in higher education, commerce, and governance. Despite this centrality, there is limited oral proficiency among the students after completion of secondary school education (Ullah et al., 2025). There is a

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prevailing teaching practice associated with the grammar translation method by prioritizing it due to its rule learning. The students are drilled in grammar rules and vocabulary lists with little opportunity for authentic spoken interaction, resulting in proficiency in written examination, lacking spoken fluency and communicative competency, which is needed in tourism, commerce, and industry (Ho, 2020). This dilemma enhances the urgent requirement to rethink pedagogical approaches for teaching English in Pakistan.

However, communicative language teaching has been introduced as a widely established strategy to address such shortcomings globally, and it is grounded on the interactional and functional aspects of language (Alamri, 2018). It has also transformed the focus from language being as abstract as rules towards a tool that serves meaningful and effective communication. A communicative language teaching approach either promotes fluency among learners or enhances pair group discussions, problem-solving exercises, and informative perceptions. Therefore, there is a potential in this method to develop opportunities for ESL learners to engage in literal language use and negotiate meaning by building confidence in oral interaction (Champakaew & Pencingkarn, 2014). It does not aim ultimately for linguistic competency but for the potential to function effectively in certain communicative environments. In the Pakistani educational landscape, the implementation of CLT faces both restrictions and challenges. On one hand, there is increasing recognition among policymakers, educators, and linguists that traditional approaches fail to meet learners' communicative needs. On the other hand, contextual factors such as large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, limited teacher training, and deeply entrenched reliance on GTM pose barriers to the successful adoption of CLT (Guo, 2021). Despite these challenges, recent calls for educational reform emphasize the importance of learner-centered approaches that foster critical thinking, creativity, and communicative competence outcomes that align closely with the principles of CLT (Raikhel, 2025).

The research aims to sponsor an ongoing discussion that investigates empirically the effectiveness and strength of communicative language teaching in developing fluency and accuracy among secondary school ESL learners in Pakistan. The study will seek its underpinnings through quasi-experimental research by comparing the consequences among learners taught by the communicative language teaching method and the traditional grammar translation method. The significance of this research lies in its dual contribution. Theoretically, it adds to the body of applied linguistics literature by testing the effectiveness of CLT in a South Asian context, where English functions as a second/foreign language and educational resources are unevenly distributed. Practically, it offers insights for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers who are seeking strategies to align English instruction with the communicative demands of the 21st century. If CLT proves effective, it can serve as a blueprint for reforming English language teaching practices in Pakistani secondary schools, ultimately helping students move beyond rote memorization toward genuine communicative competence.

Research Objective

To see the effectiveness of communicative language teaching (CLT) in developing fluency among secondary school Students in Pakistan.

Literature Review

The second language pedagogy is influenced by communicative language teaching as a fundamental approach since the last few decades (Savignon, 2007), and in Pakistan, its significance is recognizably highlighted for contemporary scholarship (Akram et al., 2025). Emerging in the 1970s as a reaction to grammar-focused approaches, CLT redefined the aims of

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language teaching by emphasizing the development of communicative competence, which encompasses not only grammatical accuracy but also the ability to use language effectively in authentic contexts (Fallatah, 2021). Larsen-Freeman and Freeman (2008) argue that language is viewed as an instrument for communication, comprising a set of rules, and that modern classrooms are established worldwide. The fundamental principle of communicative language teaching is that learners should acquire language through negotiation, interaction, and participation in real-life scenarios, which offers significant benefits in minimizing the fundamental challenges in Pakistan's ESL education classrooms (Shamim, 2018).

There is hegemony of the grammar translation method in Pakistan, which historically shapes teaching and learning practices in the ESL education domain (Bano, 2025). The students achieve their success in their examination through the drill of vocabulary lists, grammatical rules, memorization, and translation instead of communicative practice (Numonova, 2024). Umer et al. (2024) examined the effectiveness of communicative language teaching methods used by ESL teachers in the Hazara Division, finding significant differences in the academic performance of students taught using the CLT method. The students demonstrate better pronunciation, accent, syntactic structure, and body language. Khan et al. (2023) investigate the effectiveness of communicative language in EFL classrooms, revealing teachers' awareness of the method's significance and its positive impact on attitudes and perceptions in CLT. Shahid et al. improved communicative competence through CLT in the ESL domain, and results highlight the appropriate readings and writings; however, minimum oral proficiency restricts them towards professional mobility, the globalized economy, and prestigious social status.

Mahmood and Naz (2018) examine teacher attitudes and communicative approaches in EFL classrooms, emphasizing the importance of freedom of speech for active participation and reinforcing the effectiveness of the communicative approach. Bhutto and Kazami (2024) view the effectiveness of ELT textbooks to develop oral communicative competence and illuminate the need for improvement of ESL teaching practice. Ramzan et al. (2023a) empower ESL learners by harnessing the potential of social media for academic motivation in the view of CLT and highlight the overlooked potential of social media. Ramzan et al. (2023b) amplify class enjoyment by cultivating attitudes in CLT and emphasize supportive classrooms, learnercentered approach, and authentic materials. Ramzan et al. (2023c) unravel the connections between social media usage and academic achievement, concluding that it provides access to improve ESL learning outcomes. Ramzan et al. (2023d) in English learning motivation through sustainable goals in CLT conclude significant differences among genders in all four types of constructs. Ramzan et al. (2023e) perceive the collaborative strategies employed by teachers for students' CLT and conclude positive impacts. Ramzan and Alahmadi (2024) examine the impact of syntax instructions on the development of complex structures in ESL writings, highlighting cultural integration and the potential of technology in task-based CLT. Chen and Ramzan (2024) studied the CLT through Facebook portfolios in ESL learners and concluded the positive impacts. Javaid et al. (2024) examined the problems and stress-related challenges faced by ESL learners and concluded that the CLT strategy makes a significant contribution. Javaid et al. (2024) conducted a systematic review on the cognitive and motivational impacts of ESL learning through AI, concluding that AI is the future of language training.

In synthesizing the literature, it becomes clear that CLT holds considerable potential for developing fluency among Pakistani secondary school students. It fosters engagement, builds confidence, and provides authentic opportunities for spoken interaction—elements that are

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largely absent in GTM-driven classrooms. At the same time, systemic challenges such as exam orientation, insufficient teacher training, and infrastructural limitations cannot be overlooked. This tension between promise and practicality suggests that future research, particularly quasi-experimental studies, is essential to establish the concrete impact of CLT on fluency development in the Pakistani context. If such studies confirm the anticipated benefits, they could serve as evidence-based blueprints for educational policymakers and curriculum developers seeking to reform English language teaching practices. Ultimately, CLT offers a pathway to move beyond rote memorization toward meaningful communication, a shift that is crucial for equipping students with the linguistic skills required in the interconnected world of the twenty-first century.

Research Question

What is the effectiveness of communicative language teaching (CLT) in developing fluency among secondary school Students in Pakistan.

Methodology

The research is a quasi-experimental design that tests the effectiveness of English language teaching in light of the communicative approach by viewing fluency at the secondary level in Pakistan, where the language is taught as a compulsory subject. Two twelfth-grade classes of sixty students, thirty each, were selected as a sample of the study. The age limit was between 16 and 18 years. The students were divided into two groups. The comparability of both groups was tested through speaking fluency assessment, including their spoken proficiency, pausing, and hesitation phenomenon. The test involved short conversations, role plays, and topic-based speaking prompts, scored using an analytic rubric adapted from internationally recognized frameworks such as the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Two independent raters confirmed the inter-rater reliability, who analyzed the assessment separately, and they resolved the discrepancy through consensus. The intervention period consisted of eight weeks, and we provided training to the experimental group in light of CLT through audiovisual aids and spoken practice. It was aimed at enhancing speaking proficiency. However, the other group was treated through GTM, where grammar rules, translation exercises, and written drills were focused. There was limited focus on spoken proficiency in GTM. Teachers with comparable teaching experience taught both groups, and lesson durations were kept consistent to ensure fairness in instructional exposure. The data was collected from multiple resources to enhance validity. The change in fluency was checked through pre- and post-tests. Then we conducted classroom observation and used a structured observation checklist for the documentation of students' participation, interaction, and classroom discourse. Finally, we administered a learner's experience questionnaire on a seven-point Likert scale, capturing students' perceptions of their learning experiences. We also viewed the attitudes and confidence levels of students in the questionnaire towards spoken proficiency. This combination of quantitative and qualitative measures ensured a comprehensive understanding of the effects of CLT.We used a two-stage process to analyze the data. In quantitative data, pre- and post-test analyses were conducted using sample t-tests and independent sample t-tests to examine significant differences among groups over time. We also calculated effect sizes to measure the differences. The descriptive technique was used to analyze classroom observation for the identification of recurring patterns of participation and interaction. We also summarized the responses to the feedback questionnaire and analyzed them thematically using Clarke & Braun's (2014) model to examine the subjective experiences of two instructional approaches. Research

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ethics were followed strictly throughout the study. No student was disadvantaged for the participation because we provided English language teachings aligned with their curriculum needs without any bias to both groups. We sought empirical evidence through a methodological framework to determine whether the communicative language approach can enhance fluency and communicative competence in Pakistani secondary school learners.

Results

The findings of the study are presented in terms of pre- and post-test speaking assessments, classroom observations, questionnaire findings and learner feedback from both the experimental group (taught through CLT) and the control group (taught through the Grammar-Translation Method). The pre-test results indicated that both groups demonstrated comparable levels of English fluency prior to the intervention. The mean fluency score of the experimental group was 41.3, while the control group's mean score was 40.8 on a 60-point analytic speaking scale. The independent samples t-test confirmed no statistically significant difference between the two groups at baseline (p = 0.72), suggesting both cohorts began the intervention with nearly identical proficiency levels.

Following the eight-week instructional intervention, the post-test results revealed a notable improvement in the fluency of the experimental group. The experimental group achieved a mean post-test score of 52.9, reflecting a mean gain of 11.6 points. By contrast, the control group attained a mean post-test score of 44.1, representing only a 3.3-point gain. An independent samples t-test showed that the difference in post-test scores between the experimental and control groups was highly significant (t = 5.48, p < 0.001). The calculated effect size (Cohen's d = 0.92) indicated a large effect, suggesting that CLT-based instruction had a substantial impact on students' oral fluency.

Analysis of the fluency components revealed that students in the experimental group displayed marked progress in speech rate, reduced hesitation, and more effective turn-taking in conversations. They also showed greater confidence in initiating and sustaining dialogues. While the control group demonstrated modest gains in vocabulary recall and sentence accuracy, they continued to exhibit frequent pauses and limited ability to sustain spontaneous interaction.

The classroom observations supported these quantitative findings. In CLT classrooms, students were more engaged in speaking activities, with higher participation rates in pair and group tasks. The discourse was more learner-centered, with students' frequently negotiating meaning, asking clarification questions, and providing feedback to peers. In contrast, control group classrooms were dominated by teacher talk and rote memorization exercises, with only limited student contributions, often confined to short responses or translation tasks. The learner feedback questionnaires further highlighted positive perceptions toward CLT. A majority (82%) of students in the experimental group reported that role plays, discussions, and problem-solving tasks made them feel more confident using English in real-life situations. Many expressed that CLT helped them overcome their fear of speaking and provided opportunities to practice English in meaningful contexts. Conversely, only 37% of students in the control group felt that their classes improved their speaking ability, with many noting that lessons remained focused on grammar rules and translation, offering few opportunities for oral practice. Taken together, these findings provide strong evidence that CLT is more effective than traditional grammar-translation approaches in developing English fluency among secondary school students in Pakistan. The improvement was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful, as reflected in

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increased confidence, greater willingness to communicate, and stronger engagement in authentic language use.

Discussion

The results explain through the study consequences that communicative language teaching is a significantly more effective to enhance the spoken proficiency of ESL learners at secondary level in Pakistan as compared to grammar translation method. The findings reinforce the claim that communicative language teaching has a potential to promote and foster language competency than grammar drills and rote memorization (Ruzemetova, 2025). There is a consistency in the findings by viewing global scholar ship which claims communicative language teachings as a powerful ELT tool. Alamri (2018) and Champakaew and Pencingkarn (2014) have claimed CLT has a potential to enable learners engaging in authentic language use, building confidence in oral interactions, and negotiating meaning. The study further illuminate these outcomes in South Asian context, where English is a known as marker of social mobility and second language (Nawaz et al., 2021). By engaging in role plays, discussions, and information-gap activities, students in the experimental group not only improved their fluency but also became more willing to take risks in communication, a crucial step toward achieving communicative competence (Bagguley& Hussain, 2016). The students further showed slight gains in vocabulary recall and written accuracy by lacking the ability to initiate or sustain conversations without hesitation. This echoes the arguments of Ho (2020) and Ullah et al. (2025) claim that dominance of teacher centered and exam oriented methodologies grow those students who are adept in written proficiency like examination however remained handicapped in the use of oral competency. The results maintain the hegemony of grammar translation method which teach structural accuracy and students remains unprivileged towards fluency skill which are dire needs in social, professional and academic settings (Dildora, 2025). The classroom observations also confirm the validity of communicative language teachings (Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020) where they actively participate in interactive strategies, enhance motivation and provide confidence (Nawaz et al., 2021). These findings align with earlier research conducted which found that secondary students in Pakistan preferred communicative methods over traditional approaches, citing them as more engaging and relevant to real-life contexts (Wang et al., 2023). The positive attitudes toward CLT expressed by learners in the present study suggest that communicative approaches not only enhance fluency but also foster intrinsic motivation, which is critical for sustained language learning (Wanih, 2014).

Nevertheless, the study also highlights contextual challenges that have been reported in earlier literature. Guo (2021) and Raikhel (2025) pointed out that large class sizes, limited teacher training, and exam-driven curricula act as barriers to the implementation of CLT in developing countries. Although the present study demonstrated significant gains in fluency through CLT, it was conducted in a controlled environment with two intact classes and an eight-week intervention. Scaling such practices across Pakistan's diverse secondary schools may prove more complex. Teachers in many schools lack relevant training in communicative methodologies and may struggle to design and manage interactive tasks in overcrowded classrooms. These systemic barriers must be acknowledged when considering the broader application of CLT in Pakistan (Shaikh et al., 2024).

Another important point emerging from this study is the need to rethink the role of assessment in language classrooms. The current examination system in Pakistan primarily rewards rote learning and grammatical accuracy, thereby discouraging teachers from prioritizing oral skills.

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Unless assessment frameworks incorporate speaking fluency as a core component, the adoption of CLT will remain limited in practice. The results of this study suggest that when fluency is explicitly targeted through communicative tasks, students make remarkable progress. Thus, curriculum reforms must be aligned with communicative objectives to ensure that both teachers and learners see value in prioritizing oral competence (Breen & Candin, 2001).

Theoretically, this study contributes to applied linguistics literature by providing empirical evidence for the effectiveness of CLT in a South Asian context. While many studies on CLT have been conducted in Western or East Asian countries, fewer have examined its impact in Pakistan, where English plays a dual role as both an academic subject and a language of opportunity. The significant gains observed in the experimental group affirm that the principles of CLT are transferable across cultural and educational contexts, though contextual adaptation remains necessary (Bashir et al., 2025)

Practically, the study offers important implications for policymakers, curriculum designers, and educators in Pakistan. If CLT is integrated systematically into the secondary school curriculum, supported by teacher training and communicative assessment practices, it can help overcome the persistent problem of low oral proficiency among students. By shifting the focus from memorization to meaningful interaction, English teaching can be reoriented toward the communicative demands of the twenty-first century, including higher education, commerce, tourism, and global citizenship (Czerkawski & Berti, 2020).

In summary, the discussion underscores that CLT is not only an effective method for enhancing fluency among Pakistani secondary school students but also a necessary reform in response to the inadequacies of traditional teaching practices. While challenges such as teacher preparation, class sizes, and exam orientation cannot be overlooked, the evidence from this study strongly supports the argument that communicative approaches represent a more viable path toward genuine language competence. Ultimately, if policymakers and educators embrace CLT within the structural realities of Pakistan's education system, secondary school learners can be better equipped to use English confidently and effectively in both national and international contexts (Zufi, 2023).

Conclusion

The study set out to investigate the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in developing English fluency among secondary school students in Pakistan, comparing it with the traditional Grammar-Translation Method (GTM). The results revealed that students who were taught through CLT demonstrated significant improvements in speaking fluency, confidence, and communicative competence, whereas those in the GTM group showed only marginal progress, mostly in structural accuracy and vocabulary recall. The experimental group's progress was not only statistically significant but also practically meaningful, as reflected in reduced hesitation, smoother speech, and a greater willingness to engage in dialogue.

These findings affirm that CLT provides a more effective approach to developing the oral proficiency of Pakistani learners than the long-standing reliance on grammar-translation practices. The study contributes to the growing body of literature suggesting that traditional, exam-oriented teaching methods in Pakistan have limited impact on spoken competence, whereas communicative methodologies foster genuine language use. Despite challenges such as large class sizes, limited teacher training, and exam-focused curricula, the study demonstrates that CLT can be successfully implemented and can bring about measurable improvements in fluency if adapted thoughtfully to local contexts.



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Recommendations

On the basis of these findings, several recommendations can be proposed. First, English language teaching in Pakistani secondary schools should increasingly adopt CLT principles, with a greater emphasis on interactive classroom activities such as role plays, group discussions, debates, and information-gap tasks. These should be systematically integrated into lesson plans so that students are consistently exposed to opportunities for authentic language use.

Second, teachers require sustained professional development to equip them with the skills necessary to design and implement CLT-based activities effectively. Training programs should emphasize practical classroom management strategies for communicative tasks, especially in large classes, and introduce teachers to assessment methods that value fluency alongside accuracy.

Third, curriculum reform is essential to align assessment frameworks with communicative goals. Unless examinations test spoken fluency, teachers will remain reluctant to prioritize oral skills. The inclusion of speaking components in secondary school assessments would encourage both teachers and learners to focus on developing communicative competence rather than rote memorization. Finally, policymakers should allocate resources to support the implementation of CLT, such as providing access to teaching aids, reducing class sizes where possible, and introducing digital platforms that allow students to practice communicative tasks beyond the classroom.

Implications

The implications of this study extend to theory, practice, and policy. Theoretically, the findings contribute to applied linguistics by confirming the relevance of CLT in a South Asian context, where English functions both as a second language and as a symbol of socio-economic mobility. This evidence reinforces the argument that CLT principles are globally transferable, though they require contextual adaptation to local classroom realities.

For practice, the study underscores the urgent need for teachers to move beyond grammar-focused instruction and to create environments where learners can practice language in meaningful ways. Classroom interaction must shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered modes, thereby empowering students to develop confidence and autonomy in communication.

From a policy perspective, the study suggests that reforming English language teaching in Pakistan requires more than adopting new methods; it demands systemic changes in curriculum design, teacher education, and assessment structures. By embedding communicative goals in official curricula and examinations, policymakers can create incentives for teachers to implement CLT consistently. In the long run, this could help secondary school graduates acquire the communicative skills necessary for success in higher education, professional careers, and global interactions.

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