

IMPACT OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT) ON LARGE ESL CLASSROOMS: A TEACHER'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This qualitative study explores the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in large English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms at the tertiary level from a teacher's perspective. The study was conducted in a Pakistani university context, where large, exam-oriented classes are common. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with six university English teachers and were analysed thematically. The findings show that teachers generally view CLT as a useful, learner-centred approach that enhances students' speaking skills, fluency, and confidence by engaging them in real-life communicative tasks. However, they also reported significant practical challenges when using CLT in large classes, including difficulty in monitoring all students, limited individual feedback, noise and discipline issues, time constraints, and unequal participation between strong and weak learners. In response, teachers adapt CLT by using group and pair work, fixed roles, shorter structured tasks, and local topics, while combining CLT with other methods such as Grammar-Translation, direct method, task-based learning, and audio-lingual drills. The study highlights the need for teacher training, institutional support, smaller or better-managed class sizes, and assessment systems that value communicative competence. It concludes that CLT can have a positive impact in large ESL classrooms, but it is most effective when used in flexible, hybrid forms that are sensitive to local constraints.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), large ESL classes, teacher perspectives, Pakistani tertiary context, hybrid teaching methods.

1. Introduction:

Teaching methods play a crucial role in the process of learning and teaching languages. English is among the most widely spoken languages worldwide, used in fields such as technology, science, and business. This global importance has created a strong demand for effective teaching methods and resources. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), introduced in England in the 1970s, was considered revolutionary for placing communication at the centre of language learning. Today, it is widely recognised as one of the most effective approaches in English language teaching (Ansarey, 2012).

The main concept of CLT is that language learning should not be confined to grammar rules and vocabulary lists. Instead, it highlights the importance of understanding the meaning and communicative purposes of utterances as they are used in real-life situations (Qasserras, 2023). Communicative Language Teaching prioritizes meaning, recognizing communication as the key objective of second language learning (Magnan, 2007). Often termed the notional-functional approach, it was developed by the European Council in the 1970s, inspired by Wilkins' analysis of the communicative needs of learners, shifting attention away from grammar rules to the expression and understanding of meaning. (Qasserras, 2023).

In today's world, learning a foreign language has become a necessity for almost everyone. Communicative activities are therefore seen as valuable tools that help English teachers enhance their students' ability to use the language effectively. Modern learners are less satisfied with traditional methods that mainly emphasized grammar and past teaching practices. Instead, there is a growing expectation that teachers will enable students to gain practical, communicative competence in English rather than just theoretical knowledge about the language. (Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020)

Class size is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of foreign language instruction. Several studies (Blatchford, Bassett, & Brown, 2011; Mulryan-Kyne, 2010; Finn

et al., 2003; Gibbs & Jenkins, 1992) have examined how the number of students in a classroom influences teaching quality and suitable teaching methods for large groups. Blatchford et al. (2011), in particular, emphasized aspects such as active student participation, teacher-student interaction, attention to individual learners, and teachers' strategies for handling classroom challenges, highlighting the critical role of class size in these areas. (Turinská, 2017)

Large classes present several challenges that influence both teaching and learning. Benbow et al. (2007) noted that in developing countries, oversized classrooms negatively affect two key and closely related areas of teachers' work: the effective use of instructional time and the management of classroom activities. (Benbow, J., Mizrachi, A., Oliver, D., & Said-Moshiro, L. 2007).

Large classes in developing countries often undermine both instructional time and classroom management (Benbow et al., 2007). Such settings make it difficult for teachers to maintain effective teaching practices, which in turn reduces the overall quality of instruction. As a result, large class sizes have been shown to negatively affect instructional quality in different contexts (Benbow et al., 2007; Ndethiu et al., 2017).

Teachers' perceptions of class size are not fixed but are strongly influenced by context and culture. What may be considered a large class in one setting might be viewed differently in another, which makes teachers' tolerance for class size highly variable. These differences highlight the importance of cultural and contextual factors in shaping teachers' views (Ndethiu et al., 2017; Hayes, 1997)

Students in large classes often struggle to stay engaged because teachers are unable to provide sufficient individual attention. This lack of personal interaction makes it easier for learners to drift off task, which directly affects their academic focus and progress (Blatchford, Bassett, & Brown, 2011). What is considered a large class is not the same everywhere, as perceptions vary across cultural, economic, and political contexts. Students, teachers, and even society hold different views on what qualifies as a large class, which makes the definition context-dependent (Ndethiu et al., 2017).

Research indicates that teachers' perceptions of class size are not universal but are shaped by the context in which they teach. Cultural factors, in particular, play a major role in influencing how teachers view and tolerate large classes (Ndethiu et al., 2017). Large class sizes have a negative impact on both teacher motivation and classroom dynamics, which in turn lowers student engagement. In these circumstances, teachers find it difficult to evaluate and meet the needs of individual learners, and this often results in weaker academic outcomes for students (Ndethiu et al., 2017).

Teachers working in overcrowded classrooms face significant barriers that limit the quality of education they can deliver. The large number of students makes it harder to manage lessons effectively and provide meaningful learning experiences (Benbow et al., 2007, as cited in Ndethiu et al., 2017).

Many teachers believe that smaller classes are easier to manage because they allow for more effective teaching. Researchers also observe that smaller class sizes lead to better student performance and improved teacher morale, as educators can devote more attention to individual learners (Anderson, 2000; Rice, 1999, as cited in Ndethiu et al., 2017).

While many teachers regard large classes as difficult to handle, some researchers argue that they may also bring certain advantages. Blatchford (2003), for example, suggests that although teacher-student contact tends to decrease, large classes can encourage greater peer interaction among students, offering both challenges and opportunities (Ndethiu et al., 2017). Teachers expressed that large classes left them overburdened with both teaching and marking, which often led them to rely on short tests instead of more detailed assessments. Principals

further noted that subjects such as sciences, mathematics, and languages were especially difficult to handle under these conditions, leaving teachers exhausted and struggling to cope (Ndethiu et al., 2017).

Researchers observed that overcrowded classrooms made it difficult for teachers to move around freely, which limited their ability to maintain students' attention. As a result, opportunities for participation were reduced, and many learners were left disengaged. Large class sizes also restricted interaction among students themselves, further weakening the learning process (Ndethiu et al., 2017).

This research aims to examine how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) affects student learning in large ESL classrooms. It also seeks to understand teachers' views on implementing CLT in such settings. By investigating these factors, the study intends to offer a clearer picture of CLT's effectiveness and the strategies teachers use to overcome challenges in crowded classes.

Research Objectives:

- To investigate the overall perceived impact of CLT in large ESL classroom settings.
- To explore specifically English language teachers' perspectives on using CLT in large classroom settings.

Research questions

Q1: What is the perceived impact of CLT in large ESL classroom settings?

Q2: How do English language teachers perceive and experience using CLT in large classroom settings?

2. Literature Review:

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) centers on the use of authentic communication to enhance language proficiency. Although large classrooms present obstacles such as overcrowding and scarce resources, CLT, when applied effectively, can still improve students' speaking skills and increase their motivation. Despite difficulties like reduced interaction and limited materials in large classes, CLT remains a powerful method for developing students' speaking abilities and enthusiasm for learning.

Kasum, (2015) research investigates the use and effects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Kosovo high schools through a combination of literature review, observations, and experimental approaches. The study compares the performance of students in urban and rural areas across four language skills—reading, writing, speaking, and listening—between those taught using CLT and those taught by traditional methods. Findings indicate that urban students performed marginally better, partly due to the application of the ESA (Engage-Study-Activate) method, whereas rural teachers predominantly used behaviorist and direct methods, which were less effective. Experimental groups instructed with CLT, both in urban and rural settings, showed significantly higher achievement than control groups. The study concludes that CLT fits well within the Kosovo curriculum and positively impacts student achievement and teacher effectiveness.

Sherwani and Kilic (2017) report that Iraqi EFL teachers generally have positive attitudes toward the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), acknowledging its potential to improve communicative competence. However, they face several challenges in implementing CLT, particularly in large or resource-limited classrooms. These challenges include large class sizes, outdated curricula, lack of sufficient teaching materials, and limited English fluency among teachers. The authors stress that the educational system, teacher readiness, student abilities, and CLT's nature are key factors affecting successful implementation.

It also reveals that teacher attitudes differ across various CLT elements, showing less enthusiasm for grammar focus and error correction, while moderately accepting group work and learner-centered roles. Sherwani and Kilic emphasize the importance of reducing class sizes, enhancing resources, reforming curricula, and providing specific teacher training to better facilitate CLT in contexts like Iraq. They conclude that teacher fluency and familiarity with communicative approaches are crucial for effective CLT deployment, especially in large classrooms.

According to Almohideb (2019) examinations the difficulties of applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in settings similar to large ESL classrooms. The study finds mixed reactions from teachers and students toward CLT, recognizing its potential to develop communicative competence but noting that practical implementation is limited by factors such as large class sizes, time restrictions, and lack of resources. These challenges often lead teachers to modify or simplify communicative tasks, which decreases authentic interaction. Additionally, socio-cultural factors like traditional teacher-centered beliefs and exam-focused education further limit the emphasis on communication.

Abdelmageed & Ome, (2020) carried out a quantitative study to investigate how effective Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is in improving speaking skills in Sudanese secondary schools, based on teachers' viewpoints. They surveyed 100 English teachers randomly selected from Omdurman Locality. The results showed that most teachers strongly believe that having positive attitudes supports the successful use of CLT, as it makes teaching and sharing ideas easier. However, the study also revealed that the absence of authentic materials and large class sizes are significant obstacles to applying CLT. Despite these difficulties, teachers agreed that CLT enhances students' speaking abilities and encourages them to speak accurately both inside and outside the classroom.

Faizy (2020) notes a significant gap between ESL teachers' stated beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their actual classroom practices. Teachers interviewed supported a learner-centered approach that combines grammar, vocabulary, and the four language skills, aligning with CLT's emphasis on interaction. However, practical classroom conditions limited the full adoption of CLT principles. Specifically, teachers emphasized the importance of group and pair work and saw themselves as facilitators, which matches CLT's interactive focus.

Despite these ideals, teachers made adaptations such as heavily focusing on error correction to prevent fossilized mistakes, trying to balance accuracy with fluency. They also strategically used students' native language to help clarify meaning and grammar, addressing the limited vocabulary of learners. The research highlights a common theme in CLT literature: the tension between ideal communicative methods and the real-world constraints teachers face. The findings suggest that encouraging teachers to reflect on their beliefs and practices could improve awareness and help close the gap between CLT theory and classroom practice, especially in large ESL classes.

According to Le Thi Ngoc Hien (2021) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been present since the 1970s, its use remains limited in Asian higher education contexts, including Vietnam. CLT is valued for enhancing learners' communicative competence through authentic materials, interactive activities, and active learner participation. It motivates students by providing real-life communication chances that traditional grammar-focused approaches do not offer.

However, Hien highlights major challenges in implementing CLT in large ESL university classes in Asia. These challenges include education systems focused on exams that emphasize written tests rather than communicative skills, inadequate teacher training and confidence, a shortage of authentic materials, cultural attitudes towards language learning, and large class

sizes. Teachers find it difficult to fully use the target language while managing students with mixed proficiency levels, which can negatively impact student motivation.

Ghafar, Z. N. (2023) analyzed multiple studies on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its influence on students' speaking abilities. The research consistently indicates that CLT enhances fluency, vocabulary, pronunciation, and comprehension. Kasumi (2015) observed better speaking outcomes among urban students; Ratih and Hanafi (2016) reported significant improvements in Indonesian students' speaking skills; Aalaei (2017) found that Iranian students with positive attitudes toward CLT showed better speaking and listening abilities; Owen and Razali (2018) confirmed increased fluency and vocabulary without gender differences; and Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) highlighted speaking gains related to teacher and parental support. Collectively, these findings demonstrate CLT's strong beneficial impact on ESL speaking skills when applied effectively.

Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) found that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) boosts students' communicative skills and motivation but encounters difficulties in large ESL classrooms because of insufficient teacher training, limited resources, and cultural diversity. These challenges, they argue, obstruct the effective implementation of CLT in such environments. Nevertheless, teachers appreciate CLT's benefits for interactive learning, emphasizing that its success depends on better training, availability of materials, and stronger institutional support.

2.1. Problem Statement:

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely promoted as an effective approach for developing learners' communicative competence in English. However, its implementation in large ESL classrooms often remains challenging, as teachers must manage high student numbers, limited time, and mixed proficiency levels while still creating opportunities for meaningful interaction. Much of the existing research has focused on the theoretical benefits of CLT or on learners' attitudes, with comparatively fewer studies exploring how teachers themselves perceive and experience the use of CLT in large classes. This lack of detailed insight into teachers' perspectives makes it difficult to understand the practical impact of CLT and the strategies teachers adopt to make it work in such contexts. Therefore, this study investigates the perceived impact of CLT in large ESL classroom settings from the perspective of university English teachers, drawing on data collected from instructors teaching in Pakistan.

3. Methodology:

3.1. Research Design and Rationale

This study employed a qualitative research design using semi-structured interviews to explore university teachers' perspectives on the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in large English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms. Semi-structured interviews were chosen because they allowed a balance between a common question framework for all participants and the flexibility to probe further when teachers raised important or unexpected points. This design was suitable for capturing detailed experiences, beliefs, and classroom practices related to CLT in real tertiary-level teaching contexts.

3.2. Participants and Sampling

A total of six university teachers participated in the study. They were purposively selected from two public sector institutions from Islamabad and Lahore. The participants were between 26 and 40 years old, with teaching experience ranging from approximately 3 to 18 years. Three of them held PhD degrees in English while the remaining participants had completed Master's degrees. All were actively teaching large ESL classes at the tertiary level. This sample was selected to ensure that the participants had direct, practical experience with CLT and large classroom settings.

3.3. Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected through individual semi-structured interviews. Four interviews were conducted face to face, whereas two interviews were conducted online, depending on the teachers' availability and convenience. Before each interview, the researcher explained the purpose of the study and obtained verbal consent from the participants for both participation and audio recording. Interviews were audio-recorded using a mobile phone to ensure that all details could be accurately transcribed and analyzed later. Each interview lasted approximately 30–40 minutes.

3.4. Interview Questions:

The interviews were guided by a set of open-ended questions designed to explore the teachers' views and experiences related to CLT and large ESL classes. The main questions included

- Q1. Explain in detail the impact of CLT in ESL classes. What is the impact of CLT specifically in large ESL classroom settings at the tertiary level?
- Q2. What challenges do you face while applying CLT in large ESL classrooms (for example, time, student numbers, or participation)? How do you try to overcome these challenges or adapt CLT to suit large classes?
- Q3. Do you think, as a teacher, it is feasible to implement CLT in classrooms? Why or why not?
- Q4. What is your perspective on CLT, especially in terms of speaking skills?
- Q5. In your opinion, is CLT suitable for large ESL classrooms in Pakistan (or your teaching context)? Why or why not?
- Q6. Do you use CLT in your own classes? What types of classroom activities or tasks do you use to promote communication among students?
- Q7. What other teaching methods do you use in addition to CLT?
- Q8. What kind of training or support do you think teachers need to apply CLT successfully in large ESL classrooms?
- Q9. In your experience, how many students make a class "large"?
- Q10. Does linguistic diversity become a barrier between students, or between teacher and students, in large ESL classrooms?

Follow-up prompts were used whenever necessary to obtain clarification or more detailed examples from the participants.

3.5. Data Analysis and Saturation

After each interview, the audio recordings were transcribed and examined using thematic analysis to identify recurring codes and broader themes. As data collection progressed, later interviews increasingly confirmed patterns already identified in earlier responses, particularly regarding CLT's benefits for fluency, the challenges of monitoring large classes, unequal participation, and the need for structured group work and teacher training. By the sixth interview, no substantially new themes were emerging, indicating that data saturation had been reached, and therefore further interviews were not required.

4. Findings:

This section presents the main themes that emerged from the semi-structured interviews with six university teachers about the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in large ESL classrooms. The analysis generated several interconnected themes and supporting codes, which are summarized in the table below and then explained under each theme in narrative form with illustrative interpretations from the teachers' responses.

Table: Themes and Codes from Teacher Interviews

Theme	Key Codes	Insights
1. Positive impact of CLT on fluency and confidence	1. Improves fluency and speaking 2. Builds student confidence 3. Encourages active participation 4. Creates relaxed/interactive environment	Teachers reported that CLT helps students use English in real-life communication, supports fluency development, and builds confidence by encouraging them to speak more and rely less on memorization.
2. Practical challenges of CLT in large ESL classrooms	1. Difficult to monitor all students 2. Limited individual feedback 3. Noise and discipline issues 4. Time constraints and syllabus pressure 5. Unequal participation (dominant vs quiet students)	All teachers highlighted that CLT becomes difficult in large classes due to high student numbers, classroom noise, lack of time, and the impossibility of giving equal attention and feedback to every learner.
3. Adaptation strategies for large classes	1. Group work and pair work 2. Fixed roles (leader, note-taker, etc.) 3. Short, structured tasks 4. Use of local/contextual topics 5. Use of technology (videos, WhatsApp groups)	Teachers described how they adapt CLT to large groups by using group and pair activities, assigning roles, designing shorter tasks, choosing familiar topics, and sometimes using digital tools to continue communication beyond class.
4. Mixed or conditional support for CLT	1. CLT seen as effective but not sufficient alone 2. Need to combine CLT with other methods (GTM, direct method, task-based learning, drills) 3. Dependence on students' language level and motivation	Several teachers stated that CLT is valuable, especially for speaking, but should not be used in isolation. They prefer a hybrid approach where CLT is combined with more traditional methods depending on students' proficiency and exam demands.
5. Role of other teaching methods	1. Grammar-Translation Method (for rules, exams) 2. Direct Method and task-based learning 3. Presentations, debates, storytelling 4. Audio-lingual drills for pronunciation	Participants frequently mentioned other methods they use alongside CLT, especially when focusing on grammar accuracy, exam preparation, or pronunciation practice.
6. Need for	1. Workshops on CLT and	Teachers emphasized that effective use of

teacher training and institutional support	large-class management 2. Support in handling noise and participation 3. Alignment of exams with CLT goals 4. Teaching assistants or additional resources	CLT in large ESL classrooms requires formal training, practical workshops, institutional backing, and assessment systems that recognize communicative skills, not just written exams.
7. Understanding of “large class” and language barriers	1. “Large class” = 40–70 students 2. Language gaps and translanguaging 3. Weaker students becoming silent	Teachers generally described large classes as groups of around 40–70 students and noted that language differences and limited proficiency can create communication barriers, often forcing teachers to use L1 or translanguaging and making weaker students less visible.

5. Results and Findings:

Theme 1: Positive impact of CLT on fluency and confidence

Teachers reported that CLT has a clear positive impact on students' speaking, fluency and confidence. They saw it as a learner-centered approach where students take part in real-life communicative tasks such as role plays, presentations and group discussions. One teacher said that CLT “increases the confidence of the students that they can understand, and they can communicate in English when it comes to, like, engaging into a lively discussion” (Teacher 2). Another explained that it “improves their fluency and even though the students make errors, they communicate and their communication eventually becomes sharper, so they improve at the end of the day” (Teacher 6). A third teacher noted that it “generally has a very positive impact because the classroom environment is very relaxed and comfortable, the classroom anxiety is also reduced” and that “students tend to enjoy activities” (Teacher 3). Overall, when students are encouraged to speak in meaningful situations, they become less shy, more active and more confident in using English.

Theme 2: Practical challenges of CLT in large ESL classrooms

At the same time, these benefits were much harder to achieve in large ESL classrooms. All teachers mentioned serious practical challenges when using CLT with many students in one room. Monitoring and feedback were seen as major issues. One teacher stated that when there are too many students “it becomes almost impossible to monitor everyone, which is the basic requirement of a CLT classroom” (Teacher 6). Another, who taught “about 60–65 students”, said that “when you're working in such a large class, it's difficult to give individual feedback to each student” while also having to “manage noise, deal with naughty students, and ensure everyone can hear and participate in the lesson” (Teacher 4).

Time constraints and syllabus pressure were also important, because “there is a limited time, and these time constraints press upon us, the hardest. So communicative tasks cannot be executed meaningfully” and “the institutional pressure to complete the syllabus definitely contradicts CLT's slow task-based pace because you have to rush the students” (Teacher 6). As a result, stronger students often dominate activities, while weaker or shy learners remain silent or “hide behind the stronger ones” (Teacher 6).

Theme 3: Adaptation strategies for large classes

In response to these difficulties, teachers did not stop using CLT but adapted it to large-class conditions. Many used group and pair work but kept groups small and structured. One teacher said, “I try not to form very large groups, maximum five students not more than five plus. I as facilitator keep moving around to see if they are talking about the task at hand” (Teacher 3). Another described “using fixed groups with definite assigned roles to prevent

freeloading and many short tasks instead of long projects" (Teacher 6). Some teachers chose local and familiar topics to increase engagement, explaining that "if I use local topics like discussing Eid celebrations or Pakistani food, the students engage way more" (Teacher 5). A few also extended communication beyond the classroom by using technology, for example "using WhatsApp groups for homework discussions" (Teacher 5) or showing videos after in-class discussion (Teacher 1). These strategies suggest that with careful planning, clear roles and shorter tasks, CLT can still be used in large classes, although it requires extra effort and organization.

Theme 4: Mixed or conditional support for CLT

Teachers' support for CLT was generally positive but conditional. They valued CLT for speaking and confidence, yet did not see it as enough on its own. One teacher said, "I have mixed opinions about CLT. When I started teaching, I used to love CLT because it's fun, it engages students. But I didn't, as a teacher, I didn't find it very effective... so I think it should not be used alone, it should be integrated with other teaching methods" (Teacher 3). Another commented that "in my opinion, yes, it is suitable as it improves fluency even in crowded rooms. But the lack of trained teachers, the noisy environment and definitely the exam-oriented systems make full CLT unrealistic. So yes, a hybrid model will work better in our context because I personally don't go with pure CLT strategies" (Teacher 6). Teachers linked this conditional support to grammar accuracy, exam preparation and mixed language levels, and preferred to combine CLT with more traditional methods.

Theme 5: Role of other teaching methods

Because of these concerns, other teaching methods still played an important role in classroom practice. Several teachers used the Grammar-Translation Method when teaching grammar rules or preparing students for written exams. One explained that "if it's a class where you are to teach some grammatical rules or things like that, there you must resort to grammar translation method" (Teacher 2). Others mentioned direct method and task-based learning to keep students focused on the target language and meaningful tasks; for example, one said that in task-based learning "they perform certain things like role plays and, you know, they give presentations, they draw certain things and then explain" (Teacher 1).

Audio-lingual drills were used especially for pronunciation and weaker students, as another teacher noted that "audio-lingual drills... go side by side for the pronunciation of difficult words for weak students" (Teacher 6). Activities like debates, storytelling and argumentative essays were also used, with one teacher describing how she divides the class into two groups to "raise points and argue, which encourages critical thinking and collaborative discussion" (Teacher 4).

Theme 6: Need for teacher training and institutional support

Another important finding was the strong need for teacher training and institutional support to make CLT workable in large settings. Many teachers called for workshops and training on CLT and large-class management. One remarked, "I think teachers should be given the opportunity to attend workshops where they can learn how to manage large classes and overcome challenges in teaching" (Teacher 4). Another stressed that "teachers training is necessary for class management strategies for large groups... workshops could be designed for short, efficient communicative tasks to teach the teachers how to do that" (Teacher 6). Some also suggested teaching assistants to help manage groups and participation, saying that "a teacher needs to have an assistant, who can you know help her out in managing groups and group contribution plus large ESL classrooms" (Teacher 3). Teachers further pointed to a mismatch between CLT and exam systems; one commented that "exam-oriented systems make full CLT unrealistic" and argued that "aligning exams with CLT" is necessary so that communicative work is not neglected due to syllabus pressure (Teacher 6).

Theme 7: Understanding of “large class” and language barriers

Finally, the interviews showed how teachers understand “large class” and related language barriers. Most described large classes as around 40–70 students or more. For instance, one teacher said, “of course more than 30 students will make a class large” (Teacher 1), while another recalled teaching “70 students” in one group (Teacher 3). Large numbers were linked with communication problems and unequal participation. Several teachers observed that many students are shy and prefer writing to speaking; one explained that students “really get nervous whenever I ask them to communicate certain things. They feel comfortable while talking with their partners or with their friends but when I ask them to discuss it with the class... they get a little bit confused and hesitant to discuss it as an individual in front of the class” (Teacher 1). Others noticed that strong speakers often dominate while weaker students “stay quiet” or “become quiet or they hide behind the stronger ones” (Teachers 3 and 6). Because of mixed proficiency levels, teachers often had to use translanguaging or the first language; for example, one said, “we must resort to translanguaging. Translanguaging means we must use their first language at times to make them understand what we want them to do or the type of feedback that we desire from them” (Teacher 2). These points show that in large ESL classrooms, class size and language gaps together make it harder to apply CLT equally for all learners.

6. Conclusion

This study set out to understand how university teachers view the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in large ESL classrooms. The overall picture that emerges is not simply that CLT “works” or “does not work”, but that its value depends strongly on class size, assessment culture, and institutional conditions. Teachers in this study clearly recognised CLT as a powerful way to build students’ fluency, confidence, and willingness to speak, yet they also experienced serious tensions when trying to apply communicative principles in overcrowded and exam-driven contexts.

A key implication of these findings is that large class size is not just a practical management issue but a pedagogical one. When teachers cannot monitor all learners, cannot give individual feedback, and cannot control noise, the core features of CLT, ongoing interaction, meaningful feedback, and active participation from all students are compromised. In such conditions, it is unrealistic to expect a “pure” CLT classroom. Instead, teachers naturally move towards a hybrid model that blends communicative tasks with more controlled and teacher-led methods. Rather than viewing this hybridity as a weakness, it can be seen as a context-sensitive way of preserving the communicative spirit of CLT while still meeting curricular and assessment demands.

The results also suggest that the success of CLT in large ESL classes cannot be placed only on individual teachers. Institutional structures play a central role. Without supportive policies such as reasonable class sizes, time for communicative work, alignment of exams with oral and interactive skills, and access to training, teachers are pushed back towards traditional, lecture-based practices even when they personally believe in CLT. Therefore, any attempt to promote CLT in Pakistan’s tertiary ESL classrooms must include not only classroom-level strategies (like group work and role assignment) but also system-level reforms that recognise communicative competence as a legitimate learning outcome.

Finally, this study is limited to a small number of teachers from one context, and it focuses only on teachers’ perspectives. Future research could include students’ voices, classroom observations or comparative studies across institutions to see how different conditions shape the use of CLT in large classes. Despite these limitations, the study

contributes to the ongoing debate by showing that CLT in large ESL classrooms is possible, but only in adapted, hybrid forms and only when teachers are supported by training and institutional changes that make communicative work practically achievable.

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