

## Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in The Context of Online Learning: A Literature Review

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### Abstract

With the pandemic being a lingering crisis, learning has now been brought online to implement home-based teaching and learning. This article provides an in-depth study into the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the context of synchronous online learning. It aims to answer the question of the current status of CLT instruction and some useful approaches to teaching CLT virtually. With CLT being a popular and inclusive approach to teaching, combining it with technology is a fascinating process filled with trials and errors. In computer-mediated learning, the roles of teachers and students are shuffled to provide for learner autonomy and motivation. In synchronous online learning and teaching, the use of technological tools such as Zoom and Discord are being discussed. To conclude, there are many applicable benefits to online CLT, and further research should be conducted to look into more approaches and feasibility in virtual or blended learning.

**Keywords:** CLT, Online Learning, Covid-19 Pandemic

### 1. Introduction

Under the Malaysian Ministry of Education order, schools are to implement home-based teaching and learning (PdPR) given the pandemic. Educational institutions are finding it challenging to adapt to the daily operations, with the managements needing to come up with new policies and approaches while the teachers adapt to different technological tools and online instruction. Undoubtedly, this shifting of the mode of education has caused tremendous stress on both the school, the teachers, and the students. On the one hand, the schools have to cope with the constant changes made by the government while answering parents' inquiries and uncertainties. Then, teachers find it a challenge to deal with students online while providing sufficient instruction for knowledge dissemination. And students, being confined at home, could only attend online lessons, which means they would lose out on many social interactions and face-to-face communication opportunities.

The Movement Control Order (MCO) extension has disrupted yearly plans and schedules for major school events. It was also found that teachers are not very open to innovations due to teacher's lack of knowledge on new technology and pedagogy, all of which are crucial for home-based teaching and learning (Noh, 2020). Similarly, a study in Indonesia found that during e-learning, students are embarrassed and lazy to speak, resulting in an overall drop in vocabulary, pronunciation, speech fluency, and speech accuracy (Rahmawati et al., 2021). Hence, speaking activities and communicative language teaching (CLT) have been

greatly affected during this pandemic. There is an urgent need to look into CLT in terms of online instruction and synchronous learning.

This paper aims to answer the following questions by doing an extensive literature review on the given topics.

1. What is the current status of CLT instruction?
2. What are some useful approaches to teaching CLT virtually?

## 2. Current Status of CLT

### 2.1 Traditional Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is used to refer to “communicative competence” in language teaching. As listed by Richards (2005), there are several significant phases to the development of CLT. In Phase 1 (the late 1960s), students are commonly taught deductively, so grammar rules are given explicitly via the Audiolingualism practices such as memorization, guided speaking, etc. As the shift moved towards fluency, communicative language teaching evolved into the next phase.

In Phase 2 (the 1970s – 1990s), Classic Communicative Language Teaching focuses more on communicative competence. Here, meaningful interaction is emphasized as learners would learn based on tasks or activities deemed authentic. According to Nunan (1991), building based on communicative tasks, he has listed five features of the communicative approach. The five approaches include a focus on interactive communication, usage of authentic materials, the availability of chance for learners to work on, the inclusion of own experiences to aid in learning, and the linkage between classroom learning and real-world application.

As evidence, it is noted that experiential learning places personal experience as the focal point of learning in Nunan's communicative tasks. As one is able to incorporate the personal experience into the language learning environment, it would give a sense of curricular goal. He has stated that task-based language teaching with meaningful interaction could and should be the main idea behind CLT and that it gives evidence as to how it could be a multi-directional language teaching approach.

Another interesting take on the subject is made by Littlewood (2013), whereby he dissected CLT into two main versions. First, CLT deals with *what* we learn, where communicative function takes center stage. Here, activities such as role-play or discussions are engaged to achieve language competency, aka how to do things with words. Second, he contrasted by proposing the second type of CLT that focuses on *how* a learner learns, whereby one relies on the natural capacity to acquire a language. This is mainly a Krashenian approach whereby conscious learning and error correction takes the backseat in language learning.

### 2.2 Current Status of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

By and large, CLT has been a widely practiced approach in English as a Second or Foreign Language instruction, and it has rendered communication competency as its core aim. It is fascinating to note that Jacobs and Farrell (2003) found a paradigm shift in CLT Approaches. Some key components are highlighted below.

1. *The learner's role* is focused as compared to outside stimuli in view of the shift from teacher-centered learning to learner-centered.

2. *The learning process* is focused compared to the product of learning in view of the shift from product-oriented to process-oriented instruction.
3. *The social nature of learning* is focused compared to the individual, decontextualized learner.
4. *Diversity among learners* is focused and viewed as a type of resource to cater to individual differences.
5. *Views of internal participants* are focused compared to those outside the classroom in view of innovations in the field, including subjective and affective, insider views, and uniqueness of the context.
6. *The connection between the school and the outside world* is focused in view of holistic learning.
7. *The development of learners' purposes* is focused on helping them understand why they are learning specific knowledge.
8. *The whole-to-part orientation* is focused compared to the part-to-whole approach. It refers to providing meaningful contexts and assisting students in comprehending the features to enable form and function.
9. *A meaning-focused instruction* is emphasized rather than rote learning and drills.
10. *Lifelong learning* is focused compared to exam-oriented learning.

As with the above, Jacobs and Farrell (2003) found that the paradigm shift has led to eight major changes with CLT approaches. They are listed and explained below.

1. **Learner autonomy**
2. Democratization of classroom whereby learners partake in the design of the curriculum whilst being responsible for their own learning.
3. **Social nature of learning**
4. Learning by interacting with the environment around them, including but not limited to teachers, peers, and learners themselves when they attempt to teach the topic.
5. **Curricular integration**
6. Cross-curricular design whereby students form links between subject areas that leads to a stronger grasp, the deeper purpose of learning, and better holistic analysis.
7. **Focus on meaning**
8. Long-term learning leads to how meanings are understood and used as the language and information are stored as meaningful chunks.
9. **Diversity**
10. As students of different backgrounds or different bits of intelligence come together, diversity helps in the construction of meanings and connotations.
11. **Thinking skills**
12. Building on Bloom's taxonomy, higher-order thinking skills are now being promoted, at which students are expected to apply knowledge instead of memorization.
13. **Alternative assessment**
14. New assessment methods that mimic real-life situations are being pushed forward as we move away from traditional accuracy-focused instruments.
15. **Teachers as co-learners**

16. When teachers embark on a lifelong learning journey along with their students, more field-based experiences and findings can be used to gauge understanding better.

### 3. Useful Approaches of teaching CLT virtually

As evidence, CLT is considered an inclusive language teaching approach, but how does it flourish in the face of technology and online learning? The following section will be discussed based on computer-mediated learning and synchronous online learning.

#### 3.1 *Computer-Mediated Learning*

Van Nguyen (2010) has an interesting take on it – by implementing computer-mediated collaborative learning. The researcher noted that CLT online creates “an environment in which a student interacts with one or more collaborating peers to solve a given problem, mediated by a computer including all of its communicative facilities, prevalently divided into asynchronous and synchronous communication capacity with high and multiway interactivity.” In other words, the teacher would still play the role of a facilitator, but students would take the lead by working in groups to collaborate. It was noticed that students could gain a sense of real responsibility to perform an authentic discourse in the academic community via online collaborative learning. The researcher argued that computer-mediated collaborative learning in real-world and is highly feasible from the spectrum of sociocultural theory as we bring technology to the classroom or vice versa. The researcher has also drawn out a comprehensive contributing factor to hosting a successful computer-mediated collaborative learning class. However, the researcher did mention that more empirical studies should be done to support the theory.

In earlier pilot research, Ono et al. (2015) studied voice-based computer-mediated communication to increase the speaking proficiency of EFL learners in Japan. The group has incorporated Web Speech API that works as a voice-blog system that enables learners to practice pronunciation before posting. The researchers have drawn merits to asynchronous computer-mediated communication, stating ubiquitousness and preparation as the main benefits of it. As in a synchronous speech, time would be a key to speech production, and they argued that speakers might find cognitive load or blocks when required to produce immediate speech. Hence, asynchronous learning would give learners sufficient time for reflection and self-correction. The pilot revealed the possibility of computer-mediated communication to increase speaking proficiency while also improving learners' motivation.

#### 3.2 *Synchronous Online Learning*

In Ng's (2020) paper, the researcher used synchronous teaching to facilitate computer-mediated communication. This is due to the reason that synchronous learning offers a resemblance to face-to-face teaching, but at the same time, it is considered multi-modal as students can speak, look at video cameras and chat to negotiate meaning. The researcher chose to use role-play activity and UN-assembly activity with Zoom as a teaching tool to mirror real-world communication as it is real-time, engaging, and interactive. It was found that among pre-service teachers, CLT can be conducted, albeit not without issues. For one, it is challenging to get everyone to voice their thoughts and for no one to dominate the conversation, hence deeming the interaction somewhat one way. Next, sound quality is another issue. At times

network could be unstable, and the conversation would steer away from the main goals due to distractions.

Another popular online teaching tool is Discord, a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP), instant messaging, and digital distribution platform. Ramadhan (2021) conducted research on senior students using Discord as an online learning media in learning speaking. The researcher found that the application facilitates the convenience of students in the learning experience and an inclusive, interactive voice channel feature that aids in speaking. Students are found to be more motivated in using the tool provided the teacher creates a conducive and comfortable environment for them. Another benefit to it is that peers can influence the students' goal setting and attitude foundation.

#### 4. Conclusion

This article draws on CLT in the 21st century, in which by-and-by, online learning is of paramount importance especially admit the Covid-19 Pandemic. Speaking activities and communicative lessons should not be halted even as teachers face mountainous trials ahead. Needless to say, the implications are that teachers are now challenged to create and design lessons that will not only motivate students in using the language but also shift towards learner autonomy. Online CLT approaches such as computer-mediated learning are of an asynchronous nature and are suitable for collaborative activities or learners who might feel shy to speak in class. Besides that, synchronous online learning, with the engagement of technological tools such as Zoom and Discord, are ways to mimic real-life communication. However, these are not without their drawbacks. Namely, the applications allow only for spotlight speakers and poor sound quality. Naturally, these approaches are incomparable to face-to-face measures, as shown in Bagheri & Zenouzagh (2021), but we work with what we have under the movement control order.

Future researches should point to more creative applications of online pedagogies and a general directional shift in the roles of teachers and learners. As we witness more and more paradigm shifts in CLT, researchers and educators alike should negotiate strategies and instructional plans to provide future proof for a generation. More empirical studies would further supplement the field of communicative teaching in the virtual atmosphere. As classrooms are moving towards an online presence, blended learning is on the rise. Technology is still a tool, and it is up to the stakeholders to make full use of it for the betterment of the future generation. Finally, a study of possible websites, platforms, software, or applications for learning and teaching should be included to provide teachers and policymakers with more options and flexibility.

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