# COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR ENHANCING AND EMPOWERING THE LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AMONG ENGINEERING STUDENTS

**Dr. L.MAYAVAN**
*Associate Professor*
*Panimalar Engineering College,*
*Chennai-600123*
*India*

***Abstract:*** Human communication was limited within societies and communities at local level in the past but it took a new dimension as people from various societies, communities and nations started interacting with each other. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or the Communicative Approach (CA) serves and fulfills the core objective of teaching that emphasizes interaction as the ultimate goal of study. The approach prioritizes the ability to communicate in the target language rather than grammatical competence which is no longer believed sufficient to become successful job aspirants. Most engineers today stumble in the job market owing to their inadequate communication skills. Employers and hiring consultancies are weary of not being able to recruit the required percentage of well- trained proficient individuals. It becomes altogether the greatest need of the hour that these engineers to focus on their English Language Skills in addition to core technical knowledge. In such scenario, awareness of communicative language teaching can be of immense help to enhance proficiency in English within the stipulated time. Various communication language skills need to be employed in order to motivate the learners to develop the sense of responsibility in acquiring the language skills.

The present study investigates the crucial role of communicative language teaching, its background and theory behind CLT that necessitates the learners required skills as communication is the fundamental of a language. The main objective of this study is to identify the characteristics of CLT from teachers' perspectives and to assess perceptions of the effectiveness and appropriateness of CLT at Engineering College level taking into account also perceived constraints on CLT promotion. Also to find out how and in what ways CLT is adopted and adapted by the students, and the extent to which 'communicative ideas' are actually reflected in their teaching practice. Also to discover the possible factors that prevent them from using CLT, and to explore an English teaching method that may fit into the I year B.E. / B.Tech EFL setting.

**Key words:** Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), competence, authoritative, Engineering Students, Language Proficiency, pedagogy, approach, method, technique, discourse, Prospective aspirants.

## I-CLT-ITS BACKGROUND:

The goal of language learning is to become proficient at using the language for communication in which Communicative Language Teaching has its roots. The notion of teaching CLT is fairly neoteric however

languages have been taught around the world for centuries. The concept of communicative approach is amazingly acute. Communicative approach was developed by British applied linguist initially as a response away from grammar based approaches such as the audio-lingual approach. CLT was not recognized as effective approach for quite a long time although it enables learners to acquire a language by focusing on the development of communicative competence. Communicative language teachers use materials that focus on the language needed to express and understand different kinds of functions. (Examples include asking for things, describing people, expressing likes and dislikes and telling time.) CL teachers also emphasize the processes of communication – for example, using language appropriately in different types of social situations. They encourage students to use their second language to perform different kinds of tasks, like solving puzzles and getting information and stress using language to interact with other people.

## II- THE THEORY BEHIND CLT:

We learn language by using the theories suggested and language is used in four different ways which are the competencies. The leaners in general need to strengthen the area of competencies in order to enhance their proficiency in communication.
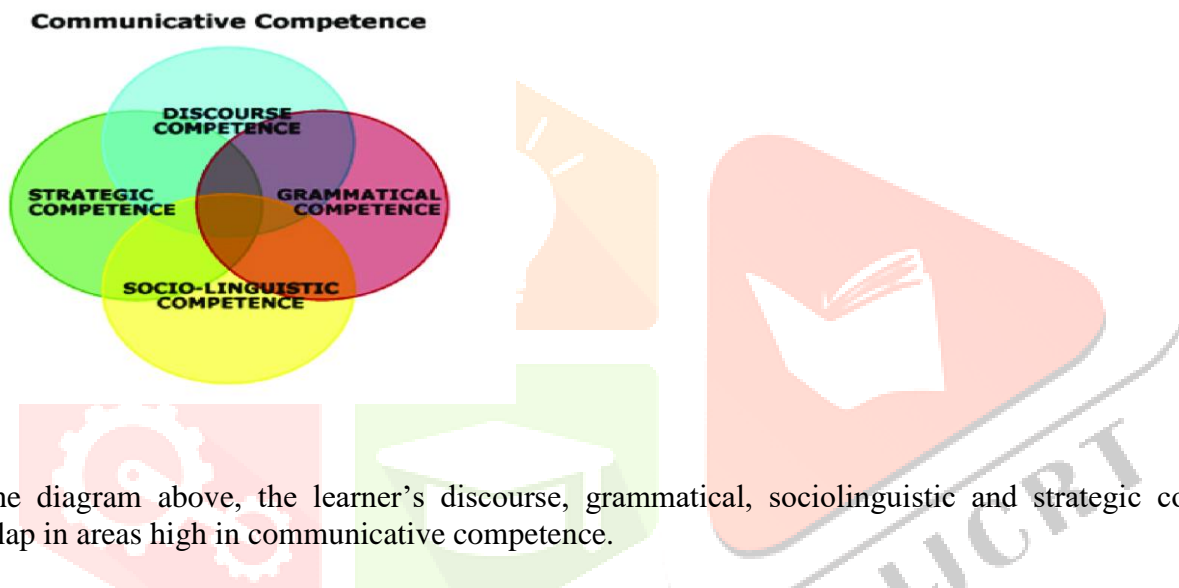


In the diagram above, the learner's discourse, grammatical, sociolinguistic and strategic competencies overlap in areas high in communicative competence.

• Discourse Competence refers to the learner's ability to use the new language in spoken and written discourse, how well a person can combine grammatical forms and meanings to find different ways to speak or write. How well does the student combine the language's elements to speak or write in English? Teachers often call this ability the student's fluency.

• Grammatical Competence refers to the ability to use the language correctly, how well a person has learned features and rules of the language. This includes vocabulary, pronunciation, and sentence formation. How well does the learner understand the grammar of English? Teachers call this accuracy in language use. Fluency and accuracy are traditional measures of effective language learning. The other two competencies are less obvious.

• Sociolinguistic Competence is about the learner's ability to use language correctly in specific social situations – for example, using proper language forms at a job interview. Socio-linguistic competence is based upon such factors as the status of those speaking to each other, the purpose of the interaction, and the expectations of the players. How socially acceptable is the person's use of English in different settings? This competency is about appropriacy in using language.

• Strategic Competence refers to strategies for effective communication when the learner's vocabulary proves inadequate for the job, and his or her command of useful learning strategies. Strategic competence is how well the person uses both verbal forms and non-verbal communication to compensate for lack of knowledge in the other three competencies. Can the learner find ways to compensate for areas of weakness? If so, the learner has communicative efficacy.

## III- REVIEW OF LITERATURE:

According to Savignon, the CLT approach offers many advantages for both teachers and students. He summarizes that CLT delivers a clear and obvious benefit to learners - they're actually able to use the skills they've learnt to communicate in their target language. CLT is not about learning just for learning's sake, it has a clear and definable purpose. Students become competent communicators, able to use the right grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure in different real-life contexts and are flexible enough to adapt as circumstances dictate.

As such, CLT typically places less emphasis on rote learning of detailed grammatical rules in favour of gaining greater fluency in the target language. Students are assessed on their level of communicative competence rather than on their ability to reiterate information. This approach also enables learners to quickly gain confidence when interacting with other people, which help them enjoy using their new-found language skills.

CLT has a highly positive impact on the relationships between teachers, students and their peers. At the highest level, CLT requires all participants to move away from the traditional teacher / student model to be successful. In the language classroom, learners also need to engage in learning activities in a cooperative rather than individualistic manner - it's vital that they work together to build effective conversations and to complete the pair / group tasks that are at the heart of the CLT approach. As such, teachers can develop more creative language learning activities that go beyond the traditional repetition and the memorization of sentences and grammatical patterns.

The rich theoretical base of CLT reveals its open and flexible nature as well as the complexity and diversity of ways it can be interpreted. This also explains the difficulty of making a precise description of any typical classroom procedure of CLT implementation. As Richards and Rogers argued, 'how to implement CLT principles at the level of classroom procedures remains central to discussions of the communicative approach'. In line with Chomsky's criticisms of structural theories of language (Chomsky, 1957), applied linguists and teachers began to question both approaches as merely focusing on the mastery of structures, with mechanical practices such as drilling being considered as insufficient in terms of enhancing the real-life communicative proficiency of language learner (McDonough and Shaw, 1993).

Wilkins (1972) was one of the pioneers in this field. He highlighted the significance of understanding of the underlying systems of meanings in communicative uses of language and classified such meanings into two types, namely, notional categories (time, location, sequence, frequency, etc.) and communicative functions (requests, offers, complaints, etc.). His book entitled Notional Syllabuses (Wilkins 1976) was at that time, and has been subsequently acknowledged as a great contribution to the development of CLT.

Communicative Language Teaching is generally recognized as an approach rather than a method, as argued by Mitchell (1988), CLT an umbrella term characterized by a set of distinctive principles, features and types of classroom activities. Richards and Rogers (1986) claim that CLT is derived from the theory of a communicative model of language teaching, which can be specified at three levels, namely, approach, design and procedure, and that the approach level mainly involves two types of theory – theory of language and theory of learning.

The goals of CC reinforcement and authenticity are reflected in some basic features of CLT. For instance, the goal of CC reinforcement is reflected in one of the basic features of CLT known as to 'pay systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language, combining these into a more fully communicative view' (Littlewood)

CLT encourages teachers to adjust the types of classroom activities and teaching techniques to respond to learners' needs; Teachers are expected to motivate learners and encourage them to learn through collaborative work and by reflecting on mistakes. The features put forward by Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983) overlap with the principles which have been previously identified above, namely all-round

development of CC (linguistically, functionally and interculturally), being experience-based and learner / learning-centered and encouraging learning-by-doing.

## IV-NEED OF THE STUDY:

The CLT approach focuses on giving students the skills to clearly and confidently communicate in real-world situations with native speakers of their target language. As such, it moves away from a traditional focus on grammar to encourage the active and authentic use of language in learning and acquisition. CLT therefore prioritizes interaction and problem solving and usually involves classroom activities such as role play and pair / group work. Communicative Language Teaching or CLT is widely recognized across language classrooms globally as a highly applicable and effective teaching and learning approach (Savignon, 1987 and 2002).

The growing need for fluent communication skills in today's globalized world creates a challenge for 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 paper exam.

Communicative teaching methods are currently a popular point of discussion and their effectiveness has been taken into account by language teachers all over the world. This article aims to provide an overview of communicative language teaching (henceforth CLT) methods and encourage teachers to apply them to their foreign language teaching.

## V-PARTICIPANTS:

The participants have been chosen for this present study from various engineering colleges of Kanchipuram and Thiruvallur district of Tamilnadu state. Co-coordinators and in-charges of different studies at engineering level have passed on the information about the study and participants showed interest and cooperated well as the kind of studies as the study is meant for ensuring their progress and enhancing their competency levels. The study focused the effectiveness of using Communicative Language Teaching that is to be adopted and employed among the engineering students.

## VI-FINDINGS:

The findings suggest that there are some shared classroom activities and teaching practices reflecting 'communicative ideas' in a general way. As observed, presentation, group discussion and question answer are the three most adopted activities carried out by the majority of informants. Other activities both mentioned in the interviews and conducted in the observations include text paraphrase and summary, making conversation, use of movie / news clips (normally followed up with questions / summary or retelling), role-play, debate, dictation, in-class writing, and sentence rewriting as error correction. The only activity found to be adopted in the observed lesson that was not mentioned in interviews is 'mock interpretation' (in George's lesson 'Advanced Interpretation'). Meanwhile, similarities can also be found across all the participants in terms of their ways of teaching. For instance, in most cases this study observed, ICT (e.g. ppt or movie clips) was widely adopted in the lessons of teachers teaching General English courses.

Participants were all observed to come to the classroom a bit earlier before the lesson began and played the BBC news / movie clips as warm-up. The previously reported useful techniques such as 'grading learners' in-class oral performance', 'asking learners to answer questions', and 'using Tamil to assist language learning process' were all observed to be adopted by the informants. For instance, in technical English, it was observed that the different points to the different questions posed to learners so that learners could select questions to answer just as she reported in the interview. This practice was observed to be adopted by learners' in-class oral performance and homework assigned to them before the lessons. The technique of

'asking learners to answer questions' was found to be adopted by nearly all the participants whose class was full of spontaneous oral activities such as debate and question answers.

The principles adopted during the pre-teaching stage are mainly concerned with the preparation of lesson plans and assignments for learners to finish before sessions. Nearly all the informants who reported the principles at this stage tried to rationalize their efforts on planning their lessons by emphasizing that learners' needs and expectations are taken into consideration.

In addition, 'communicative ideas' were found to be well reflected in most informants' criteria of good language teaching as well as in the actual teaching practice of the majority of the participants as observed. However, the findings also suggest viewpoints different from those indicated in the literature review. The biggest difference lies in the new viewpoints presented on the possible mismatch between CLT and the Second language Teaching/learning EFL context. As indicated in the literature review, a basic reason for the inefficiency of CLT in Engineering Colleges has been summarized by Hu (2002) as being that ideas advocated by CLT such as 'learning-by-doing' and equality between teacher and learner are in contradiction with second language teaching and learning, deeply influenced by Confucianism. But the findings showed that CLT is considered by certain participants as being fundamentally harmonious with the essence of Confucianism.

In addition, unlike what was indicated in the literature review that the constraints of CLT are mainly at cultural level, the findings suggested that the major constraints of CLT seem to be more at technical and ideological levels instead. The technical level here refers to identified constraints such as teachers' lack of competence in English language and lack of intercultural competence, teachers' insufficient teaching proficiency, learners' low level in English and low motivation, and big class size, etc. The ideological level here refers to reasons such as teaching philosophy and teacher beliefs that are reflected in the features of the traditional G-T method (such as the emphasis on recitation and lexical chunking memorization, and the preference for cramming teaching).

## VII-CONCLUSION:

In this study, it was taken an in-depth look at the phenomenon of CLT adoption and adaptation among students in Engineering Colleges, the teachers with experience of various training programmes. It was investigated how CLT was interpreted, as well as the extent to which the approach was considered compatible with I year engineering students. Students' in EFL context, taking into account possible constraints on its implementation. This study explored how and in what ways CLT was actually adopted and adapted by the participants in practice, via interview and observation. In addition, this study attempted to identify the extent to which the participants considered the experienced teachers who underwent various training programmes to have been conducive to facilitating CLT implementation in their own contexts as well as to improving their teaching proficiency in a general way.

One of the major contributions of this study is to fill an identified research gap by examining the effectiveness of CLT in the I year B.E./ B.Tech student EFL context from an anti-essentialist perspective. This study pointed out the danger of the tendency of essentialism underlying the participants' interpretations of CLT and teaching practices which it was termed 'seeming-communicative'. However, it should be clarified that this research has not been intended to advocate or defend any particular teaching approach or teaching philosophy.

Instead, by identifying the problems existing in current studies on the appropriateness of CLT in Engineering Colleges and by revealing how/whether the findings of this study support assertions made in previous work, it aims to highlight the complexity of the issue. This is because teaching methods and teacher beliefs are not static. Instead, they can greatly vary not only among teachers from different educational and academic backgrounds but within individuals as well, due to the changing needs of teaching contexts and learners given the dynamics of the language classroom.

The second implication of this study is that the findings suggest the important role played by teachers' intercultural competence and critical thinking ability in terms of CLT implementation and the development

of context-sensitive methodology in I year B.E. /B.Tech students' EFL context at Engineering College Level. These two aspects are widely considered as very important facets of professional development for second language EFL teachers as well as the key criteria for a good English language speaker nowadays.

In the present study, teachers' perspectives were focused upon, but one possibility for future research is to look into the appropriateness and effectiveness of CLT from learners' perspectives via in-depth interviews. Focus could be laid on investigating learners' preferred ways of teaching, the reasons underneath such preferences and the extent to which the preferred ways of teaching reflect communicative ideas.

It might be worth looking also at ways in which second language learners consider teachers with intercultural experience to be distinguished from expatriate teachers and teachers with no intercultural experience. It would be interesting to see what learners' suggestions are for teachers in terms of maximizing teaching effectiveness. Another possibility is to take an in-depth look at the teaching philosophy of second language EFL teachers who have experienced the promotion of CLT. By using a life story approach, such a study could focus on the development and implementation of CLT in the I year B.E./ B.Tech students EFL context at Engineering College level from a historical perspective.

The analysis shows that the majority of participants exhibited high to medium use of communicative Language Teaching. The study also indicated that the majority of students preferred CLT amidst the learners who traditional way of teaching. It reflects that they require guidelines or training to improve their communication proficiency. It is also clear that the participants tend to adopt communicative language teaching based on their present need and task. Communicative language teaching increases the energy levels for change and improvement. Strong communications keep everyone focused on goals and priorities while providing feedback on progress. Effective communicative teaching, systems, and practices have a huge and direct effect on organization learning and innovation.

The present study attempts to explore the use of communicative language teaching by engineering students in Kanchipuram and Thiruvallur district of Tamilnadu. Further research needs to be conducted in other universities and colleges before any generalizations can be made. Moreover, other research methodologies such as, retrospective interviews, think aloud protocols, diaries, or longitudinal studies need to be used to gain more comprehensive information about engineering students' use of communicative language teaching more effectively.

## VIII-REFERENCES:

[1] Chomsky, N. (1957) Syntactic Structures. The Hague: Mouton.

[2] Finocchiaro, M. and Brumfit, C. (1983) The Functional-Notional Approach: From Theory to Practice. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[3] Littlewood, W. (1984) Foreign and Second Language Learning: Language Acquisition Research and Its Implications for the Classroom. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[4] McDonough, J. and Shaw, C. (1993) 'Materials and Methods' In ELT: A Teacher's Guide. Oxford: Blackwell.

[5] Mitchell, R. (1988) Communicative Language Teaching in Practice. Center for information on language teaching and research.

[6] Richards, J.C. and Rogers, T.S. (1986) Communicative Language Teaching in Approaches and Methods in Language Teaching. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[7] Richards, J.C. and Rogers, T.S. (2001) Approach and Methods In Language Teaching (2nd ed.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[8] Savignon, S. (1972) 'Teaching for communicative competence: A research report [J]'.Audio Visual Language Journal, 10/3: 153-162.

[9] Savignon, S. (1983) Communicative Competence: Theory and Classroom Practice Reading. Mass: Addison-Wesley

[10] Wilkins, D.A. (1972) The Linguistics and Situational Content of The Common Core in A Unit / Credit System. MS. Strasbourg: Council of Europe

[11] Wilkins, D.A. (1974) Second-Language Learning and Teaching. London: Edward Arnold.