



## The Effect of Communicative Language Teaching on Kurdish EFL Learners' Speaking Skills in Soran Independent Administration

Akam Azad MOHAMEDAMIN<sup>a\*</sup>, Zanyar Nathir GHAFAR<sup>b</sup>, Vina Fryad MAMND<sup>c</sup>, Exlas Mustafa JUMAA<sup>d</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Faculty of Education, English Department, Soran University, Soran, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

<sup>b</sup>Public Health Department, Technical Institute of Sulaimani, Sulaimani Polytechnic University, Sulaimani, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

<sup>c,d</sup>Faculty of Education, English Department, Soran University, Soran, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

\*Corresponding author: [akam.azad88@gmail.com](mailto:akam.azad88@gmail.com)

### Abstract

This study investigates the effect of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on the speaking skills of Kurdish EFL learners in the Soran Independent Administration. A quantitative research design was employed, which involved two groups of 7th-grade students which consisted of 53 students from (Dilara Secondary School and Hawdian Secondary School) schools. The data were collected through a questionnaire which consisted of 8 items. The results indicated a significant improvement in students' performances after attending CLT sessions. The results showed that the student outperformed in fluency over accuracy, and their grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary expanded. They showed that CLT classes are engaging, the tasks are more real world, and the classes are more student-centered. Thus, they demonstrated the effectiveness of CLT in promoting real-world communicative competence among young EFL learners in school settings.

Keywords: Kurdish EFL, CLT, speaking skills, teacher-centered, student feedback

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### Introduction

Speaking is a core component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) instruction, enabling learners to communicate effectively in academic, professional, and everyday contexts. While reading and writing have often been prioritized in formal curricula, speaking remains essential to language proficiency and student confidence. However, developing speaking skills poses challenges for EFL

learners, particularly in environments where opportunities for real-life language use are limited. In the Kurdish context, especially within the Soran Independent Administration, students frequently struggle with speaking fluency due to the dominance of traditional grammar-based instruction. Most classrooms emphasize accuracy and written forms of English, leaving learners with limited exposure to authentic spoken interaction. As a result, students experience low confidence, poor fluency, and minimal engagement in communicative tasks. CLT emerged as a response to the limitations of traditional teaching methods, advocating for student-centered, interaction-based learning. Unlike methods focused on memorization and grammar drills, CLT promotes authentic communication in meaningful contexts (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Hiep, 2007). Activities such as role-plays, interviews, and group discussions form the backbone of CLT, allowing students to negotiate meaning and develop fluency in supportive settings.

Desia (2015) presents an overview of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as an approach to teaching English as a foreign language. The paper provides a historical overview of CLT, outlines its key principles, and highlights its main characteristics in the context of language education. Richards (2006) describes CLT as encompassing language tasks that simulate real-life situations where the language used is unpredictable and informative exchange is emphasized. According to Hiep (2007), successful CLT implementation requires meaningful classroom practices that reflect real-world communication, fostering learners' communicative competence through active participation. Teachers act as facilitators, while students collaborate in tasks that enhance both confidence and language output. Despite the global success of CLT, little research has been conducted on its implementation and impact in Kurdish EFL contexts, particularly in public institutions within Soran. Curriculum constraints, teacher training gaps, and classroom culture hinder the adoption of CLT practices. Moreover, learners' speaking abilities remain underdeveloped. This study addresses the lack of empirical data on CLT's effectiveness in enhancing speaking skills in this region. This study aims to explore the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in improving the speaking skills of Kurdish EFL students. It seeks to: Examine the effect of CLT-based instruction on students' speaking proficiency. Explore learners' perceptions of CLT as a method. Research questions:

1. What are students' perceptions of CLT-based speaking instruction?
2. Which specific aspects of speaking improve most under CLT?

## Literature Review

### *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)*

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also known as the "Communicative Approach," emerged as a response to traditional methods such as the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) and evolved from the Notional-Functional syllabus. Over recent years, task-based language learning, an extension of CLT has gained prominence, emphasizing the use of authentic communication as both the medium and the goal of language learning (Crookes, 1993; Richards, 2006). CLT focuses on developing learners' ability to use language effectively in real-world contexts, highlighting communication over grammatical accuracy. This involves understanding language functions, adapting language use based on context and participants, and producing and interpreting various types of texts. The method also shifts the classroom dynamic: teachers become facilitators guiding communicative interactions, while students actively negotiate meaning through collaborative tasks (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Hiep, 2007). Despite CLT's global adoption, many learners, particularly in EFL contexts such as Kurdish classrooms, still struggle to achieve speaking proficiency (Kumar, 2021). This gap underscores the need for learner-centered speaking classrooms that incorporate student feedback and address the challenges of communicative activities. This study aims to contribute to this effort by investigating CLT's role in enhancing EFL

learners' speaking skills.

### *Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts*

Speaking is a fundamental communication skill involving the expression and exchange of meaning through verbal and non-verbal symbols (Al Asmari, 2015). Historically, speaking was undervalued in EFL teaching, with instructors relying heavily on drills and memorization rather than meaningful interaction. However, recent research emphasizes that the goal of teaching speaking is to empower learners to communicate freely and effectively in a variety of settings. Developing speaking skills is crucial, not only for everyday informal interactions but also for formal occasions such as business meetings or presentations. Motivation and learners' attitudes towards language learning significantly influence their speaking performance. Therefore, fostering positive learner engagement and readiness is essential for successful oral communication development.

### *Previous Studies on CLT and Speaking*

The current study investigated the effectiveness of learner-centered instruction in enhancing students' attitudes toward learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and in fostering academic self-motivation. The sample comprised 35 twelfth-grade students from a high school in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, during the 2017/2018 academic year. To meet the research objectives, a training program was developed based on three active learning strategies: Cooperative Learning, Think-Pair-Share, and Think-Aloud. Pre- and post-tests were administered using standardized scales to measure students' attitudes toward EFL and their academic self-motivation. The intervention, which lasted for eight weeks, implemented the quasi-experimental design with both pre- and post-assessments. Findings revealed statistically significant improvements in students' post-test scores for both attitude and motivation scales, indicating the positive impact of the learner-centered approach. The study concluded with several recommendations based on the results. (Ahmed & Dakhiel, 2019)

Songsiri (2007) explored students' attitudes toward English language learning, with a focus on speaking skills, at King Mongkut's Institute of Technology in North Bangkok, Thailand. The study aimed to enhance students' motivation and confidence in speaking English through varied materials and activities. Using an action research approach—comprising planning, action, observation, reflection, and revision—the research examined both the implementation process and participant outcomes in the context of improving language instruction in Thai education. Uzoma and Ibrahim (2018) demonstrated that CLT activities increase student participation and interest, contrasting with teacher-centered classrooms that limit student interaction. Similarly, Alwazir and Shukri (2016) explored the psychological barriers faced by EFL learners, such as anxiety and shyness, which impede speaking practice. Their study emphasized the need for communicative teaching methods that create supportive environments to overcome these challenges.

### *Theoretical Framework*

This study is grounded in several key principles of CLT:

- **Emphasis on Communication:** Prioritizing real-world interaction and meaningful language use over rote grammar instruction.
- **Learner-Centered Approach:** Empowering students to take ownership of their speaking development through active participation and experimentation.
- **Focus on Fluency over Accuracy:** Recognizing that mistakes are a natural and essential part of language learning.
- **Use of Authentic Materials:** Incorporating real-world resources and scenarios to enhance relevance and engagement.

These principles collectively aim to foster communicative competence and improve

learners' confidence and fluency in speaking.

### Conceptual Framework

The conceptual foundation of this research lies in the application of CLT principles to improve speaking proficiency among Kurdish EFL learners. Key constructs include:

- **Instructional Approaches:** Comparing CLT-based interactive techniques with traditional grammar-focused methods (Uzoma & Ibrahim, 2018).
- **Learner Motivation:** The importance of engagement and willingness to communicate within the classroom (Alwazir & Shukri, 2016).
- **Classroom Interaction:** Promoting student collaboration and reducing teacher dominance to facilitate communication (Crookes, 1993).
- **Speaking Fluency:** Evaluating how CLT activities reduce anxiety and promote natural speech production (Alharbi, 2015).

### Methodology

#### *Research*

#### *Design*

This study employs a quantitative method research design. A questionnaire was used as a research tool to gather data about students' perceptions of CLT on their speaking skills after receiving Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) instruction.

#### *Participants*

Participants are a total of 53 students, both male and females. They were selected from two schools (Dilara Secondary School and Hawdian Secondary School) in Soran Independent Administration. These students have demonstrated deficiencies in speaking confidently and fluently, based on teacher observations and test results. Most participants have intermediate or low-intermediate English proficiency and limited opportunities to use English in daily life, making them suitable for studying the effects of CLT (Creswell, 2014).

#### *Research Instruments*

**Questionnaire:** A questionnaire was employed as a research instrument to capture students' perceptions and attitudes towards the communicative activities. It includes 8 items based a five-Likert-scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree, which were given to the students to fill. Then it was used to assess the effectiveness of CLT on speaking proficiency.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

Validity is ensured as the tests directly measure speaking ability relevant to real-world communication (Hughes, 2003). For validity, the questionnaire was shown to four academists from English department at Soran University. Reliability is supported by consistent test conditions and repeatable results (Cohen et al., 2011). For reliability, SPSS was used and the Cronbach's Alpha test score was 0.794 which means the questionnaire is acceptable.

#### *Procedures of the Study*

The study follows these steps:

**Permission:** First, permission was taken from both schools, the researchers went to the head of the schools and took permission to conduct the study.

**Voluntary Consent:** Consent was taken from the students to voluntarily participate in the study and they were informed that their identity remains anonyms.

**CLT Instruction (one semester):** Students engage in communicative activities such as role-

plays (e.g., restaurant, hospital, job interview), group discussions, pair work, problem-solving tasks, and language games. The teacher facilitates, focusing on meaningful communication over grammar correction (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Questionnaire: Students complete a questionnaire regarding their perceptions and experiences of the CLT activities.

### *Data Analysis*

SPSS was employed to analyze the questionnaire items, offering insights into students' attitudes (Creswell, 2014). The questionnaire consisted of eight items regarding fluency, grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, CLT talking time, classrooms, activities and student engagement.

### *Ethical Considerations*

The study adheres to ethical standards. Participants are informed of the study's objectives, provided with voluntary consent, and assured of confidentiality. Data is used solely for research purposes and securely stored (Creswell, 2014).

## **Result and Discussion**

This section presents the results of the questionnaire regarding students' perceptions of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) program and how it influenced their speaking skills. CLT appears to help improve fluency. According to the findings, 46% of the participants agreed that CLT enhances fluency, while 38% strongly agreed. Only 2% disagreed, and 14% remained neutral. The majority response suggests that CLT fosters more fluency speech production through interaction-based tasks. Around 64% of the participants agreed that CLT helped them improve their grammatical accuracy in speaking, and 13% strongly agreed. However, 15% were neutral, and 8% (4% disagreed and 4% strongly disagreed) felt that CLT did not help with grammar. This reflects CLT's prioritization of fluency over explicit grammar instruction. A total of 44% of students agreed that CLT improved their vocabulary, and 36% strongly agreed. Only 12% disagreed (8% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed), while 8% were neutral. This suggests CLT helped many students build vocabulary contextually. CLT was perceived as helpful for pronunciation by 38% of students who agreed and 36% who strongly agreed. A total of 12% disagreed (8% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed), while 14% were neutral. Some neutral responses may stem from lack of explicit pronunciation feedback.

Most participants found CLT classes to be student-centered, with 44% agreeing and 42% strongly agreeing. Only 13% disagreed (10% disagreed, 3% strongly disagreed), and 1% were neutral. This suggests that students experienced more autonomy in CLT. A total of 34% agreed and 28% strongly agreed that they were actively engaged in CLT sessions. Meanwhile, 12% disagreed, 2% strongly disagreed, and 24% remained neutral. Students were generally positive about the real-world relevance of CLT activities, with 36% agreeing and 30% strongly agreeing. Only 12% disagreed (8% disagreed, 4% strongly disagreed), and 22% were neutral. The primary aim of this research was to explore the influence of how CLT on speaking skills among grade 7 Kurdish EFL learners in a public-school setting in Iraqi Kurdistan. A secondary aim was to explore students' perceptions of CLT as an instructional approach for enhancing spoken English. To meet these objectives, a two-part questionnaire was formulated consisting of eight items. The first part of the questionnaire examined the impact of CLT on aspects of speaking such as fluency, accuracy (grammar, pronunciation), and complexity (vocabulary). The second part consisted of four items regarding CLT classrooms, activities, student talking time and student engagement.

A total of 53 Grade 7 students from two public schools (Dilara Secondary School and ) located in Soran, Erbil, participated in this study. They participated in CLT-based program for a semester. All the participants were English-as-a-foreign-language (EFL) learners with limited speaking opportunities in their everyday lives. The CLT program included communicative speaking tasks based on real-world themes such as shopping, dining out, job interviews, travel, telephoning, and storytelling. These were selected to mirror authentic language use in various social and professional settings. To answer the research questions, a student questionnaire was used to measure students' perceptions of CLT. Statistical analysis confirmed the questionnaire was reliable. The questionnaire consisted of eight items. It was divided into two parts. The first of the questionnaire focused on fluency, grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. The second part focused on "student-centeredness, Student Talking Time, Active Engagement and Real-world Tasks.

## Conclusions

CLT has proven to be effective in developing EFL learners' speaking skills. By focusing on meaningful, communicative tasks, CLT encourages learners to engage in authentic language use, which promotes fluency, improves accuracy, and fosters linguistic complexity. While there are inherent challenges in balancing these three dimensions, CLT offers a flexible and dynamic framework for language learning that aligns with the natural language acquisition processes. CLT provides learners with more opportunities to practice speaking skills than conventional methods. As tasks typically involve pair work or group work, learners have to speak more frequently, which provides the necessary practice to enhance CLT, in particular fluency. Regular, authentic use of language in communicative tasks naturally improves the ease and speed of language production. This has also been confirmed, most of the CLT works on speaking. Through various strategies such as task repetition, careful task design, and the strategic use of feedback, learners can make significant progress in all aspects of speaking skills. This study has demonstrated that, when CLT is implemented thoughtfully and systematically, it offers a powerful pedagogical tool for improving the speaking skills of EFL learners, preparing them for successful communication in the target language. One of the primary insights from the study, supported by information processing theory, is that humans have a limited capacity for attention. This limitation prevents speakers from focusing on all aspects of the language simultaneously during task performance. For second language learners with lower proficiency, the absence of well-developed strategies can hinder their ability to produce language effectively under time constraints. The scope of this research was limited to Kurdish EFL students enrolled in public institutions under the Soran Independent Administration. The study focused exclusively on speaking skills, excluding other language domains such as writing, reading, or listening. While this research has provided a comprehensive analysis of the impact of CLT on Kurdish EFL learners' speaking skills, several areas warrant further investigation. More longitudinal studies are needed to examine the long-term effects of CLT on the triad of CLT. While this dissertation has illustrated positive short-term effects, it is essential to investigate how these skills evolve over extended periods of CLT implementation and whether learners can sustain improvements in the CAF in real-world communication. Research on individual learner differences in response to CLT is also needed. Factors such as motivation, cognitive abilities, and language aptitude may affect how learners are involved in tasks and how effectively they can balance the CLT. Understanding these individual differences can help teachers better tailor tasks to the needs of diverse learners. 30 The integration of technology in CLT is a growing area of interest. Digital tools, such as online platforms, language learning apps, and virtual communication tools, offer new opportunities for implementing CLT in different educational contexts. Future research could investigate the efficacy of technology-enhanced CLT in promoting

fluency, complexity, and accuracy, especially in online or blended learning environments. Similar to several studies, this study has several limitations and shortcomings, mostly related to methodology. The number of participants was limited; therefore, other researchers in the same and other contexts could duplicate similar research with more significant sizes. Although, a mixed method was employed to collect both the qualitative and quantitative data, future studies are suggested to be conducted with a higher number of participants, and other research instruments such as interviews, observations, and surveys.

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