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THE IMPACT OF COMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING ON COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF THE STUDENTS

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Abstract

This research explores the impact of communicative language teaching (CLT) on the communicative competence of BS English students in Charsada, Pakistan. It investigates how learners' communicative competence is affected by the CLT strategies. Grounded in Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence–encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence–the study adopts a mixed-methods research design, employing questionnaires and classroom observations for the data collection. The sample involved forty undergraduate students and ten English language teachers from rural and urban colleges. Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, while qualitative data were examined through thematic analysis. The main findings of the research reveal that CLT helps in developing underlying knowledge of the learner's language and positively impacts learners' communicative competence by improving their vocabulary, grammatical accuracy, and fluency. Overall, CLT which incorporates linguistic and pragmatic dimensions of communication proves to be an effective pedagogical approach. Implications have been drawn based on the study's findings regarding improvement in language pedagogy in similar educational contexts.

Introduction

In recent years, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as a dominant approach in language Education. This method aims to improve the communicative competence of learners as compared to the focus mainly on the structural accuracy. CLT focuses on a learner's ability to communicate effectively in different real-life context. Due to the unsatisfactory traditional syllabus that failed to facilitate learner's ability to use language for communication, linguists attempted to design a syllabus to achieve the communicative goals of language teaching (Richard & Rodgers, 1986; Widdowson, 1983).

The key idea underlying communicative language teaching is communicative competence which was introduced by Dell Hymes (1971, 1972) and which represents the learner's ability to use the targeted language effectively in different social contexts. The theory of Hymes (1972) about language competence proposed that communicative competence is the overall knowledge of the learner about language and involves not only grammatical knowledge but also sociolinguistic appropriateness, discourse coherence, and strategic language use. Building on this perspective, Canale and Swain (1980) proposed a comprehensive framework of communicative competence that has since become central to CLT-oriented research.

It can be stated that CLT introduces a novel approach to language teaching, diverging from traditional techniques (Yanna, 2010; Li, 1998). While traditional methods emphasize the

transmission of grammatical and structural rules; CLT aims to enhance students' capacity for effective communication and language use (Gao, 2011). Brown (1994) pointed out that CLT is learner's focused, with a focus on the learners' needs and passions, and provides possibilities for learners to interact with each other and the teacher through student-centered activities. Another research carried out by Taylor and Bachman (1991) emphasized the necessity of assessing communicative competence of language learners, which can assist teachers to identify areas which require refinement and provide feedback to learners. CLT play a very important role for improving the learner's ability to interact effectively in practical situations. Many researchers have concluded that CLT has a positive impact on the learners' speaking and writing proficiency (Jin, 2016; Rehman, 2019; Agbatogam, 2014; Felder & Brent, 2004). Nevertheless, there remains a need for context-specific research examining the effectiveness of CLT in underrepresented regions such as Charsadda, Pakistan.

In Pakistan, English language has a prominent role in policy making, in administration, education, and other professional domains. It appears from the socio-cultural aspect to be more as a pattern of life (Hague, 1983) which necessitates improving the competency in this language.

Accordingly, the present study investigates the impact of CLT on the communicative competence of BS English students in Charsadda. The study seeks to assess learners' competence levels, explore the effectiveness of CLT strategies, and identify pedagogical practices that can further enhance CLT and thereby students communicative competence in similar EFL contexts.

Research Questions

The current study addresses and examines the following research questions:

Q-1. What is the influence of CLT on the communicative skills of college students in Charsadda with limited exposure to the English language?

Q-2. What are the key factors which contribute to their competency levels?

Q-3. Which CLT strategies are most effective in improving students' communicative competence?

Delimitation of the Study

The study is limited to college-level students in District Charsadda who have relatively limited exposure to English language learning. Students outside the college context or those with extensive exposure to English were not included. Additionally, the study focuses exclusively on English as a foreign language.

Research Methodology

The study employs a mixed-methods approach, incorporating both qualitative and quantitative data, to investigate students' communicative competence. Canal and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence was utilized, which defines the communicative competence in terms of four different categories e.g. sociolinguistic, grammatical, discourse and strategic competence. This model asserts that comprehensive language proficiency encompasses not only grammatical and lexical knowledge but also the ability to appropriately use language in diverse communicative contexts, thereby enabling learners to effectively navigate real-world communication challenges and achieve complete language understanding (Canale & Swain, 1980). Data were collected using structured questionnaire adapted from Khodamoradi (2024), and classroom observation conducted over a four-week period.

The data comprised a sample of forty undergraduate English students from Charsadda to represent a range of language proficiency levels from beginner to advanced. The sample included 20 male and 20 female students from five colleges, including two rural and two urban institutions, randomly chosen to provide a comprehensive view of the classroom demographic and language competency. Additionally, ten English language teachers from these colleges were included. This representative sample offers valuable insight into language competency across proficiency levels and diverse backgrounds, essential for analyzing communicative competence within the region. Questionnaire was distributed during a one-hour

session, while classroom observations were conducted over a four-week period covering multiple sessions to ensure a comprehensive overview of classroom practices. The observations focused on task-based learning, interactive activities, role-playing exercises, and the use of physical materials to provide a comprehensive framework of strategies employed in communicative language teaching (CLT).

Data Analysis

For analyzing qualitative data that was gathered from the classroom observation, thematic analysis, which gives us a clear understanding of the research data, was used to identify key themes. Descriptive statistics was applied to analyse the quantitative data to understand the primary factors influencing learners' communicative skills and to provide a comprehensive overview of how students perceive the four components of discourse as defined by Canale and Swain's model. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated for each questionnaire item during observations. Various statistical analyses, including ANOVA and t-tests, were utilized to assess differences in communication abilities in relation to demographic parameters such as gender, age, and competency level.

Findings

Following the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT), the findings reveal that more than half of the participants reported comfort and confidence in using the target language. This confidence facilitates students' ability to express themselves freely and engage in authentic interactions with both peers and instructors. The results suggest that the majority of respondents have successfully demonstrated a significant achievement in grammar mastery. The findings collectively reflect notable progress in both communicative competence and grammatical understanding. Students also demonstrated enhanced ability to use English in real-life situations, such as ordering food, asking for directions, and participating in discussions.

However, the findings also reveal variability in learners' progress. While many students showed substantial improvement, a minority exhibited limited development, particularly in complex grammatical structures and pragmatic competence. These results suggest that although CLT is largely effective, additional instructional support may be required for some learners.

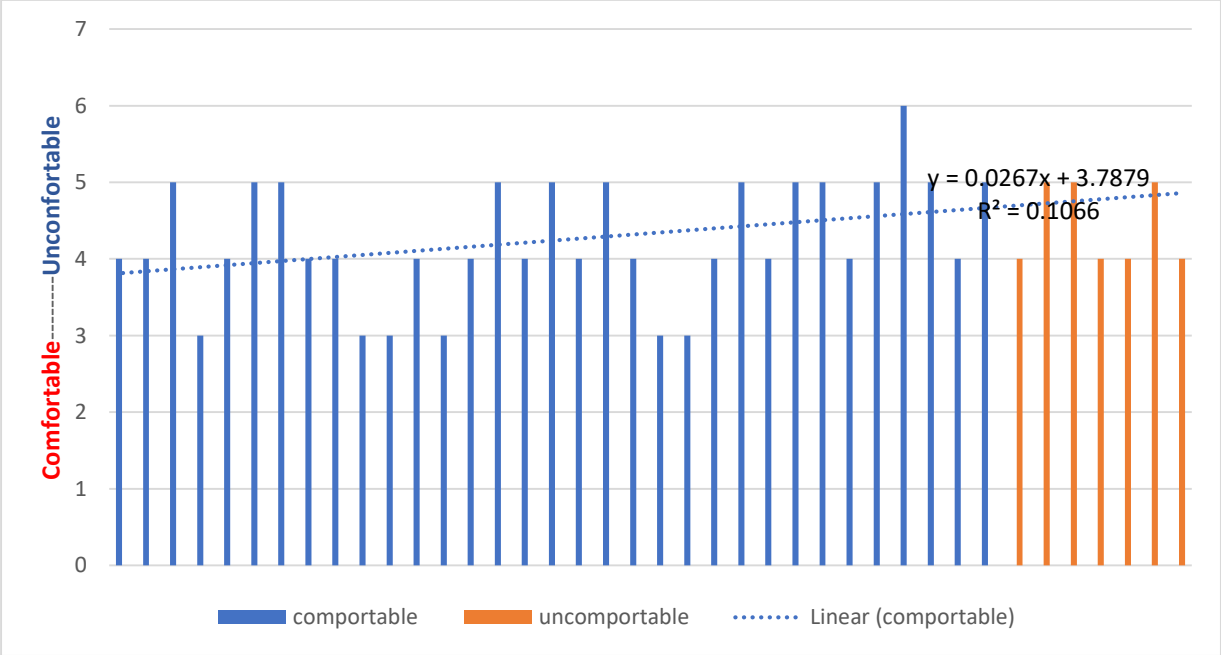


Figure 1. Results of the comfort level of students to communicate effectively from sale 1 to 5.

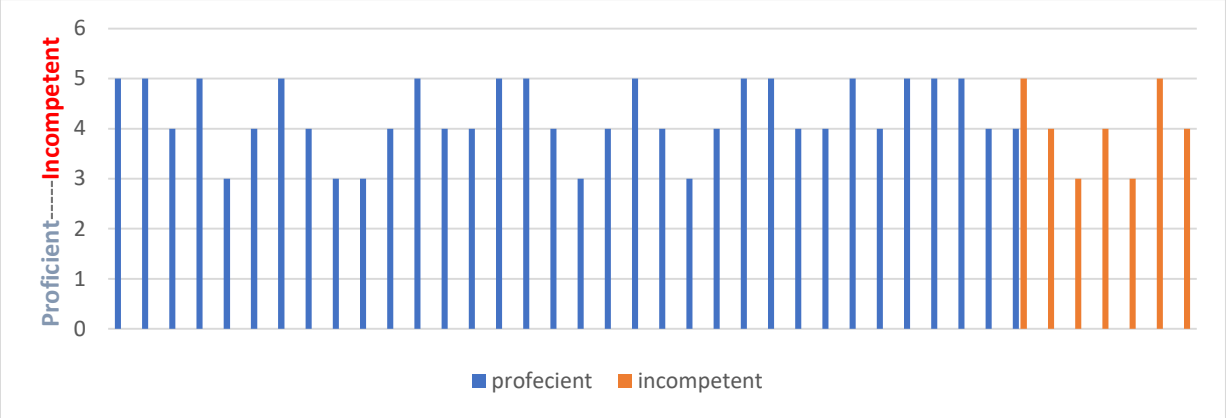


Figure 2. Results of students on a scale of 1-5, to rate their ability to use appropriate grammar, syntax, and vocabulary in the target language.

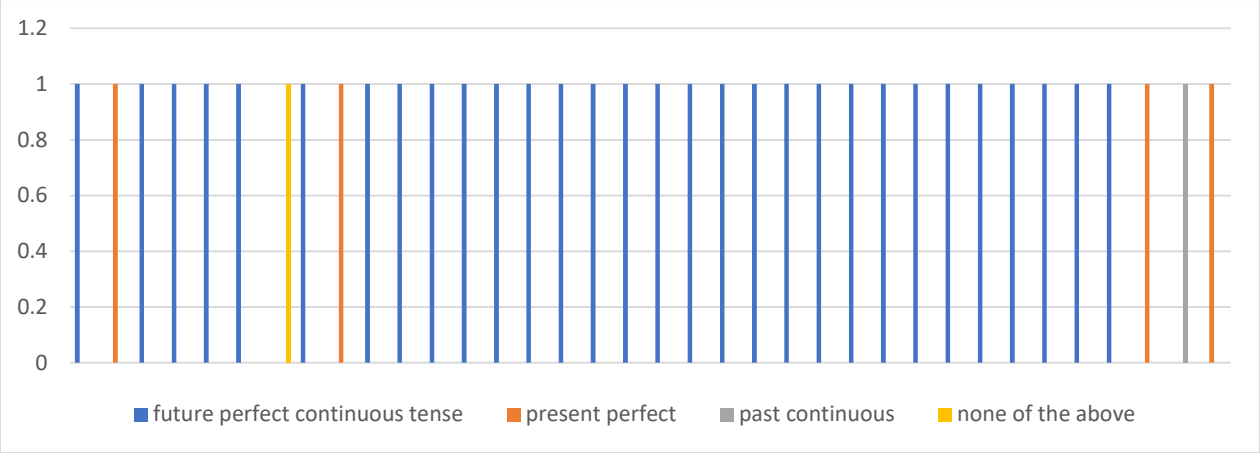


Figure 3.Results of students on a scale of 1-5, to rate their ability to identify the verb tense in the given sentence.

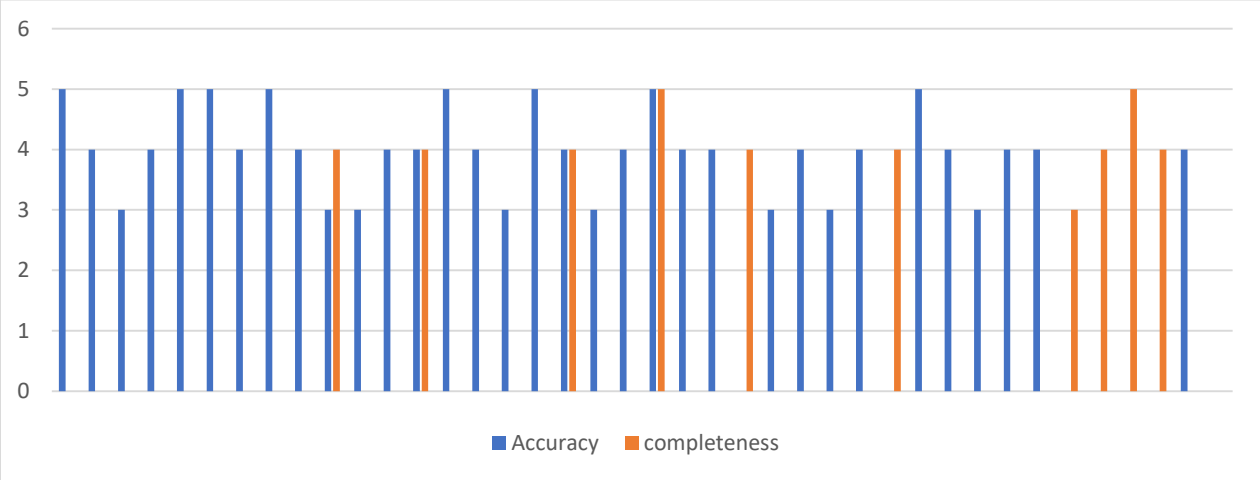


Figure 4.Results of the students to differentiate between a subordinate clause and a coordinating clause.

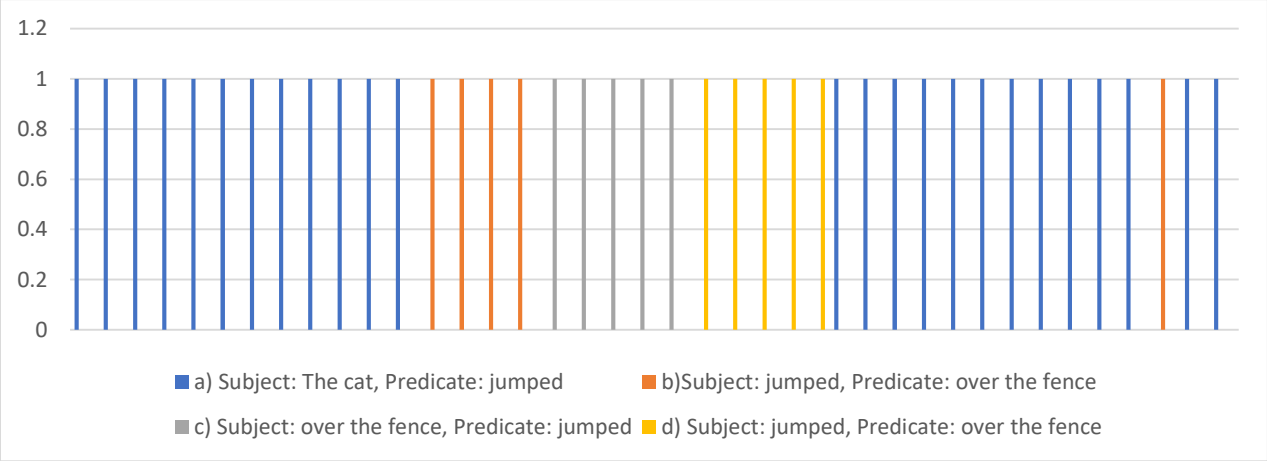


Figure 5. Results of the students to identify the subject and predicate in the following sentence.



Figure 6. Results of the students to use the word "antecedent" in a sentence.

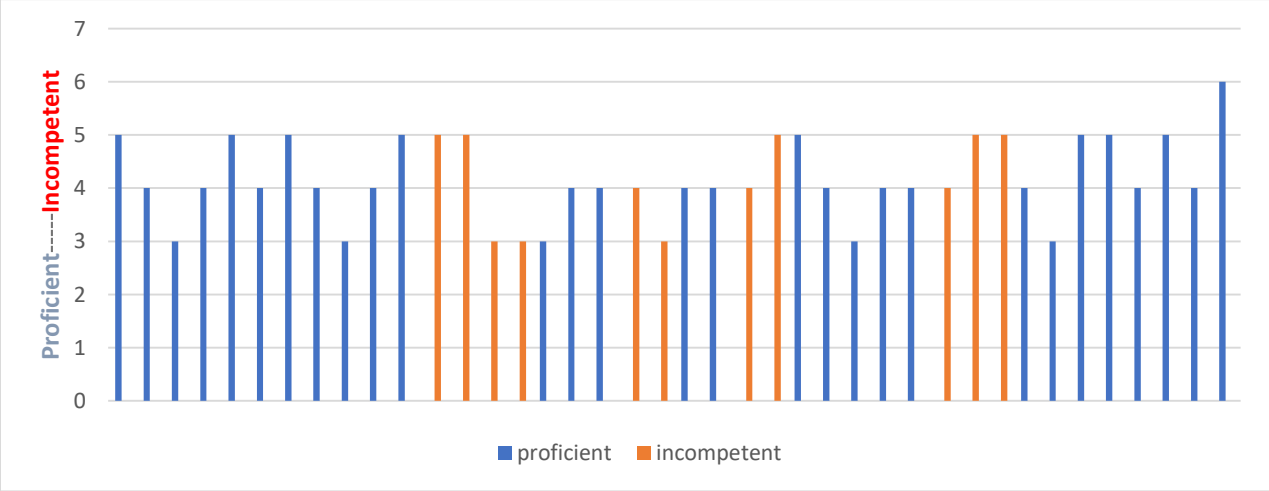


Figure 7.On a scale of 1-5, rate your ability to express a specific attitude in different contexts in the target language.

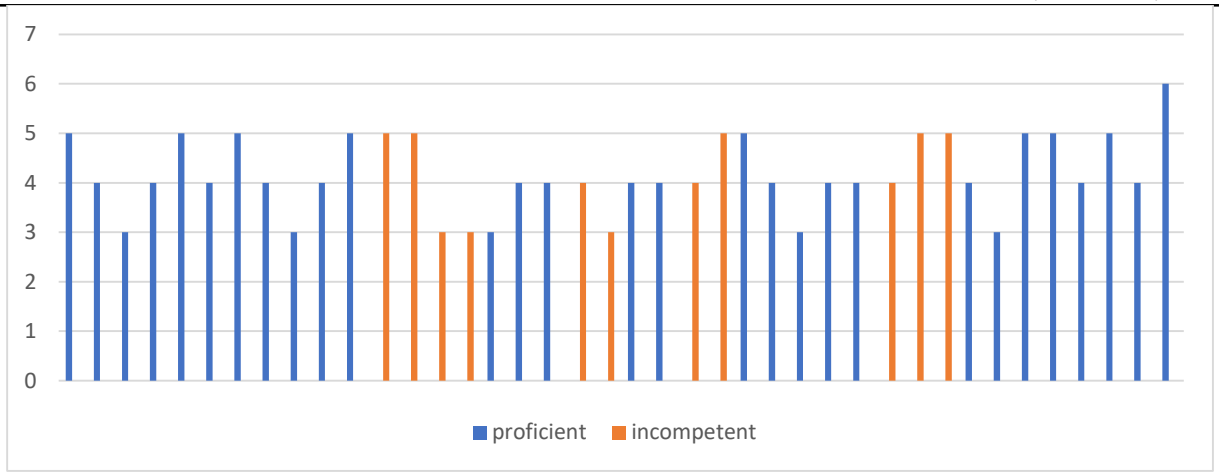


Figure 8. Results of the question "What are the strategies you use to improve your communicative competence in the target language?".

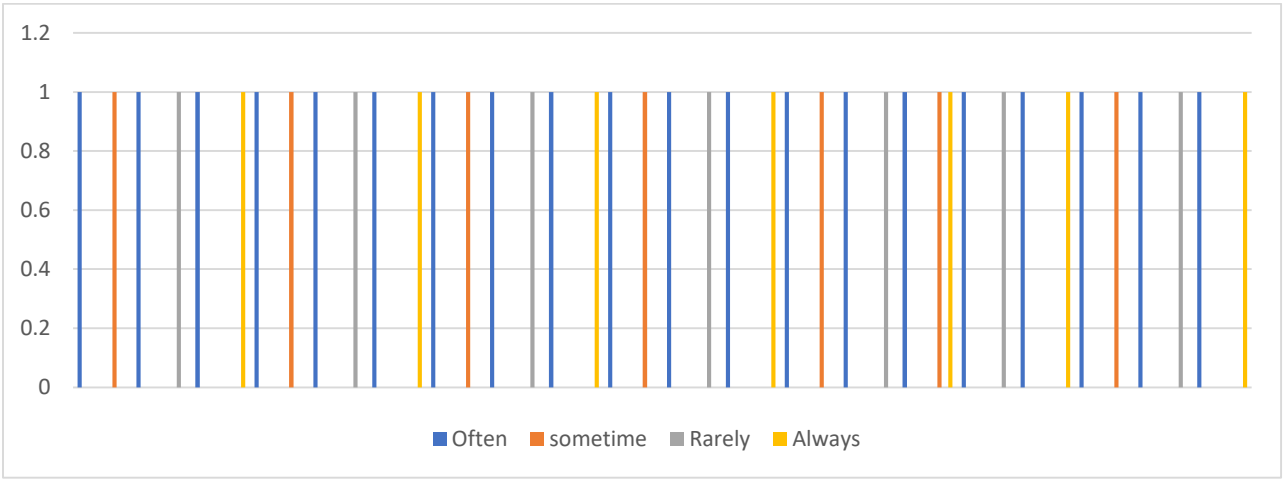


Figure 9. Results of the question "How often do you use the foreign language outside of the classroom?".

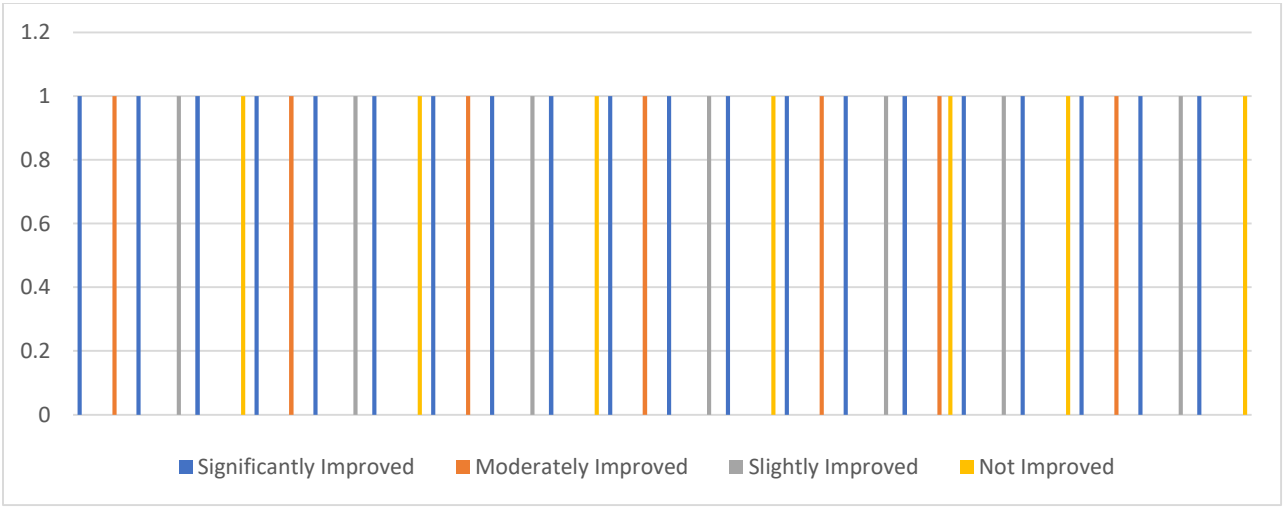


Figure 10. Results of How do you think your communicative competence in the target language has improved since the implementation of communicative language teaching?

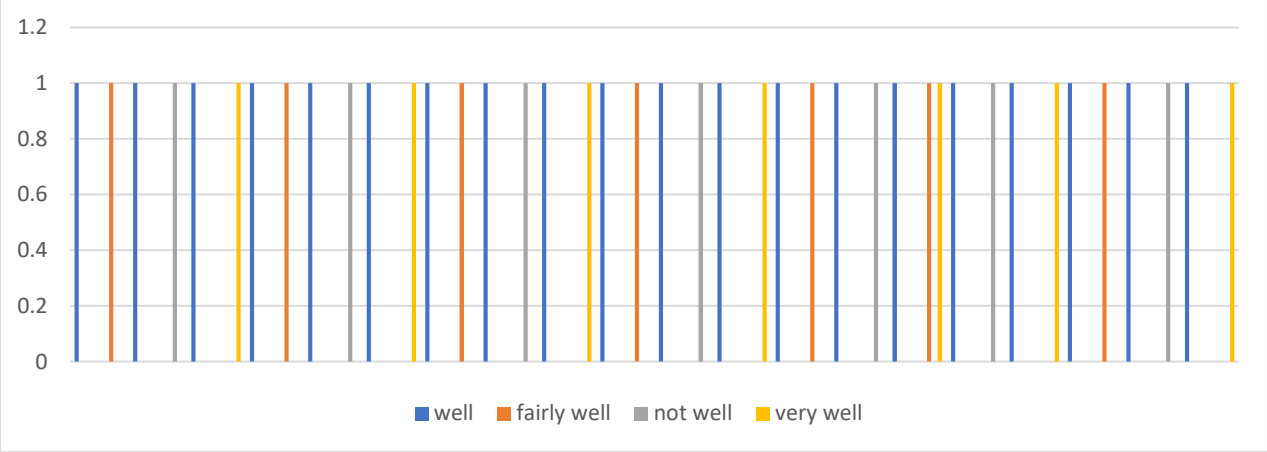


Figure 11. Results of the question "How well can you understand and produce different language registers, such as formal and informal speech?".

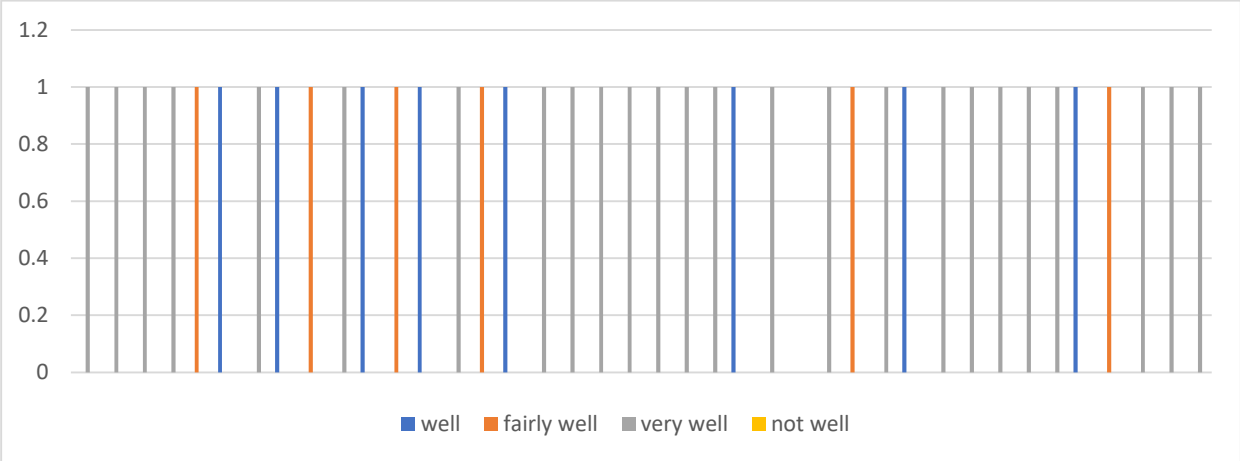


Figure 12. Results of the students to interpret and express nonverbal cues, such as body language and tone of voice, in the foreign language.

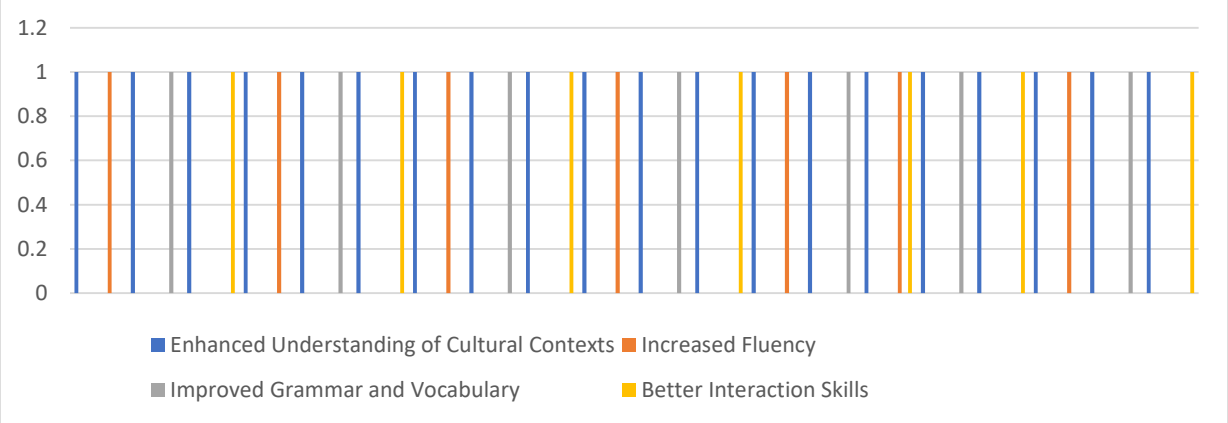


Figure 13. Results of the students that how they feel that communicative language teaching has helped improve your communicative competence in the foreign language.

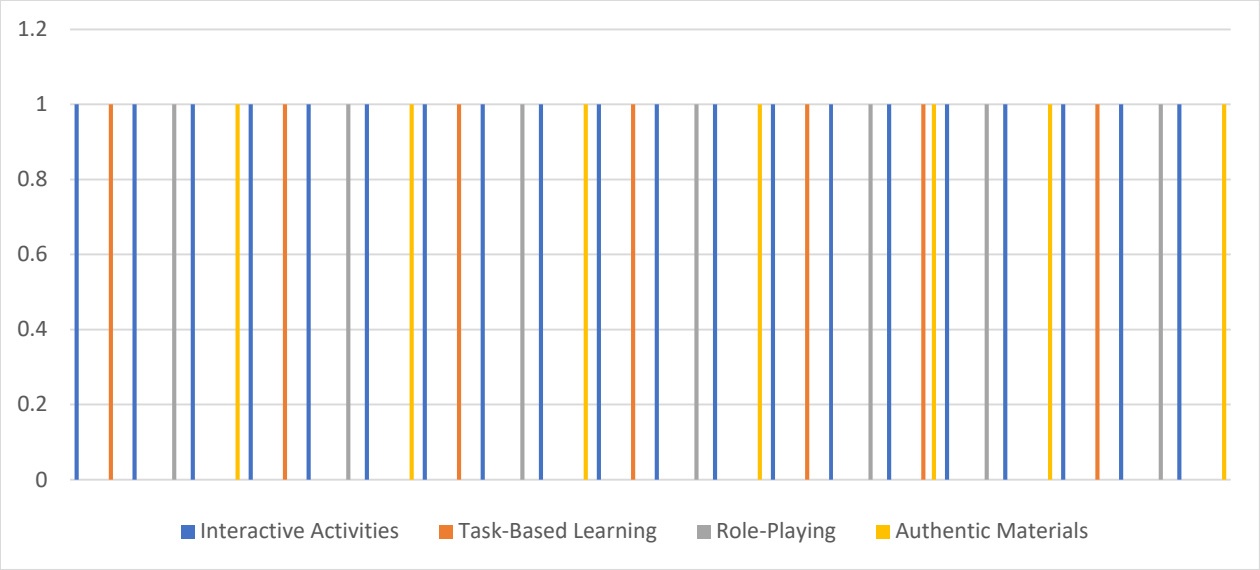


Figure 14. Results of the question that what is the most effective communicative language teaching strategies?



Figure 15. Results to compares communicative competence in the target language to that of a native speaker.

16. Can you provide an example of a situation in which you successfully used the target language to communicate effectively?

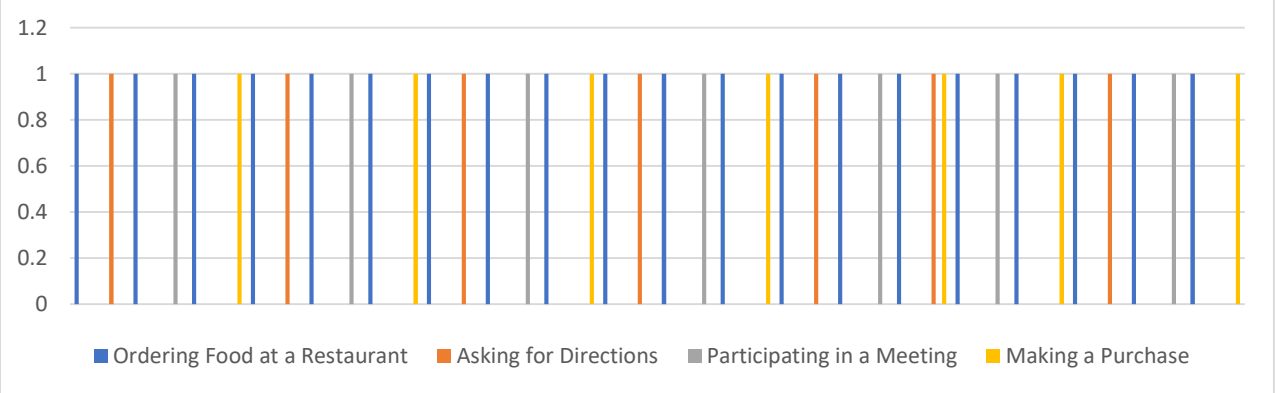


Figure 16

17. How do you think your communicative competence in the target language could be further improved?

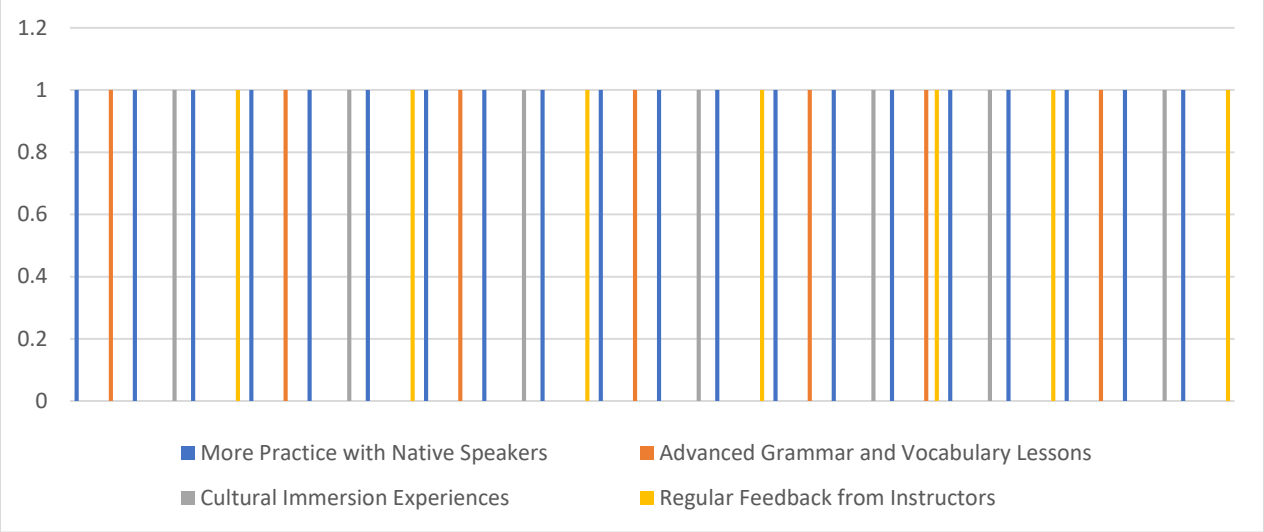


Figure 17

18. On a scale of 1-5, rate your ability to understand and use various language functions, such as asking for clarification, making small talk, and giving instructions.
Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

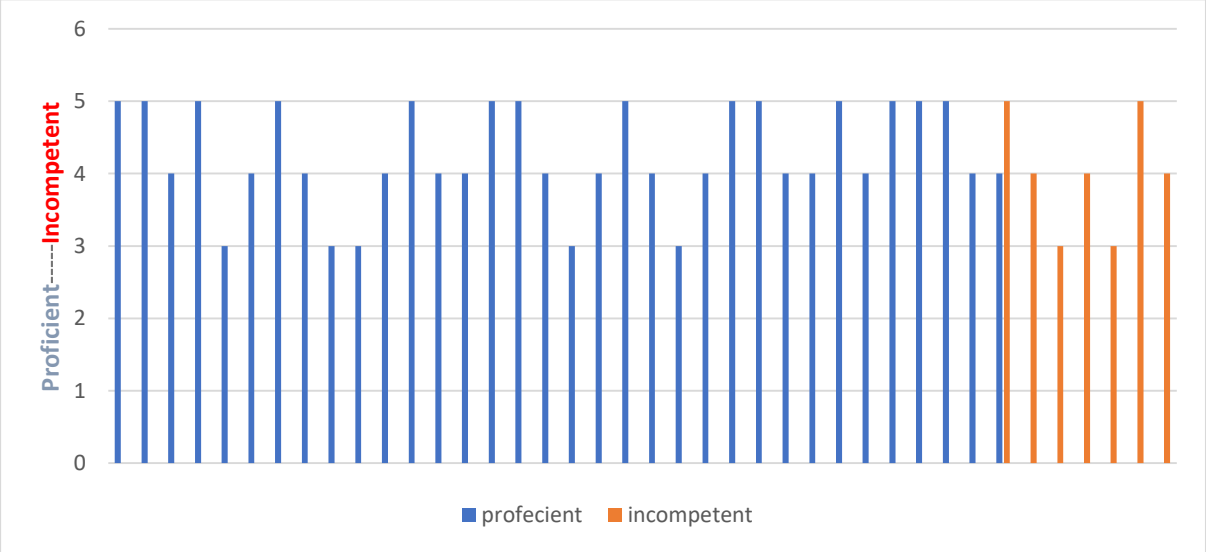


Figure 18

Discussion

The findings of this study confirm the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching in enhancing students' communicative competence. Consistent with previous research (Ellis, 2003; Richards, 2006), CLT was found to promote fluency, confidence, and meaningful interaction through learner-centered activities. Classroom observations further demonstrated that interactive tasks and authentic materials created opportunities for students to practice language in realistic contexts.

Nevertheless, the variation in learners' performance indicates that CLT alone may not address all aspects of language development equally. Some students continued to struggle with grammatical accuracy and pragmatic expression, highlighting the need for a balanced instructional approach that integrates explicit grammar

instruction with communicative practice (Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Thornbury, 1999).

These findings suggest that teachers should adopt flexible pedagogical strategies that respond to learners' individual needs. Regular feedback, targeted practice, and increased exposure to authentic language use—both inside and outside the classroom—may further enhance the effectiveness of CLT.

Conclusion

The research concluded that communicative language teaching plays a significant role in developing students' communicative competence. It promotes learners' ability to communicate effectively through authentic material and meaningful activities, thus helping students become competent users of English. This method encourages students to take risks in using the target language while focusing on meaningful and authentic contexts. Communicative language teaching increases learners' self-confidence and enables them to interact more fluently with others. Moreover, it creates a learning environment where each learner can freely express themselves without fear or hesitation. The current research has shown that communicative language teaching can positively influence learners' abilities to use English as a tool for communication and foster better understanding among people from different cultural backgrounds. Additionally, further research could be undertaken by comparing the effectiveness of CLT and other popular ELT approaches, such as content-based or task-based instruction. Also, further research may investigate how CLT contributes to intercultural communication between members of diverse societies.

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