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COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SECONDARY EDUCATION: PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICE

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Abstract

This paper examines the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in secondary school English classrooms, focusing on how it can foster communicative competence through authentic, learner-centered activities. It explores the theoretical foundation of CLT, outlines its key principles, and presents practical strategies for integrating all four language skills—speaking, listening, reading, and writing—into cohesive, task-based lessons. The findings suggest that CLT, when adapted to learners' needs and contexts, can significantly improve language proficiency and learner motivation.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, learner-centered approach, task-based learning, interaction, language skills.

Introduction

The growing emphasis on communicative competence in language education has shifted the focus from grammar translation and rote learning to methods that prioritize meaningful interaction. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as one of the most influential approaches, emphasizing the use of language for authentic communication rather than solely for structural mastery (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In secondary education, where learners are developing both academic and social language skills, CLT offers a framework that integrates language learning with real-world application.

Theoretical Background

CLT is rooted in Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, which extends beyond grammatical knowledge to include sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies. Canale and Swain's (1980) model further reinforced these dimensions, shaping the foundation for CLT principles. Unlike traditional methods



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such as the Grammar Translation Method, CLT prioritizes fluency, learner autonomy, and interaction as essential components of the learning process (Littlewood, 2014).

Key Principles of CLT

The following principles guide CLT implementation in secondary education:

1. Authentic Communication: Lessons should simulate real-life language use through role-plays, interviews, and problem-solving tasks (Nunan, 2004).
2. Integration of Skills: Reading, writing, listening, and speaking should be taught together in contextually meaningful activities.
3. Learner-Centeredness: The teacher functions as a facilitator, encouraging collaboration and active learner participation (Harmer, 2015).
4. Task-Based Learning: Learning occurs through purposeful tasks that require communication to achieve a goal.
5. Error Tolerance: Errors are seen as a natural part of the learning process and addressed through feedback rather than constant correction.

Practical Applications in Secondary Education

In a CLT-oriented classroom, lessons might include:

Role-Plays and Simulations: Students enact real-world scenarios, such as ordering food at a restaurant or asking for directions.

Project-Based Work: Groups collaborate on presentations about cultural topics or environmental issues.

Information Gap Activities: Learners exchange missing information to complete a task, promoting negotiation of meaning.

Integrated Skills Tasks: For example, reading an article, discussing it in groups, and writing a short reflection. These activities encourage active engagement, peer learning, and the practical application of vocabulary and grammar in context.

Challenges and Adaptations

While CLT offers many benefits, challenges arise in contexts where examinations focus heavily on grammar and translation. Teachers may need to blend CLT with form-focused instruction to meet curriculum requirements (Savignon, 2018). Large



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class sizes, limited resources, and varying proficiency levels also demand flexible adaptation of CLT principles.

CLT's emphasis on meaningful communication, skill integration, and learner autonomy makes it a powerful methodology for secondary English education. By adapting CLT to local contexts and combining it with supportive assessment strategies, educators can enhance students' language proficiency and motivation.

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