

Enhancing Student Well-Being through the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Vocational High Schools

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ABSTRACT

ABSTRACT This study investigates the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in vocational high school classrooms and its potential impact on students' well-being, particularly in relation to their confidence and engagement in learning English. CLT is a learner-centered approach that emphasizes the use of language in real-life communication, promoting student interaction, fluency, and autonomy. In the context of vocational education, where English is essential for future professional settings, fostering communicative competence is crucial. Moreover, classroom environments that prioritize student expression and participation can contribute positively to emotional and psychological well-being. A qualitative method was employed through classroom observations in two English classes at a vocational high school. Each class was taught by a different teacher. An observation checklist based on CLT principles was used to assess the presence of communicative strategies, teacher roles, student participation, and the use of authentic materials. The aim was to explore not only the extent of CLT implementation but also how classroom interaction might support students' sense of inclusion, confidence, and comfort which are key components of educational well-being. Findings revealed contrasting teaching approaches. The first teacher actively applied CLT strategies, encouraging group discussions, role-plays, and open communication. This created a positive, student-centered environment where learners appeared more motivated and confident in expressing themselves. In contrast, the second teacher relied heavily on grammar drills and translation, with minimal student interaction. This more traditional approach limited speaking opportunities and may have negatively affected student engagement and well-being. The study concludes that effective CLT implementation not only enhances speaking skills but also contributes to a supportive and empowering learning environment. Promoting communicative practices in vocational classrooms can help improve both language outcomes and the overall well-being of students

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Vocational High School, Student Well-Being, Learner-Centered Approach, English Language Education

54 Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as one of the most effective approaches in English language instruction, particularly for fostering speaking and interaction skills. Unlike traditional, teacher-centered methods that emphasize grammar and rote learning, CLT promotes a learner-centered environment focused on real-life communication, collaboration, and active participation. Through activities such as group discussions, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and peer interactions, CLT enables students to use language meaningfully, thereby enhancing both fluency and confidence in English.

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In vocational high schools, the need for communicative competence is particularly critical. Students in these institutions are being prepared for specific career paths where English is frequently used in workplace communication, customer service, technical documentation, and digital correspondence. As such, mastering spoken English is not merely an academic goal but a practical necessity for future employment. Implementing CLT in vocational classrooms offers a relevant and functional approach that bridges the gap between language learning and its real-world application.

Furthermore, current educational discourse highlights the importance of addressing not only academic achievement but also student well-being. A growing number of students face personal and environmental factors that contribute to school dropout rates a trend that is rapidly increasing (Lippman & Rivers, 2008). The primary cause of this phenomenon is often poor academic achievement, which is closely linked to reduced motivation defined as the process by which targeted activities are energetic, directive, and sustainable (Schunk et al., 2010).

Numerous studies have explored the factors influencing academic performance, and well-being has consistently emerged as a significant predictor (Mercer, 2020). Closely associated with life satisfaction, well-being encompasses self-worth, positive relationships, autonomy, competence, and goal orientation. Emphasizing personal growth is especially important for learners, as it contributes to optimal functioning and sustained engagement in learning activities (Steele & Fullagar, 2009). Research indicates that students with higher levels of well-being tend to achieve better academic outcomes and are less likely to experience failure (Yang, 2021).

Moreover, well-being and engagement are deeply interconnected. Engagement, which includes motivational and behavioral dimensions, equips learners to adapt and thrive in the educational environment, especially when facing life's challenges (Salmela-Aro et al., 2016). In higher education and beyond, academic engagement is recognized as a critical psychological construct due to its positive correlations with student performance, mental health, achievement, and enthusiasm for learning (Rogers et al., 2017).

CLT, with its interactive and respectful learning environment, can play a pivotal role in fostering both student engagement and well-being. When students feel heard, valued, and capable of expressing themselves, they are more likely to develop positive attitudes toward learning, greater emotional resilience, and improved academic outcomes.

Despite the recognized benefits of CLT, its implementation in classrooms remains inconsistent. Some educators continue to rely on more traditional, teacher-dominated methods. This study aims to investigate how CLT is applied in vocational high school settings and how it influences both students' speaking development and their overall well-being. Through classroom observations, the research explores the connection between teaching practices and student experiences, offering insights into effective and holistic language education.

55 Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an instructional approach that prioritizes real-life communication as the primary goal of language learning. Rather than treating language as a set of isolated grammatical rules, CLT promotes interaction, meaning-making, and functional usage. It emerged as a reaction against traditional, form-focused approaches, such as the Grammar-Translation Method and the Direct Method (Baugh, 1993; Emerson, 1971; Howatt & Widdowson, 2004), and instead emphasizes student-centered, situation-oriented learning (Da Silva Cintra & Bittencourt, 2015; Dos Santos, 2019a; San-Valero et al., 2019).

CLT is best understood as an approach rather than a rigid theory (Savignon, 1987; Savignon, 2002). This distinction allows for flexibility and adaptability, giving both teachers and students

the freedom to select materials and strategies relevant to their contexts (Kennedy, 2002). The approach encourages creativity and contextualization, with a strong emphasis on learner autonomy and meaningful interaction. Harmer (1988) and Savignon (2002) assert that CLT provides a motivating framework that supports both the linguistic and personal development of learners.

A core strength of CLT lies in its encouragement for both teachers and learners to draw on resources from their immediate communities and real-life environments. For instance, Dos Santos (2019a; 2019b) demonstrated that educators could design visual-based learning materials sourced from students' everyday surroundings—such as city halls, school buildings, shopping centers, or residential dormitories. These community-based materials not only increase relevance but also create opportunities for learners to discuss familiar topics, enhancing both fluency and confidence.

Another characteristic of CLT is its emphasis on target language use in the classroom. Students are encouraged to minimize the use of their native language and engage in English communication as much as possible. While errors naturally occur during this process, they are seen as valuable learning opportunities. Teachers introduce corrective feedback, alternative phrasing, or relevant grammar only after students have completed their communication tasks, thereby maintaining fluency and confidence during interaction.

In vocational high school contexts, where learners prepare for professions requiring interpersonal and workplace communication, CLT aligns closely with their needs. By focusing on authentic communication, collaborative learning, and student engagement, the approach equips learners with practical language skills that can be directly applied in real-world professional settings.

In summary, CLT represents a flexible, learner-centered approach that supports not only language acquisition but also learner confidence, independence, and contextual awareness. Its adaptability to various learning environments and emphasis on real-world communication make it especially valuable in vocational education and other applied language learning contexts.

Student Well-Being

Student well-being has gained increasing attention in educational research as a critical component of academic achievement and personal development. Well-being refers to a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional, psychological, and social health. According to Mercer (2020), student well-being includes self-worth, autonomy, positive relationships, and goal-directedness, all of which contribute to enhanced engagement and academic performance.

In the classroom context, well-being is closely linked to motivation and learning outcomes. A large number of students face personal and environmental factors that put them at risk of dropping out, with disengagement and low academic motivation cited as primary causes (Lippman & Rivers, 2008; Schunk et al., 2010). Research suggests that well-being significantly affects students' willingness to participate and persevere in academic tasks. Learners with higher levels of well-being are more likely to experience academic success and are less prone to failure or dropout (Yang, 2021).

Positive emotions, such as enjoyment and interest in learning, have been shown to increase students' effort and persistence (Salanova et al., 2010). Therefore, fostering learner engagement is essential. Engagement, as defined by Reschly et al. (2014), is a dynamic and multidimensional process involving behavioral, emotional, and cognitive involvement in school-related activities. When students feel emotionally safe and intellectually stimulated, they are more likely to develop the self-efficacy necessary for overcoming academic challenges.

Educational strategies, such as CLT, that support interactive learning and student autonomy can contribute significantly to student well-being. As Gunuc and Kuzu (2015) and Rogers

et al. (2017) suggest, enhancing student engagement and promoting psychological safety in the classroom should be a priority for educators aiming to foster resilience, motivation, and long-term academic success.

56 Research Methods

This study employed a qualitative approach using classroom observation as the primary method to explore the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in vocational high schools and its relation to student well-being. Observations were conducted in two English classes at a vocational high school, each taught by a different teacher. The purpose was to examine how CLT principles were applied in each classroom and how the teaching approach influenced students' opportunities to develop speaking skills and experience a positive learning environment.

An observation checklist was developed based on key CLT indicators, including the use of group activities, student-student and student-teacher interaction, authentic communication tasks, learner autonomy, and the teacher's role as a facilitator. In addition to the classroom environment and teaching strategies, attention was also given to student behavior, engagement levels, participation, and signs of emotional comfort or discomfort during lessons factors considered essential to evaluating well-being. By observing two contrasting classes, this method allowed for a comparative analysis of how different teaching approaches affected both language learning outcomes and the emotional atmosphere of the classroom.

57 Result and Discussion

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58 Conclusion

This study explored the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in vocational high schools and its connection to both language development and student well-being. The findings highlight a clear contrast between two classrooms: one where CLT was actively and effectively implemented, and another where traditional, teacher-centered methods prevailed. In the classroom where CLT was practiced, students demonstrated greater confidence, active participation, and enthusiasm for learning. The environment encouraged peer collaboration, meaningful use of English, and a sense of emotional safety which contributed to a more

positive and productive learning experience.

To ensure broader and more consistent implementation of CLT, it is recommended that schools provide professional development for teachers, access to communicative teaching resources, and institutional support for innovative pedagogical practices. By doing so, vocational high schools can create learning environments that not only prepare students for real-world communication but also support their overall growth, confidence, and well-being.

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