

Employing CLT Approach to Improve English Speaking Skills for Hau Giang Community College Students

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: CLT approach, English speaking skills, classroom activities, interaction

Teaching the English language to non-native students at Hau Giang community college is a concern for instructors. This research was conducted to examine whether the CLT approach is the effective teaching method that students expect. The research used survey questionnaires for teachers and students. The participants consisted of 16 teachers of English and 23 EFL students at Hau Giang community college. The quantitative data was collected through the Google form application. The finding indicates that necessary factors such as classroom activities, appropriate teaching materials, and media aim to create a communication environment that gives learners some chances to interact with each other. The study results confirmed that CLT is an appropriate and effective teaching method for students here until now.

Introduction

English is known as the most common official language in the world. People between countries communicate in English together. Learning English as a foreign language is necessary for everyone, especially learning to speak, which is the oral product of the learning process. Learners, who are Hau Giang Community college students, have a limitation of speaking skills. Thus, a suggested question for teachers is “How to improve students’ English-speaking skills?” There are many methods that teachers select to match the characteristics of learners and to modern teaching trends as learner-centered. Lom (2012) pointed out that learner-centered, active teaching strategies can be more effective than traditional lectures, as recent research on teaching and learning claimed. This research proposes some effective ways through classroom activities that are led by CLT. Many researchers found that Communicating Language Teaching approach should be used in teaching Foreign Language (FLT) through interactive activities in the classroom. Wahyuni (2021) pointed out that students actively join in-class activities that are more visual and realistic with CLT. Toro et al. (2018) stated that the CLT approach involves learning through interaction and communication rather than learning through learners’ memorization. CLT aims to support learners with chances to learn and use the target language in a second language context (Farooq 2015). This approach helps learners have many opportunities to practice speaking English in the classroom, where teachers mainly use

strategies and resources. With this approach, the teacher has to create more communicative environments for students who need more interaction together to transmit their ideas and learn from each other. From that, learners can naturally develop their English speaking ability. With strong points of CLT, this research instructs learners who are not only able to develop their oral ability but also develop others of English language.

Literature review

Definition of Communicating Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is known as the Communicative Approach, which emerged in Europe and the USA in the 1970s. CLT is a recent popular approach that is associated with integrated teaching methods. The CLT approach is often specified in many ways, such as content-based, task-based, project-based, etc. These are modern (student-centered) approaches that are far from the traditional (teacher-centered) approach. With a communication approach, the teacher can combine skills such as Listening, Speaking, Reading, Writing, Vocabulary, and so on while teaching in the target language. Thamarana (2015) defined that learners' communication ability will be improved if the CLT approach is applied to teach grammatical rules in the target language. Learners are always motivated to speak English as a foreign language during classroom activities. Teachers and learners have important roles in contributing to CLT's classroom success. Learners' English speaking skill is improved by observing their classmates' steps and becoming more confident with CLT (AL-Garni & Almuhammadi 2019). According to Saputra (2015), English-speaking subject is taught effectively when using the CLT method. Employing the CLT approach, the teacher is a motivator, assessor, facilitator, and corrector during students' learning process in the class, and students desire to speak orally and gain communicative capacity effectively.

Definition of Speaking Skill

Speaking is a daily human communication activity that takes place anywhere and anytime. It is an act that connects the speaker and the listener. In English subjects, the most difficult and important skill is known as speaking skills which relate to the ability to express spoken and body language, thoughts, opinions, or feelings in a particular situation. Indriyani (2020) defined that people communicate with each other every day through speaking activities. The goal of language learners is to master communication skills (Sari và Sembiring 2019). According to Qasemi (2020), speaking is a form of communication that demonstrates the most meaningful language ability. Also, Ngan (2013) pointed out that learning speaking skills are more complicated than other skills, which involve pronunciation when producing oral speech. Speaking skills involve the proficient use of language-building elements such as grammatical structure, vocabulary, intonation, and pronunciation. Students often have difficulty in social communication that as not being able to express their views or thoughts, or they understand what others say but cannot report it (Wahyuni et al., 2021). This can be due to many influencing factors such as lack of regular speaking practice environment, motivation to learn, and confidence of learners. Islam, Ahmad, and Islam (2022) claimed that through communication and interaction, speaking skill is clearly shown their importance. Likewise, English speaking skill concerns how to speak the English language so that listeners can effectively understand it.

CLT Strategies to Improve English Speaking Skills

Classroom Activities of CLT

When learning a second language, learners need to have an interactive environment to communicate with each other. So, teachers should create context as well as organize a lot of classroom activities that can engage students to join actively and interactively. Toro et al. (2018) pointed out that learners' communicative competence develops when using classroom activities such as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction. That's right, and college students need classroom communication activities to practice speaking English and improve speaking as well as other language learning skills. Dabiri (2019) said that speaking practice in class is an opportunity to develop students' speaking skills that they are always encouraged to participate in class activities to express their views and ideas. So, teachers should organize a lot of interactive tasks/ activities in the classroom to create an English practice environment for students. To Lom (2012), an active way of learning is that students should do what they have learned instead of just listening. As proof of negative teaching, teachers only use available materials in the book without communicative activities. (Farooq 2015). According to the traditional teaching method, students almost only listen to the teacher's lectures and follow the model, thus not developing students' creativity and thinking, leading to completely passive learners. Working in pairs, in small and large groups in context gives students authentic opportunities to learn English speaking effectively (Wael et al., 2019). Besides that, interviews play an important role in enhancing students' fluency; problem-solving activities which relate to types of topics and tasks (AL-Garni và Almuhammadi 2019). One always needs classroom activity is role play. Through these activities, students gradually overcome their lack of confidence, anxiety, shyness, etc., and gain experience with real-life situations.

Appropriate Speaking Teaching Materials of CLT

Interaction plays an important role in CLT. Learners need interactive tasks to transmit their ideas and learn from others. Interactive resources in the classroom have a significant affection for learners' quality. Toro et al. (2018) claimed that choosing appropriate materials encourage meaningful interaction among learners. Akhter and Ashikuzzaman (2019) stated that learning resources to teach communication to describe and use Western cultural contexts and environments. Agreeing with this point of view, the programs in the English majors at Hau Giang Community College are designed to the Western culture and context. Therefore, sometimes the lesson is not suitable for the learners' context, limiting the effectiveness of both teaching and learning. To employ CLT effectively, schools and teachers must support appropriate teaching/learning resources. For this point, Chang and S. Goswami (2011) stated that schools could support teachers to create English communication chances by designing suitable lessons for learners of when the condition of the educational system. Also, teaching materials related to items in the classroom, such as desks, chairs, class size, etc. have certain influences on the teaching and learning process.

Enhancing Media on CLT approach

With obstacles and difficulties in learning English speaking skills, instructors must use different teaching methods and strategies. Nowadays, the media brings the most convenience to

practicing students' English skills. Yanli (2019) argued that when students use new media technology in and out of the classroom, it has many benefits to the field of education, especially the teaching of improved speaking and listening skills, reducing difficulties for learners, and creating more enjoyment. The use of media is always appropriate in all circumstances, especially in the condition that it is not possible to teach directly. Teaching and learning are still conducted through a computer connected to the Internet. Teh (2021) pointed out that Although learning online through computers, students work in group cooperation, and the teacher is the guide. Thus, some strategies and tips are used by students to cope with the learning challenges. Firstly, to improve English speaking skills, Vietnamese college students should regularly practice listening to English media like TV programs and online video and audio. Speaking competence cannot be improved quickly by reading more books, but it can be improved by listening to English media. Secondly, to improve their speaking ability, students need to force themselves to practice as much as possible. For this, they can join online forums or participate in audio chat rooms in English. Also, students can practice talking in English and record it themselves so that they can relisten their speaking presentation and adjust their pronunciation as to other errors. In college school, the only time when English is used is during English lessons as possible. That certainly is not enough. So, wherever possible, students have to speak English with some friends and teachers who will or can speak English with. Dabiri (2019) said that speaking practice in class is an opportunity to develop students' speaking skills that they are always encouraged to participate in class activities to express their views and ideas.

In short, there are many methods of learning English speaking skills well. Because of these positive attitudes, learners can follow those strategies with the strength combined with learning vocabulary, structured grammar, etc. English speaking skills will develop significantly.

Research gaps

As we can see, previous researchers have had different perspectives on applying the CLT approach. According to the group (Yanli, 2019; Dabiri, 2019) the use of media helps to develop speaking skills for students. Otherwise, (Toro et al., 2018; Chang & S. Goswami, 2011; Akhter & Ashikuzzaman, 2019) supported the view that the use of teaching materials is suitable to the culture, level, and characteristics of learners, etc., contributes positively to the direction of communicative teaching. However, the other group (Lom, 2012; Farooq, 2015; (Wael et al., 2019); AL-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019) believed that organizing many interactive activities in the classroom helps students enjoy learning English and developing their communication skills.

From previous studies, this study emphasizes pair/group discussion in the classroom and considers it the most effective method according to the CLT approach. Besides, the application of media to support English listening and speaking will help learners improve their speaking ability.

Research Questions

With certain limitations on the English- speaking ability of students at Hau Giang community college as well as the benefits of communication-oriented teaching, this study raises the following two research questions:

1. What are the benefits of CLT for English language learners?
2. What are college students' attitudes on CLT strategies/ factors?

Methods

Pedagogical Setting & Participants

For this research, this study conducts a questionnaire survey for participants to collect qualitative and quantitative data. Participants in the survey included 16 teachers of English at Hau Giang community college and 23 English- major and non-major students of Hau Giang community college. Teachers' questionnaires and students' questionnaires are designed on Google form, and then they are sent to the participants.

Design of the Study

The researcher conducts the survey questionnaire through the Google form application to collect the participants' answer data. Survey questions of teachers consist of 6 questions. Questions 1 to 5 have four choices that focus on the frequency of using methods/ approaches; Question 6 has four choices of benefits of CLT. For survey questions of students, three questions relate to learners' expectations on the way to effectively learn the English language as well as improve their oral skills.

Data collection & analysis

The answers to the survey questionnaire are statistically based on the answer data as well as the answer choices of survey participants. Time to collect survey results is allowed in 1 day. The researcher can print it out as an evidence base for the research questions. The statistics of participants' answer data are done through the Google form application. Collected data is then converted into percentages and clear numbers through Google form.

Results/Findings and discussion

Results of Research Question 1

For teachers: What are the benefits of CLT for English language learners?

This research question is to find out the intentions of the teachers when using the CLT for their students. From there, comparison with learners' expectations at research question 2, whether it is compatible or not.

Firstly, this study examines the frequency of use and the choice of teaching approaches/methods of Hau Giang community college teachers.

Survey answers in Table 1 show that in 16 teachers, 68.75% of teachers always use the Communicative approach, 31.25% often use it; 37.5% often use Grammar- translation, 56.25% sometimes use, and 6.25% rarely use it; 50% often use the Audio-lingual method and 50% sometimes use it; 31.25% often use Direct method and 56.25% sometimes use it.

Table 1. Frequency of using teachers' teaching methodologies/ approaches

Survey on English teaching methodologies/ approaches										
Frequency										
Methodologies/ approaches	Always	Ratio (%)	Often	Ratio (%)	Sometimes	Ratio (%)	Rarely	Ratio (%)	Never	Ratio (%)
1. Grammar-Translation	0/16	0	6/16	37.5	9/16	56.25	1/16	6.25	0/16	0
2. Audio-lingual	0/16	0	8/16	50	8/16	50	0/16	0	0/16	0
3. Direct method	0/16	0	5/16	31.25	9/16	56.25	2/16	0	0/16	0
4. Communicative approach	11/16	68.75	5/16	31.25	0/16	0	0/16	0	0/16	0

The results clearly show that the communicative approach has been widely used in colleges and high schools. Teachers have always used this approach by 68,75% in their teaching process. This is a significant percentage that shows that now this approach is not new but has been deployed and widely used to teach ESL learners. Most of the six teachers at Hau Giang community college chose "always" to use CLT, and only 5/16 of teachers used this teaching "often." This means that CLT is always the preferred choice among other methods. The teachers see the benefits of CLT in combining many language skills in general as well as developing students' speaking skills in particular. Moreover, students at Hau Giang Community College are essential to developing English speaking skills, where there is a lack of practice environment to communicate with native speakers.

Table 2. The benefits of CLT for learners

5. What are the benefits of CLT for English language learners in your opinion?	Choice of participants	Ratio(%)
A. Learners can use right grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure in different real-life contexts.	0/16	0
B. Learners are the centre of learning rather than the audience.	0/16	0
C. More interactive activities that learners become enjoyable and confident to join in	0/16	0
D. All of them	16/16	100

The responses of the study participants in Table 2 show that this approach focuses on the primary role of the centered- learner while the role of the teacher is secondary - being a facilitator. Teaching communication is creating a dynamic environment for learners to experience the knowledge they have learned in real contexts. Teachers of Hau Giang community college understand CLT's characteristics and benefits, so most of the 16/16 teachers (ratio of 100%) chose all 3 of its benefits, as shown in Table 2 above.

Results of Research Question 2

For students: How are college students' attitudes on CLT strategies/ factors?

This research questionnaire aims to find out the strategies or important factors suitable for teaching and learning towards CLT.

Statistical data collection results of survey question 2 are as follows. There are 33.33% of

students who have chosen their purpose of learning English as "To master all skills of English language"; 4.16% for "To master Grammatical structures"; and 62.5% for "To Communicate English effectively". This shows that students expect to be able to communicate effectively in English after their course by 62.5% of 15/23 college students. Their purposes are also for mastering all skills of the English language by 33.33% of 8/23 college students.

Table 3. The ratio (%) of students' English learning purpose choice

Q1: What is your English learning purpose ?	Numbers of students	Percentage (%)	Ratings
a. To communicate English effectively	15/23	62.5	1
b. To master grammatical structures	1/23	4.16	3
c. To master all skill of English language	8/23	33.33	2

In addition, students also completely agree that 95.65% that learning will not be effective if only based on learning materials without classroom interactions.

Table 4. Students' responses to learning English without interactive activities

Q2: In your opinion, do you think if only learning from textbook or from teacher's lectures without interactive activities will be enough effective for English learners ?			
Stt	Participants (college students)	Yes	No
1	Nguyen Van A		x
2	Tran Van X		x
3	Tran Thi V		x
4	Nguyen Van B		x
5	Tran Van T		x
6	Tran Thi Q		x
7	Lam Van P		x
8	Nguyen Thi R		x
9	Trinh Van H		x
10	Le Thanh T		x
11	Bui Van Y		x
12	Tran Minh V		x
13	Vuong Minh Q		x
14	Trinh Van P		x
15	Le Thanh L		x
16	Bui Van K		x
17	Tran Minh C		x
18	Vuong Minh N		x
19	Nguyen Van E		x
20	Tran Van G		x
21	Tran Thi L		x
22	Lam Van B	x	x
23	Nguyen Thi M		x
24	Nguyen Thi H		x
25	Lam Thi K		x
26	T Thanh L		x
27	Dinh Van A		x
Total		1	22
Percentages		4,55	95,45

The students' answers have shown that the role of classroom interaction is very important in teaching and learning today. Especially learners need to participate in many interactive activities in class to learn, exchange and develop skills, including speaking skills.

Table 5. Students' priority on English learning strategies/ factors

Q3: Order the following strategies/ factors in the order of most priority to least priority?			
<i>strategies/ factors</i>	<i>priority</i>	<i>priority</i>	<i>priority</i>
Using media to enhance oral skill			2/3
Joining in the classroom activities (pairs/groups discussion, solving problems, roleplay, interviews)	12/23		
Using appropriate teaching materials (books/hangouts/school curriculums/teaching aids)		9/23	
Percentages	52,17	39,13	8,7

The research results in Table 4 clearly define the role of classroom interaction, which is always a top priority for learners. It accounts for 52.17%, with 12 of 23 participants choosing. Next is the participant's preference for relevant teaching materials, which accounts for 39.11%. The last priority is for applying media to learning the English language by 8.7%.

As a result, through the survey on the application of teaching methods/teaching approaches as well as the research questionnaire for students of Hau Giang community college, it is clear that CLT has been and is being widely used for ESL Learners. Moreover, when learning a foreign language in English becomes more and more urgent and the need to speak English fluently today, learners are always interested in the quality of teachers' teaching through teaching methods and techniques. Therefore, students have a wise choice of language learning goals and effective teaching activities through the answers to the research questionnaire.

Discussion and Findings

With the results of research questions for teachers, research question 1 is summarized as follows. First of all, the teachers of Hau Giang Community College are always interested in using the communication approach in addition to other methods. Certainly, teachers have found that this approach has many strengths and is more effective than other methods. Secondly, students of Hau Giang community college need to be oriented to learn with a communicative approach to improve their speaking skills. In summary, the choice of CLT by teachers is to improve communication skills, especially the speaking skills of students (Putri et al., 2014), the previous researcher also had this opinion.

In essence, CLT is a combination of many skills and interactive activities in class to create an environment to practice the English language for learners. This finding of research question 2 supports previous studies that suggested that communicative language teaching is teaching learners about grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discursive competence, and strategic competence (Nishino, 2008; Saputra, 2015). Firstly, "learners can use right grammar, vocabulary, sentence structure in different real-life contexts" (Table 2). This finding is the same as a researcher like Putri et al. (2014). Secondly, "learners are the center of learning rather than the audience". In traditional teaching way, the teacher is central and only gives the lecture in the book. Students listen and do what the teacher asks. However, today is different.

Learners need to be active, creative and explore new knowledge based on the knowledge they have learned from their teacher. As Cai Wenjie (2009) stated, the teacher is no longer the one who imparts knowledge as before but the one who actively supports the learners to participate in all classroom activities. Thirdly, CLT teachers have “more interactive activities that learners become enjoyable and confident to join in”. This view did not surprise previous researchers such as AL-Garni and Almuhammadi (2019); Chang and S. Goswami (2011); Saputra (2015). In general, CLT is a modern and effective approach that meets the teaching and learning goals of today's trends.

With the results of research questions for students, research question 3 is summarized as follows. First, in Table 3, the results show that students expect to be able to communicate effectively in the English language. This is clearly shown by the statistical results of 15/23 students selected, accounting for 62.5%. Students learning goals are completely in line with the needs of today's society, which requires good foreign language communication in the work environment. To achieve this goal for learners, teachers must choose appropriate and effective teaching methods that help learners develop many skills, with the most concern on speaking skills. As previous researchers confirmed that the CLT approach allows students to use English as a communication tool in the classroom to improve their English speaking ability (Cai Wenjie, 2009; Farooq, 2015). Thus, with CLT, learners are very likely to develop their speaking ability and achieve their learning goals.

Second, in Table 4, there are 95.65% of students confirmed that learning is not effective if only based on school materials without active classroom interaction. Students have found that today's learning is not passive listening but requires a specific practice environment. Lom (2012) stated this point in his study. They need to participate in interactive activities that help them exchange ideas and learn and correct their errors from their peer classmates. So, in recent years, CLT is always used at Hau Giang community college to adopt these aims.

Third, research results also show that students of Hau Giang community college are most interested in classroom activities (52.17%). To develop their speaking ability, students need many practical environments where the teacher has to organize exercises and tasks into real contexts. Classroom interaction can be considered as a leading strategy of CLT, including pair/group discussions, role-playing, story-telling, problem-solving, interviews, etc. This finding was concurred by many previous researchers, such as Gudu (2015) and Farooq (2015). The second priority of students is the use of appropriate teaching resources (39.13%). Teaching resources such as textbooks, curricula, handouts, etc., play a very important role in creating an effective English class (Akhter & Ashikuzzaman 2019). Finally, the low priority factor (8.7%) also contributes to the student's speaking ability and use of media to support foreign language learning, such as youtube, English channels, English forums, and so on. The previous researcher (Salman 2009) believed that new media like the Internet contains a large amount of important knowledge, but it needs to be approached appropriately.

Through the results of the survey questionnaires of teachers and students, this study once again confirms that CLT has many strengths, which are suitable for today's demand for innovation in teaching methods as well as meet the needs of students, especially foreign language communication ability.

Conclusion

This study was conducted to find out strategies as well as factors to developing the English speaking ability of Hau Giang community college students through the CLT approach. The survey questionnaire for teachers and students was implemented to collect qualitative and quantitative data by the Google form application. Specifically, this study focuses on key strategies/elements of CLT, such as classroom interaction, the use of appropriate teaching resources, and the application of modern media. Research results show that, firstly, the CLT is being widely used at Hau Giang community college, and teachers always exploit the advantages of this method to help students acquire knowledge and create new ones in real contexts. In other words, teachers apply CLT to enhance students' English communication skills. Secondly, for college students, the survey results also show that they always expect to have a dynamic learning environment, with many interactive tasks in class to practice their English speaking skills with their classmates. In addition, using appropriate teaching materials is students' second priority, and the next is using media (Internet). Finally, students' ultimate goal is to be able to communicate in English effectively. This finding confirms that the above-mentioned strategies/factors of CLT are very much in line with students' expectations and can develop their English speaking ability.

However, the researcher's knowledge is still limited in several aspects such as research methods, analysis of research results as well as discussion. With the efforts of the researcher of the topic to help students improve their communication ability, this finding makes a practical contribution to the teaching and learning of Hau Giang community college.

In general, with some fairly strategies/factors of CLT as above, students can overcome barriers in English language learning and success in communicating English to everyone.

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This paper has many limitations on research methods and other parts that the writer has not seen. Therefore, the writer hopes that readers will sympathize and point out the limitations of this writing so that the writer can overcome them the next time. Many thanks to the readers.

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Biodata

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