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КНИЖЕВНИ И КУЛТУРОЛОШКИ ИСТРАЖУВАЊА

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и културолошки истражувања

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## ALBANIAN TEACHERS' AND LEARNERS' PERSPECTIVES AND EXPERIENCES ON THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

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**Abstract:** This study explores the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom in Albania, from the perspectives of both teachers and learners. It also investigates the challenges and benefits of implementing CLT in the Albanian context, and to examine how both teachers and learners experience this teaching methodology. The study uses a mixed-methods approach, including surveys and interviews with EFL teachers and learners in Albania. Teachers report that CLT helps to engage learners, promote communicative competence, and foster learner autonomy, while learners report that CLT enhances their speaking and listening skills, increases their confidence, and facilitates real-life communication.

Overall, this study contributes to the growing body of research on the implementation of CLT in EFL contexts and provides valuable insights into the experiences of teachers and learners in Albania. The findings suggest that although there are challenges to implementing CLT in Albania, such as limited resources and traditional teaching approaches, both teachers and learners recognize the benefits of using CLT in the classroom. The study has implications for EFL teaching and learning in Albania and other similar contexts, and provides useful recommendations for promoting effective CLT implementation. The study highlights the need for further professional development opportunities for EFL teachers in Albania to effectively implement CLT in their classrooms.

**Keywords:** *Communicative Language Teaching; English as a Foreign Language; Perspective; Experiences; Teachers and Learners.*

### 1. Introduction

All Albanian schools now put a high value on English instruction. This is due firstly, to the annual English test that is given in Albanian high schools, and, secondly, to the language's explosive growth and current pervasive use throughout all areas of life in Albania. For all Albanian citizens, but particularly for young people who must meet the requirements for participation in the global community, learning English has become crucial. When a number of language schools offering English lessons for all levels were created in Albania, this interest in learning the language became even more apparent.

This was necessary because enrolling in university requires that students speak English at a passable level. The Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method has been well received by English teachers in high schools. CLT enables second language learners to learn and use the language in an appropriate, functional, and meaningful manner, according to Farell and Jacobs (2010). However, because traditional teaching techniques are still employed in our schools, Albanian students are unable to attain a proficient level in English. Although students may have a solid grasp of grammatical structures and forms, Berns (1990) found that they are frequently ill-equipped to use their second language properly and effectively.

Since communication is language's main purpose, learning a language is necessary in order to interact effectively and properly in that language. As a result, exercises that improve pupil fluency and communication skills should be used in Albanian classrooms instead of teaching and discussing various grammatical rules. The first goal of this study is to recognize that CLT is an excellent technique for helping students improve their communicative competence. The second goal is to find out how communicative strategies affect students who are learning English. In addition to addressing some of the challenges involved in putting CLT into practice in an EFL environment in Albania, this research also offers some recommendations for how to do so successfully.

One advantage of using CLT in an English classroom, according to Larsen-Freeman (2000), is that it enables instructors to involve students in the teaching-learning process while also highlighting the connection between language and communication. From this angle, it is obvious that speech and language are interdependent. In other words, when students learn a new language, they also need to learn how to converse or how to use it properly. In addition to learning linguistic structure, they are also conversing with one another. Having this in mind, the practical implementation of this approach is more than necessary in Albania due to a previous teacher-centred education and the principles used in teaching EFL.

The current study aims to examine teachers and learners' perspective and experiences regarding the use of CLT in the Albanian setting, followed by teachers' willingness to employ these cutting-edge teaching techniques more frequently. This study seeks to show how a variety of communicative tasks and activities carried out in the classroom help students improve their communicative competence.

## **2. Research Methodology**

The primary goal of this research was to investigate the effectiveness of CLT approach for enhancing learners' communication skills. The second goal was to look into how interactive methods affected English language learners and to identify potential challenges that the implementation of CLT faces in the Albanian EFL context. Finally, to make specific suggestions for including CLT approach and its principles into the curricula of Albania, which may yield outstanding



results and assist teachers in achieving their teaching goals.

The study was conducted during the year 2021-2022 in several cities of Albania including: Tirana, Durrës and Elbasan in secondary education institutions.

The research questions of this study are:

1. What are students' attitudes towards CLT in the EFL classroom?
2. What are teachers' experiences with implementing CLT in the classroom?
3. What are the main challenges faced by Albanian EFL instructors when attempting to implement CLT in the Albanian context?

This study is designed to assess the following hypothesis:

1. Students hold positive attitudes towards CLT use in their classroom; they believe that CLT is the right approach toward efficient English language teaching, and it motivates students towards the English language learning process.
2. Teachers face various difficulties in implementing the CLT approach as a teaching the classroom.

Due to the traditional nature of Albanian schools, neither the Communicative Approach nor its supporters are frequently used. Traditional methods are used because instructors are concerned that using the Communicative Approach may interfere with their instruction. Therefore, the primary aim of this study is to offer Albanian EFL instructors a case study that illustrates how using the Communicative Approach as a teaching strategy, along with its supporting strategies, may produce excellent results and help teachers achieve their objectives.

### **2.1. Participants and instruments**

The sample population consisted of 20 high school students selected from different schools of the abovementioned cities who learn English as a foreign language. Additionally, 10 EFL teachers were interviewed regarding their attitudes and experiences while implementing CLT in their everyday instruction.

A student survey, based on literature reviewed for the research, was used to gather the quantitative statistics. It concentrated on evaluating the English language teaching strategies employed by English teachers, with an emphasis on evaluating the CLT strategy in particular. It assisted in identifying student preferences and gave information about their educational experiences, especially their motivation and attitude toward learning English, as well as their views on the use of conventional teaching techniques and the CLT approach. The poll also revealed student views toward the existing English language curricula and their perceived challenges with applying the CLT methodology and carrying out the necessary activities in the CLT classroom.

To ascertain the degrees of teachers' comprehension of CLT, teachers' interviews, based on literature reviewed for the research, served as the qualitative data. The use of CLT in classrooms and the reasons behind teachers' decisions to use or refrain from using CLT for teaching were both open topics for discussion among teachers. They discussed their thoughts on the CLT method, pointed out any personal challenges they encountered while using it in the classroom, and offered some recommendations for a future, more fruitful application.

### **3. Results**

The findings of the quantitative data were to assess ELT methods used by English teachers and more particularly the CLT approach.

#### **3.1 Students' questionnaire**

The quantitative data, gathered from the student questionnaire, focused mostly on the students' assessment of English Language Teaching methods used by English teachers and more particularly on their experience using the CLT approach in English classes. Its aim was to determine student preferences and explore their learning experiences, their attitudes and motivation towards learning English and their attitudes toward traditional teaching methods when compared with the CLT approach. Furthermore, the study aims to explain student attitudes toward the existing curricula of English language as well as their perceived difficulties in implementing the CLT approach and their views of the activities used in the CLT classroom.

Students were asked about their attitude towards the application of Communicative Language Teaching in the classroom. The responses to those items demonstrated that the majority of respondents had positive views in regard to CLT principles and an appreciation for the student-instructional approach which is focused on enhancing their communicative skills. When asked whether "The Communicative Approach includes all four skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading", 79% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed, while regarding the statement that "The Communicative Approach creates a more relaxed atmosphere in class", 73% either agreed or strongly agreed, and the rest respectively 11.8% and 12.4% agreed little or not at all and the remainder were neutral. It seems that the participants enjoyed to be in a classroom stress free and this encourages communication and interaction among them.

Moreover, 65.8% of the participants agreed that "The Communicative Approach is a student-centered method" which demonstrated that most students had a solid knowledge about CLT, because it provides students with plenty of opportunities to use English for communication purposes.

Additionally, 61.8% of the respondents agreed that they enjoy speaking English in front of the class. The findings showed that students had varying opinions regarding statements such as "It is more important for me to be able to speak English than to write it" and "I like the way I learn English now" for which the respondents agreed respectively 60.4% and disagreed by 57.6%, while 1/3 of them claimed that "I feel hesitant to ask questions in front of the class". Regarding the issue "English teaching in my school is just explaining and practicing grammar rules", 67.2% of the participants agreed or strongly agreed with it. The same attitude it is revealed for the item "I prefer studying English in the classroom rather than in the language lab". This suggests that students prefer to be in contact with each other sharing ideas in the classroom.

The rest remained neutral in their response or disagreed with these items, which is further expressed in the following two issues "I am familiar in the classroom with the communicative method" and "English is used as a language of

communication rather than just a school subject” where most of them, respectively 58.4% and 62.6% disagreed or strongly disagreed. It seems that the students surveyed had the opinion that CLT is not a favored teaching method used by their teachers and is not practiced often in their classroom. Obviously, students in Albania are accustomed to being taught utilizing traditional teaching techniques rather than more modern ones in teaching English.

Regarding the items about the activities used in the classroom, the findings revealed that students enjoy classroom activities because they see them as tools that assist them to learn English better. In response to the item “Working in pairs and small groups helps to improve my English skills and increases my self-confidence” 80.2% of the respondents, agreed or strongly agreed. For the item “The teacher uses authentic materials in class such as newspapers, magazines, brochures, articles, video etc.” the findings revealed that 68.8% of the respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed with this statement. Many educators have emphasized that CLT allows to use authentic materials which can provide real-life examples of using everyday English.

The findings showed surprising results for the students who agreed and those who were neutral as only 4.2% of them agreed and 27.2% were neutral which showed that teachers prefer using the textbook rather than using authentic materials as a teaching resource in the classroom. In response to the item “I enjoy learning English by interacting with my classmates in group work activities” the findings showed that 75% of the respondents agreed with this item. In addition, regarding “Group work activities make students have the courage and confidence to speak in the classroom” a similar 70.8% of the participants agreed as well. Such findings demonstrate that students do prefer to participate in the communicative activities during the English Language class because are these activities which give learners more opportunities to practice the language and improve language fluency.

For the items “Changing partners or group work in a speaking activity increases my communicative skills” and “Large class sizes are an obstacle to using Communicative activities” respectively 57.6 % and 63.2% of the students surveyed agreed or strongly agreed with these statements. CLT is more effective in smaller groups where students may actively participate in communicative activities. It can be difficult to oversee and create meaningful interaction amongst all students in large courses, and the teacher’s time may not be enough to offer feedback and assistance to all student pairs and groups. On the other hand, for the item “The class time is sufficient to use communicative activities in class”, the results demonstrated that 60.8% of the respondents either strongly disagreed, disagreed or were neutral regarding this statement, and only 39.2% of them agreed or strongly agreed. It was astonishing to hear the participants express their opinion that a class time of forty-five minutes is not enough time to complete communicative activities. Moreover, in response to the item “The use of audio video material helps me to learn better English” 73% of the students surveyed either agreed or strongly agreed with this, while the remainder disagreed or were neutral. This shows that students prefer the use of audiovisual materials as they make the students to remember the concept for longer period of time. Richards

(2006) considers authentic materials to be the basis of classroom learning. Clarke and Silberstein (1977) emphasize that authentic materials have several advantages such as “they provide cultural information about the target language, also they provide exposure to real language and relate more closely to learners’ needs, and finally they support a more creative approach to teaching” (p. 51 as cited in Richards, 2006, p. 20).

The implementation of CLT in English Language Teaching, on the one hand has its advantages, but on the other hand also has some difficulties and challenges to overcome. Therefore, regarding the following items that measure and evaluate these difficulties, the statement “The “State Matura” examination system is an obstacle to learning and using English for communication purposes” confirmed this to be a difficulty as it reached the maximum participant agreement of 86.4%. The other item confirming this was “Classrooms have very few necessary resources (computer, OHP, CD player) to support communicative activities” which also received a high level of agreement from 74.6% of the respondents surveyed. The “State Matura” national examination is very important for students as well as their teachers; the exam results affect students in terms of the credits they require for university entrance and the scores affect teachers in terms of their status in the eyes of their colleagues and the principal of the school.

There were additional difficulties demonstrated by the responses to “Students in my class have limited English proficiency and are not motivated to communicate in English” and “Students in my class are reluctant to participate in communicative activities”. These difficulties experienced while implementing CLT in Albanian classroom confirm students’ low motivation and unwillingness to participate in communicative activities or to speak English in class. The respondents agreed respectively with 50.8% and 52% while the rest disagreed or were neutral about these statements. The results showed that language barrier creates confusion and hinders students from communicating and does not stimulate them to participate in communicative activities in the classroom.

In response to other items related to difficulties such as “Classroom management is challenging when communicative activities are used by the teacher”, “The Coursebook is the only teaching material used by the teacher without being combined with alternative teaching material” and “Large class sizes are an obstacle to using Communicative activities” the respondents agreed that these statements exist as challenges in implementing the CLT approach respectively by 51.7%, 58.4%, and 58.8%. The remaining students either disagreed or were neutral about these issues. The same trend of participant agreement confirmed another challenge of CLT implementation. The statement “The class time of 45 minutes makes it difficult for the teacher to use communicative language teaching methods in the English classroom” saw an agreement from 57.8% of the total students. Many studies have shown that the lack of time is a considerable challenge in using communicative activities as CLT needs ideal classes with as few students as possible.

It is noteworthy to mention that without any doubt; the teaching process cannot be understood without the work and help of the teacher during the teaching

process. The student relies heavily on the teacher for the lesson explanation, for the deepening and broadening of their knowledge, for the use of the right teaching methodology and for the classroom to be managed well, etc. The role of the teacher is unquestionably very important in any English Language class. Students in this data analysis were certainly asked for their views concerning this process as well. As a result, 80.6% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that "Tasks and activities should be negotiated and adapted to suit the students' needs rather than imposed on them". In addition, a considerable number of the students surveyed, around 77.4% of them, also agreed or strongly agreed that "Activities such as explanations, writing and examples are not the only role of the teachers". However, the findings were surprising as they revealed that more than half of the respondents, by 52.7% also agreed or strongly agreed that "Direct instruction in the rules and terminology of grammar is essential if students are to learn to communicate effectively" while the remainder disagreed, strongly disagreed or were neutral. These results demonstrate that students in most of the schools in Albania are still taught using traditional methods or a combination of methods and that students appear to still have a strong bond with these traditional methods of learning English because their teachers are not trained enough to use current methodologies. The rest of them either disagreed or were neutral about this issue. In response to the item that "The teacher should be the monitor and facilitator of student learning" 82.6% of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed with this statement. The findings suggest that students need the freedom to express themselves in English and communicate with one another in the classroom rather than be controlled and guided by the teacher. This demonstrates that students are aware of the essential role of the teacher in a CLT classroom which, according to Richards (2006), is one of facilitator and monitor. When asked about the item that "The teacher takes part in classroom activities as a participant" again a considerable amount of the students surveyed, more specifically 79.2% agreed or strongly agreed about this issue. This shows once more that students have the knowledge that their teacher should be part of the teaching process not just controlling it. In response to the item that "Group work activities have little use since it is very difficult for the teacher to monitor the students' performance and prevent them from using their mother tongue" 66% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with this issue, while the rest disagreed or were neutral. The results emphasized the need of students for group work, because by working in pairs students will be able to discuss, practice, and master material without feeling isolated in the process of learning a new language.

The findings of the questionnaire revealed on one hand that group work activities are seen very positively by more than half of the respondents, whereas on the other one there were a significant part of them who did not agree with this teaching technique, which was 10-15% while the rest preferred to be neutral in their responses. For instance, for items such as "Group work activities give me the courage and confidence to speak in the classroom" or "Group work and pair work activities should be part of the English Language teaching" and "Group work and pair work partners should be changed often to enhance confidence in



communication the respondents agreed or strongly agreed respectively by 64.4%, 66.6% and 66.6%.

### **3.2 Teachers' interviews**

The purpose of teachers' interviews in this study is to provide results about teachers' attitude and their experiences with the CLT in the EFL classroom in Albania as well as their difficulties found while implementing it in the classroom. In the interview, interviewees were requested to give their opinions towards CLT and the difficulties and challenges in implementing CLT.

The interview contained 3 sections with 5 questions each of them. The first section explored teachers' attitude towards CLT; the second section consisted of questions related to English language teaching methodology, particularly CLT; and the last one focused on the difficulties and challenges in implementing CLT. The analysis of the findings from qualitative data is followed by a detailed list of the major problems and difficulties encountered by Albanian teachers regarding the implementation of CLT in their English classes. One of the most important aims of the teachers' interview was to obtain data that explain, firstly, why teachers liked or disliked using CLT in their English classes, and secondly, the findings explain the major problems encountered in the English language teaching process.

One of the research aspects regarding the implementation of CLT is to examine teachers' attitude towards the CLT approach. It is worth noticing that the majority of the interviewed teachers highlighted that they are familiar with the term Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

#### ***Section 1: Teachers' attitude towards (CLT)***

Although the majority of the respondents, 77% of them, demonstrated a positive attitude towards CLT as an approach that places more importance on fluency rather than accuracy, it appears on the other hand that some of the teachers, represented by 23%, did not have a clear understanding of CLT. It is evident that the participants' understanding of CLT lies within the field of communication in general, as in a CLT classroom, teachers focus more on fluency rather than accuracy if they intend to improve students' communicative competence.

#### ***Section 2: English language teaching methodology, particularly CLT***

The CLT approach is accepted as effective by 60% of respondent teachers, mainly related with the teaching of grammar and vocabulary while the rest, 40% of them, do not accept this fact. Just like the vast majority of them represented by 87% do not agree with the fact that CLT is a teacher-centered approach. 70% of the teachers interviewed agreed on that fact that CLT tries to use authentic materials wherever possible. Once more, it is worthy to mention that all teacher participants showed a clear understanding of CLT principles which it is not a teacher-centered approach but rather a student-centered one and the teacher uses authentic materials in the classroom, in order to boost the learners' communicative skills. A similar trend was seen for the item stating that the curriculum is based more on grammar than communication, 73% of the participants agreed with this fact.

### ***Section 3: Difficulties and challenges in implementing CLT***

Notwithstanding the fact that a large number of the teachers emphasized that they were aware of the term CLT and had a favorable view toward this approach that emphasizes exchange of information, participants identified some significant obstacles and problems in implementing CLT. Regarding the item that the “The State Matura” examination system hinders teachers from using CLT in their classroom, 67% of the respondents agreed with this fact, whereas 15% did not agree at all while the rest, 18% of them were confused and chose “don’t know” as their response. It is notable to mention that the majority of teachers in the interview outlined the Albanian curriculum’s significant obstacles, such as being grammar-based or the impact of the external entrance exams on English language teaching, emphasizing that the Albanian curriculum is an exam-oriented education technique that encourages an individualistic learning style that does not encourage much pair or group work collaboration. Regarding the methodology currently used today in their English teaching classrooms, teachers have been asked some specific questions which are specifically related to their daily work.

### **Conclusion**

This study aimed to shed light on attitudes that learners and EFL teachers in Albania have towards the use of CLT in the classroom and possible obstacles they face.

*Hypothesis 1:* The analysis of the data from students’ survey revealed that student participants showed a positive attitude towards group work and pair work, however they emphasized that their classroom is mainly focused on grammar and reading comprehension exercises and they would like more activities practicing speaking such as games and activities which would be very beneficial and would facilitate language acquisition. The findings demonstrated that they were positive about the possible contributions of games and other activities used in the classroom for improving and encouraging more communication between them.

The findings also showed that students face a lot of difficulties during the English learning process which are mainly related to the lack of listening skills, lack of course books which have listening activities as well as CDs or OHPs, lack of communicative activities in the classroom between them, deficiency in speaking English, lack of time for communicative activities, limited knowledge of English.

*Hypothesis 2:* The results of the study from teachers’ interview revealed that the majority of the teacher participants show a good level of understanding of the CLT principles, emphasizing it as an approach that places more importance on fluency rather than accuracy. They demonstrated a positive attitude towards this approach by putting emphasis on the fact that the goal of learning English is for students to be able to communicate. Despite expressing positive opinions towards the implementation of CLT in ELT classrooms, the findings showed that teachers face many challenges, and a lack of equipment such as whiteboards, OHPs, CD players, computers, classes organized according to the “The State Matura” examination system, the lack of preparation time, not enough professional training

or limited class time make it difficult and challenging for teachers to adopt CLT in ELT classroom.

The findings also revealed that students' exams focus, their lack of attention in class, their low motivation as well as their lack of practice in English outside the classroom for conversational purposes create difficulty in responding to the CLT principles. Although, few teachers resulted to have used more CLT approach techniques than the others in this study, one recommendation would be to ask teachers, apart from student's textbook to use other teaching materials and resources which give students possibilities to communicate and interact with one other. If teachers use authentic materials in the classrooms, they provide students with real-life examples of the language as well as teaching the culture of the language. Cultural materials expose students to a live language, which is something that a foreign language learner lacks.

Another recommendation would be for the Ministry of Education Sport and Youth (MoESY) to alter the "State Matura" examination system, which is designed only to test student's grammatical competence. If the MoESY changes the test from one that assess students' grammatical abilities to a test that assesses communicative abilities, English teachers would change their teaching approach. This is because teachers would like students to succeed in the exams and as a result would be willing to include more communicative activities for their students during their teaching practices.

The general infrastructure of the Albanian education system needs to be changed by improving current schools' condition. Classrooms should have internet access, modern technology as well as a language lab system which transforms a passive language class into an active speaking learning environment, where students practice good pronunciation as they provide real samples of the language. Moreover, classrooms should be equipped with computers as well as other teaching aids which encourage students' motivation to learn the target language.

Reducing the class size in order to make it possible for teachers to implement the CLT approach would be another further recommendation. According to Maghnouj et al. (2020, p. 49) "about 27% of classrooms in Albania had over 30 students in 2015-2016, and overcrowding is of particular concern in urban centres". Some teachers have reported class sizes exceeding the legal limit of 40 students. Larger classrooms tend to be disruptive, and group or pair work activities are more difficult to manage by teachers, as a result by reducing them, students are to perform better and can be more active participants in the classroom. Moreover, in a small class size teacher can identify the language strengths and weaknesses of their students more easily than in a large class size.

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