

THE ROLE OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN DEVELOPING CRITICAL THINKING AND SPEAKING SKILLS

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Abstract: *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become a leading methodology in modern language education, enabling learners to develop both communicative competence and critical thinking simultaneously. Unlike traditional rote-based approaches, CLT engages students in authentic activities such as debates, problem-solving tasks, and case-based discussions, which require precise articulation, evidence-based reasoning, and engagement with diverse perspectives. This study combines theoretical review with classroom observation to investigate how communicative tasks influence learner development. Results confirm that task-based speaking activities enhance oral proficiency while fostering analytical thinking. The study concludes that integrating communicative and cognitive strategies effectively transforms learners into active participants, significantly improving their ability to express ideas in English with clarity and confidence.*

Keywords: *communicative language teaching, critical thinking, speaking skills, debate, problem-solving tasks, communicative competence*

INTRODUCTION

Modern language education has undergone a significant paradigm shift. The traditional emphasis on grammatical accuracy and structural knowledge has gradually given way to a broader focus on communicative proficiency and higher-order thinking. Today, it is not sufficient for learners merely to comprehend linguistic forms; they must be equipped to use the target language purposefully, flexibly, and thoughtfully in real-world communicative contexts. This shift in educational priorities has given rise to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), an approach grounded in the belief that language is best acquired through genuine interaction rather than through the passive study of rules and vocabulary in isolation.

At the heart of CLT lies the understanding that interaction is the primary mechanism through which language acquisition occurs. Learners develop proficiency not by rehearsing scripted phrases, but by engaging in dynamic communicative exchanges that require them to listen, respond, negotiate meaning, and adapt their language to meet the demands of the situation. Richards and Rodgers (2001) emphasize that CLT prioritizes tasks in which

speaking arises naturally from meaningful communicative goals, rather than as a product of mechanical drills. Such engagement builds sustained linguistic competence in ways that memorization of grammatical rules alone cannot achieve.

Parallel to this communicative emphasis, contemporary educational systems increasingly demand that students demonstrate critical thinking skills. Learners are expected to analyze information rigorously, evaluate competing perspectives, and construct well-reasoned arguments. These cognitive capacities are not developed in isolation; they grow most effectively when embedded in authentic communicative activities such as debates, real-world problem-solving exercises, and collaborative discussions. In this respect, speaking in a second language becomes both a linguistic and an intellectual exercise, simultaneously building fluency and fostering thoughtful engagement with ideas.

The present study explores the intersection of communicative pedagogy and critical thinking development, examining how CLT-based activities contribute to measurable gains in both speaking proficiency and analytical reasoning. By drawing on relevant theoretical frameworks and classroom observations, this paper argues that the deliberate integration of communicative tasks and critical thinking strategies represents a powerful and principled approach to English language instruction.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND: LANGUAGE LEARNING THROUGH COMMUNICATION AND THOUGHT

The theoretical foundation of CLT rests on the premise that language acquisition is fundamentally a social and interactive process. When learners engage in purposeful dialogue, they do not merely practice pre-learned structures; they actively construct meaning through the collaborative exchange of ideas. This process of joint meaning-making is simultaneously a linguistic and a cognitive act. As Nunan (2004) observes, the act of articulating one's thoughts in a shared communicative context stimulates deeper cognitive processing, encouraging learners to organize their ideas, formulate coherent arguments, and evaluate the reasoning of their interlocutors.

Within a CLT framework, the teacher's role is fundamentally reconceptualized. Rather than functioning as the primary source of knowledge and the director of classroom discourse, the teacher acts as a facilitator who creates the conditions for productive learner interaction. By stepping back from the traditional lecture format, the instructor empowers students to take ownership of their learning, encouraging them to think in the target language rather than simply translating from their first language. This learner-centered approach is essential for the development of autonomous communicative competence.

Furthermore, CLT recognizes that authentic language use occurs in response to real-world challenges and communicative needs. Activities designed to replicate genuine problem-

solving situations require learners to gather and assess information, weigh alternative courses of action, and communicate their decisions clearly and persuasively. In this way, the development of critical thinking skills and the development of communicative competence are not separate objectives but mutually reinforcing dimensions of a single pedagogical process.

Communicative activities and their role in developing critical thinking

Debate

Structured debate is among the most effective communicative activities for the simultaneous development of speaking proficiency and critical thinking. When students are required to argue in favor of or against a given proposition, they must engage in careful research and analysis, select the most persuasive evidence, anticipate counterarguments, and present their reasoning in a logically coherent and linguistically appropriate manner. This process demands a level of intellectual engagement that far exceeds what is typically required in traditional language exercises.

As H. Douglas Brown (2007) notes, the process of organizing and sequencing arguments during debate compels learners to think critically about the structure of their reasoning while simultaneously deploying the linguistic resources of the target language. The dual cognitive load involved in constructing a sound argument and expressing it in English enhances both dimensions of learner competence. Moreover, the competitive and collaborative dynamics of debate motivate students to engage actively and invest in their performance.

Problem-Solving Tasks

Problem-solving tasks present learners with authentic or simulated dilemmas that require systematic analysis and collaborative decision-making. Whether approached individually or in small groups, these activities require students to identify the key dimensions of a problem, generate and evaluate potential solutions, and justify their chosen course of action through reasoned argumentation. The process of working toward a solution encourages learners to think systematically and to consider problems from multiple perspectives.

From a language development perspective, problem-solving tasks provide rich opportunities for meaningful communication. As students discuss and debate possible solutions, they are required to listen actively, respond to the ideas of their peers, and express their own reasoning clearly and persuasively. The communicative pressure inherent in collaborative problem-solving tasks encourages linguistic precision and promotes the spontaneous use of a broad range of grammatical structures and vocabulary. Crucially, the focus remains on the communicative goal rather than on language form, which aligns with the fundamental principles of CLT.

Case Studies

Case study methodology offers learners the opportunity to engage with complex, real-world scenarios in depth. By examining actual events or situations, students develop their capacity to interpret detailed information, identify relevant factors, evaluate competing interpretations, and formulate well-reasoned conclusions. The contextual richness of case studies ensures that students' engagement is intellectually substantive rather than superficial.

When case studies are integrated into language instruction, the discussion of cases in English provides learners with authentic opportunities to practice interpretive and evaluative discourse. Students learn to articulate nuanced judgments, respond to the perspectives of their peers, and revise their thinking in light of new information. This dynamic process develops both critical reasoning and the linguistic flexibility required to express complex ideas in a second language.

Table 1. Communicative Activities and Their Impact on Critical Thinking Development

Communicative Activity	Description	Critical Thinking Skills Developed
Debate	Students argue for or against a specific topic, constructing and defending evidence-based positions	Argumentation, evaluation of perspectives, logical reasoning
Problem-Solving Tasks	Learners analyze a presented problem, generate potential solutions, and justify their decisions collaboratively	Analytical thinking, decision-making, collaborative reasoning
Case Study	Students examine real-life scenarios, discuss outcomes, and draw evidence-based conclusions	Interpretation, contextual reasoning, reflective judgment

DISCUSSION

The analysis of CLT-based communicative activities reveals a consistent and mutually reinforcing relationship between oral language development and the cultivation of critical thinking skills. Task-based speaking activities do not merely provide learners with opportunities to practice language; they create the conditions for genuine intellectual engagement. When students participate in debates, for instance, they are required to move beyond surface-level comprehension of a topic and engage with it analytically, constructing

and evaluating arguments in real time. This process is fundamentally different from the passive reception of information that characterizes teacher-centered instruction. One of the most significant advantages of CLT-based approaches is the extent to which they promote learner autonomy and intrinsic motivation. When students recognize that they are responsible for constructing meaning and solving problems rather than simply reproducing correct answers, their investment in the learning process increases substantially. This heightened engagement is reflected in the quality of both their linguistic output and their critical reasoning. Research consistently indicates that learners who participate actively in communicative tasks demonstrate greater gains in fluency, accuracy, and complexity of speech than those who receive predominantly teacher-led instruction.

Collaborative dimensions of CLT activities also deserve particular attention. When students work together on problem-solving tasks or case studies, they are exposed to diverse perspectives and reasoning strategies that they might not encounter in individual work. This exposure to varied viewpoints enriches their understanding of the topic and challenges them to refine and defend their own positions. The social dynamics of collaborative learning thus serve as a powerful catalyst for both linguistic and cognitive development.

It should be noted, however, that the effective implementation of CLT activities requires careful pedagogical design and facilitation. Tasks must be sufficiently challenging to stimulate genuine critical engagement without being so complex as to overwhelm learners' linguistic resources. Teachers must also develop the skills necessary to facilitate productive discussion without dominating it, asking probing questions that deepen student thinking without directing it toward predetermined conclusions. When these conditions are met, CLT activities can transform the language classroom into a space of genuine intellectual inquiry.

CONCLUSION, This study confirms that Communicative Language Teaching, when effectively implemented, provides a strong framework for developing both speaking proficiency and critical thinking. Through authentic activities such as debate, problem-solving, and case study analysis, CLT creates conditions where linguistic and cognitive competencies grow together. Learners who engage regularly in such tasks demonstrate not only greater fluency and confidence but also a stronger capacity for analysis and reasoned argumentation. CLT's shift from teacher-centered to learner-centered instruction reflects a fundamental understanding that language is best acquired through purposeful communication, while critical thinking develops most effectively within authentic, problem-based contexts. These two principles reinforce each other within the CLT framework. Future research should explore the long-term effects of CLT instruction across varied learner populations and investigate facilitation strategies that best promote critical engagement. As global

communication demands continue to grow, equipping learners with both linguistic and intellectual skills remains a vital educational priority.

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