



Competence of Teachers in Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in China: A Systematic Literature Review

Shaoli Xiong¹²

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Malaysia.

² School of Languages and Culture, Dongguan City University, China

1002163244@ucsiuniversity.edu.my

Siew Eng Lin^{1*}

¹ Faculty of Social Sciences & Liberal Arts, UCSI University, Malaysia.

linsieweng@gmail.com

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Abstract:

In China, English is regarded as an essential language skill, carrying significant importance for global communication and career advancement. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language education that emphasizes the importance of communication as the main goal of language learning. Consequently, educators at every tier of language education in China are encouraged to integrate Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into their instructional approaches. This study reviews the literature on the teachers' competency in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) between 1993 and 2023. The literature was sourced from prominent electronic databases including Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Eric reference using the keywords "Communicative Language Teaching", "Communicative approach", "China" "Teacher". The systematic literature review reveals a complex landscape of CLT implementation in China, marked by progress and challenges. The findings show that the teachers lack competence, language proficiency and sociolinguistic understanding to implement CLT in classrooms. Challenges of implementing CLT include traditional methods, cultural disparities, large class sizes and limited resources. Adaptation, teacher training, and context-specific measures are proposed for successful CLT implementation in China.

Keywords: Systematic Review, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Teachers' Competency, Challenges

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1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), also referred to as communicative approach, now has become one of the prevailing approaches in teaching second language skills (Wei et al., 2018), and has been defined and characterized by many scholars (Littlewood, 1981; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Taş & Khan, 2020). Taş & Khan (2020) claimed that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as a revolutionary approach in the early 1980s, suggested new techniques to teach learners foreign languages by getting the learners into spoken interaction interact successfully with people who speak the target language, and enabling them to produce comprehensible speech as demanded in real communication. Richards and Rodgers (2014) pointed out that CLT has been described by both American and British linguists and educators as an approach that focused on (a) achieving communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and (b) developing instructional procedures of teaching language skills that recognize the interdependence of language and communication. In general, CLT aims at teaching language learners to communicate with speakers of the target language through providing them with communicative activities or tasks in which they are required to exchange information with each other or with the teacher.

Educators and scholars have demonstrated the effectiveness of CLT in various educational contexts and countries in enhancing learners' speaking proficiency (AL-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019; Hanafi, 2017; Phoeun & Sengsri, 2021; Guado & Mayorga, 2021). Concerning English education within China, numerous universities and colleges have embraced the integration of CLT into their curriculum and instructional materials, a trend that commenced with the introduction of CLT to China in 1986 (Wei et al., 2018).

2. Research Objectives and Research Questions

The research aims to achieve the following objectives: 1) To find out the competence of teachers in executing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China. 2) To identify the challenges that impede the successful implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China.

The research questions are: 1) Are the teachers competent in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China? 2) What challenges hinder the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China?

3. Methodology

In this study, the researcher adopts the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) guidelines by Page et al. (2021) to screen and select the articles for the systematic review (See Figure 1).

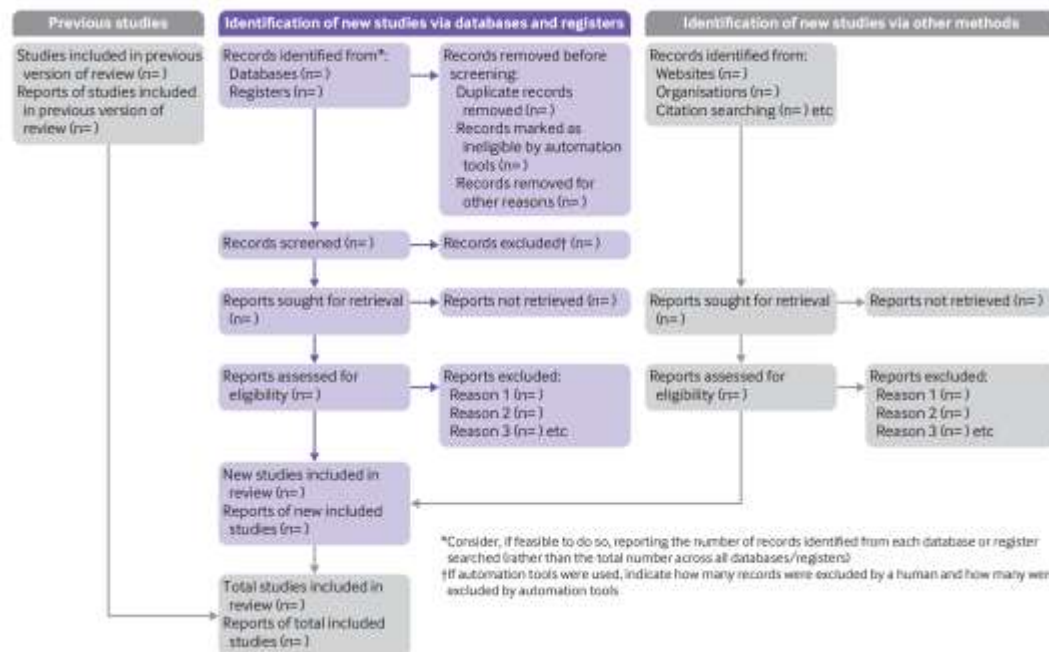


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram template for systematic reviews by Page et al. (2021)

The first step involves conducting a comprehensive search across various databases such as Google Scholar, JSTOR, and Eric using the keywords “Communicative Language Teaching”, “Communicative approach”, “China” and “teacher”. The retrieved articles are then subjected to removal of duplicates, resulting in a refined pool of studies. Subsequently, two independent reviewers meticulously assess the titles and abstracts of these articles to ascertain their alignment with the research objectives and eligibility criteria. Articles that meet the initial screening are further subjected to full-text examination, enabling a more thorough evaluation of their relevance. During this stage, any disagreements between the reviewers are resolved through discussion or consultation with a third reviewer. Finally, the selected articles that fulfill the inclusion criteria are included in the systematic review.

Having identified articles published between 1993 and 2022, the researcher will conduct a comprehensive analysis of these publications to extract and present the insights pertaining to the proficiency of educators in effectively implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

4. Finding

Following the PRISMA 2020 flow diagram by Page et al. (2021), the researcher has identifies a total number of 20 articles to answer the research questions of this study.

Utilizing the ERIC reference databases, 73 articles were initially identified. Following a meticulous screening process, only 2 articles aligning with the study's objectives have been incorporated into this literature review.

In the examination of the JSTOR database, a substantial 2324 articles were initially located. Yet, after rigorous evaluation, only 1 article was deemed suitable for analysis in accordance with the study's objectives.

Further exploration through Google Scholar yielded 18 articles that met the specific objectives of this study. Following a thorough examination, the researcher, along with two independent reviewers, has unequivocally identified one duplicated article among the collected resources. Upon excluding this redundant entry, a refined selection of 20 distinct articles from the aforementioned databases remains, chosen to be encompassed within this comprehensive literature review.

The following table (See Table 1. Summary of included articles) presents detailed information about the researcher, year, journal title, competence of teachers (C1), challenges teachers have (C2) and the major findings of the article.

Table 1. Summary of included articles

Researcher	Year	Journal title	C 1	C 2	Findings
Jan Anderson	1993	Is a communicative approach practical for teaching English in china? pros and cons	√	√	Challenges like traditional methods, exam-focused teaching, and lack of resources are highlighted. CLT is seen as valuable for practical language skills, but implementation requires considering Chinese educational context and attitudes.
Guangyong Sun & Liying Chen	2000	From Context to Curriculum: A case study of communicative language teaching in China	√	√	Successful incorporation of CLT requires careful consideration of the context's impact on teaching methodology, objectives, and activities.
Liming Yu	2001	Communicative Language Teaching in China: Progress and Resistance	√	√	Progress was made in the 1990s emphasizing communication skills. Challenges persisted due to factors like traditional teaching methods, skepticism about CLT's superiority, economic constraints for teachers, large class

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					sizes, and the lack of qualified English teachers.
Guangwei Hu	2002	Potential Cultural Resistance to Pedagogical Imports: The Case of Communicative Language Teaching in China	√	√	Traditional methods persist due to clashes with Chinese learning culture. Conflicting philosophies, roles, and approaches hinder CLT adoption. A culturally sensitive approach is recommended for successful integration.
Xiaoqing Liao	2004	The need for Communicative Language Teaching in China	√	√	CLT's suitability for China despite challenges like large class sizes. A successful case study demonstrates its effectiveness, emphasizing teachers' competence. The need for teacher training and government support is highlighted, and CLT adoption is seen positively.
Ping Li	2004	Chinese EFL teachers' perceptions of implementation of communicative language teaching at tertiary level	√	√	Chinese university teachers of non-English major programs welcome the adaptation of CLT in their teaching. However, they encounter difficulties arising from the educational system, EFL context, cultural tradition, and students.
Lingjie Jin, Michael Singh, Liqun Li	2005	Communicative Language Teaching in China: Misconceptions, Applications and Perceptions		√	Positive results of implementing CLT in Chinese college English education are noted, but challenges arise from the educational system, exam format, student autonomy, and teacher roles. The need for reforms, better teacher training, and addressing misconceptions is emphasized for successful CLT implementation.
Guochen Jin	2008	Application of Communicative Approach in College English Teaching	√		Communicative Approach is an effective method in foreign language teaching. Teachers' roles shift from authority figures to communication facilitators.
Gong Pin	2010	A Survey of Current Application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China for Non-English Majors' College Oral English		√	CLT principles, despite challenges, have been integrated into Chinese English classes. a combination of traditional and innovative methods is proposed.
Wei Hu	2010	Communicative language teaching in the Chinese environment	√	√	It discusses the challenges of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Chinese English classrooms and proposes solutions. It reviews CLT advantages and obstacles in China, suggests a blended approach, and offers techniques for adapting CLT in

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				Chinese context
Fang Yuan	2011	A Brief Comment on Communicative Language Teaching	√	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is gaining popularity in second language education. It discusses "strong" and "weak" versions of CLT, its use in China, and issues arising from its implementation. It highlights the need for balanced language teaching methods based on different teaching contexts.
Xiaoshan Zeng	2011	Communicative Language Teaching Obstacles and Strategies	√	Misunderstandings, complexities of implementing CLT in China and strategies for successful implementation in China's language education are proposed.
Xiaotong He	2014	An Analysis of Communicative Language Teaching Methodology and Its Application on Language Learning in China	√	The paper discusses Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its impact on language education in China. CLT faces challenges in implementation. The paper suggests a balanced approach, combining CLT with traditional methods for effective language learning.
Yingjie I. J. Yang	2014	The Implementation of Speaking Fluency in Communicative Language Teaching: An Observation of Adopting the 4/3/2 Activity in High Schools in China	√	This study examines the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Chinese EFL classes, highlighting challenges and gaps between CLT principles and practice. Misunderstandings of CLT, constraints like textbooks and education policies, and the importance of a motivating environment are discussed.
Shan Liu	2015	Reflections on Communicative Language Teaching and Its Application in China	√	CLT's emergence, impact, and challenges in foreign language teaching, especially in China. Challenges, student attitudes, and suggests solutions like broader communicative activities are discussed. Experimental approaches like task-based teaching are highlighted for improved language education.
Xia Yu	2015	Audiolingual Method and Communicative Language Teaching in China: The Case of Cultural Domestication and Resistance	√	It discusses the challenges of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Chinese education. CLT, which emphasizes interaction and practical use of language, faces challenges due to a cultural preference for knowledge accumulation and seriousness in learning.
Lijun Zhang	2020	An Analysis of Communicative Language	√	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its application in a Chinese high school English class is

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		Teaching Approach, an English Class and its Teaching Material			examined. It analyzes a CLT class's outline, teaching process, benefits, and areas for development. While it mentions challenges such as introverted students struggling to participate
Xiaoqing Liao	2020	How Communicative Language Teaching Became Acceptable in Secondary Schools in China		√	It discusses the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China's English language education. Initially met with resistance, CLT was seen as unsuitable for China's context. The State Education Development Commission (SEDC) played a role in promoting CLT and implementing measures to overcome resistance.
Lin Siew Eng, Zhao Peidong	2021	An Investigation of The Use of Communicative Language Teaching in a Higher Education Institution in China: A Case Study	√	√	It examines the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in a Chinese higher education institute's English classes. Findings show that CLT is not fully adopted, and classes remain teacher-centered. Measures to address the challenges are provided.
Zhou Tianli, Nor Shahila Mansor, Lay Hoon Ang, Sharon Sharmini	2021	Practicing Communicative Language Teaching Approach of English Grammar Teaching: Teachers' Perspectives in China Colleges	√	√	It examines how Chinese college English teachers perceive and implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English grammar instruction. Positive outcomes include improved classroom atmosphere and student confidence, although challenges for lower-level students and classroom management exist.

4.1 Implementation of CLT in China

CLT's implementation in China has progressed with varying degrees of success. Jin et al. (2005) highlight resistance and the need for examination system reform. Jin (2008) emphasizes the significance of the Communicative Approach in foreign language teaching, advocating for a balanced approach with traditional methods. Li (2004) examines CLT implementation for non-English major students in Chinese universities, stressing the need for favorable conditions. Liu (2015) discusses CLT's emergence and impact in the Chinese context, indicating ongoing efforts to enhance language learning outcomes. Collectively, these articles depict a landscape of challenges, adaptation, and evolving perspectives regarding CLT implementation.

Zhang (2020) examines the application of CLT in a Chinese high school English class. It analyzes a CLT class's outline, teaching process, benefits, and areas for improvement. The study details the use of communicative activities like pair discussions and role-play to encourage student communication. While highlighting the advantages of CLT, the article acknowledges challenges, such as introverted students' limited participation in group activities. The use of an innovative textbook incorporating interactive exercises is noted as a positive development.

4.2 Teachers' Competence of Implementing CLT:

The competence of teachers in implementing CLT is a pivotal factor in the success of language education. Anderson (1993) highlights the need to balance communicative and traditional methods. Sun and Chen (2000) stress the significance of teacher proficiency, learning strategies, and adaptation time. Yu (2001) underscores the importance of teacher training, theoretical awareness, and linguistic abilities. Liao (2004) presents a case study illustrating the crucial role of teachers' competence in navigating challenges. The articles collectively emphasize the need for teachers to possess language proficiency, sociolinguistic competence, and a solid understanding of CLT principles to facilitate effective language communication. Hu, G. (2010) discusses the discord between Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and the traditional Chinese culture of learning in ELT. CLT's interactive approach conflicts with China's teacher-centered, knowledge transmission approach. The article recommends integrating compatible aspects of CLT within the traditional framework, considering sociocultural influences. It emphasizes that teachers may lack necessary language proficiency, sociolinguistic competence, and familiarity with CLT principles due to differences in the education system and traditional teaching methods.

4.3 Challenges of Implementing CLT

Numerous challenges hinder the seamless integration of CLT in China's education system. Traditional teaching methods, limited resources, large class sizes, and resistance to change remain obstacles (Anderson, 1993). Yu (2001) identifies challenges including skepticism about CLT's superiority, economic constraints for teachers, and the lack of qualified English instructors. Hu (2002) underscores the clash between CLT and deeply ingrained Chinese cultural norms of learning. Yang (2014) points out misunderstandings of CLT, such as exclusive focus on meaning and lack of error correction. These challenges underscore the complexity of aligning CLT

with the existing education landscape. Hu, W. (2010) discusses challenges and potential solutions for developing Chinese English learners' communicative competence. Yu (2015) explores the integration of Audiolingualism and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Chinese education. It highlights the compatibility of Audiolingualism with Chinese education's focus on knowledge accumulation. In contrast, CLT faces resistance due to its emphasis on interaction, which Chinese learners associate with entertainment rather than learning.

4.4 Measures to Address the Challenges

To address these challenges, several measures have been proposed. Lin and Zhao (2021) recommend intensive teacher training courses to align teachers with CLT goals. Liao (2020) discusses measures taken by the State Education Development Commission to overcome resistance, such as advocating an eclectic approach and limiting drills. Zeng (2011) suggests strategies including communicative testing, improving teacher quality, and creating conducive teaching environments. Yuan (2011) emphasizes the need to balance fluency and accuracy, as well as addressing disputes and challenges through well-rounded language teaching methods. These measures collectively aim to bridge the gap between traditional practices and the principles of CLT. Hu, W. (2010) suggests an approach that combines communicative functions with linguistic teaching, cultural awareness, and various activities. The article underscores the need for systematic changes in teaching methods, teacher training, and syllabus design to foster communicative competence. Yu (2015) suggests adapting teaching methodologies to their cultural context and avoiding cultural imperialism to ensure effective language education practices.

5. Discussion

To answer Research Question 1: Are the teachers competent in the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China? The literature review underscores the critical role of teacher competence in the successful implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Multiple articles highlight the importance of teachers possessing the necessary skills and understanding to effectively employ CLT methodologies in the classroom. Anderson (1993) emphasizes the need for a balanced approach that combines communicative and traditional methods, indicating that teachers must navigate a nuanced pedagogical landscape. Sun and Chen (2000) delve deeper into this notion, stressing the

significance of teacher proficiency, learning strategies, and adaptation time for successful CLT implementation. Yu (2001) underscores the requirement for thorough teacher training, theoretical awareness, and linguistic abilities to overcome challenges associated with CLT.

Furthermore, Liao's (2004) case study illustrates the pivotal role of teachers' competence in overcoming obstacles. The study underscores the value of educators who possess both language proficiency and a solid grasp of CLT principles. The analysis by Hu, G. (2010) contributes an important cultural perspective, highlighting how the traditional Chinese culture of learning clashes with the interactive approach of CLT. This indicates that teacher competence extends beyond pedagogical skills to include an understanding of cultural norms that influence teaching and learning practices.

However, challenges in teacher competence emerge. The study by Hu, W. (2010) reveals that some Chinese teachers might lack the necessary language proficiency and familiarity with CLT principles due to differences in the education system and traditional teaching methods. This raises questions about the extent to which teachers are equipped to effectively implement CLT, particularly in the face of such linguistic and cultural disparities.

To answer research question 2: What factors hinder the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in China? The literature review unveils a range of factors that hinder the seamless integration of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) into the Chinese education system. Traditional teaching methods are identified as a substantial barrier (Anderson, 1993), reflecting the deeply entrenched nature of prevailing instructional approaches. Limited resources also pose a challenge (Anderson, 1993), indicating that the adoption of interactive and communicative methodologies might require a shift in resource allocation and investment.

Moreover, large class sizes are highlighted as an impediment to effective CLT implementation (Yu, 2001), as they can undermine the personalized interaction essential for communicative language learning. Resistance to change is another significant obstacle, as indicated by multiple authors (Jin et al., 2005; Hu, 2002). This resistance could be attributed to factors such as skepticism about CLT's superiority, economic constraints for teachers, and the lack of qualified English instructors (Yu, 2001).

Cultural factors also play a significant role in hindering the adoption of CLT. Hu, G. (2010) discusses the discord between the interactive nature of CLT and the traditional Chinese culture of learning, emphasizing the need for integration to align with cultural norms. Yang (2014) highlights the misunderstanding of CLT, which

stems from an emphasis on meaning and a lack of focus on error correction. These cultural factors present unique challenges to the integration of CLT within the Chinese educational context.

6. Conclusion

The analysis of the reviewed literature reveals a complex and evolving landscape of CLT implementation in China. While progress has been made, challenges ranging from traditional teaching methods to cultural differences underscore the intricate nature of integrating CLT into the Chinese education system. Teacher competence emerges as a pivotal factor, demanding language proficiency, sociolinguistic competence, and a deep understanding of CLT principles. These articles collectively shed light on the multifaceted efforts being made to enhance language education through meaningful communication. As China continues its journey towards implementing CLT, the ongoing adaptation, teacher training, and exploration of context-specific measures will play a crucial role in the success of this pedagogical approach.

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