



A Critical Review of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Afghanistan

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Abstract

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is widely promoted in global English education, emphasizing meaningful interaction, learner autonomy, and communicative competence. However, its implementation in developing and post-conflict contexts like Afghanistan remains difficult, often failing to translate policy into practice. This critical review examines the theoretical basis of CLT and how it has been interpreted or resisted in Afghan English teaching environments. Although national curriculum documents support CLT principles, classroom practices largely remain rigidly teacher-centered and overwhelmingly grammar-focused. Key barriers include limited teacher proficiency, inadequate training in communicative methods, large classes, scarce resources, exam-oriented assessment, and learner independence. While CLT has strong potential to significantly improve English learning in Afghanistan, the review argues that success requires a localized adaptation rather than adoption of Western models. It ultimately recommends context-sensitive teacher development, culturally appropriate communicative activities, and stronger institutional support to enable sustainable CLT implementation.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Performance, English Language Teaching (ELT), Communicative Competence, Teacher Training; Afghan EFL learners.

Introduction

The status of English in Afghanistan has grown significantly over the past two decades due to globalization, international development programs, foreign agencies, and the increasing role of English in higher education and employment. English became a compulsory subject in schools from Grade 4 onward, and universities expanded English departments across the country (Hashimi, 2018). Private language institutes also emerged as key providers of English instruction, often drawing in learners aiming for better job opportunities locally and abroad (Ahmadzai, 2020). Despite this expansion, ELT in Afghanistan has faced chronic challenges, including limited teacher preparation, outdated methodologies, inadequate materials, and exam-oriented instruction (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). These have shaped the context into which Communicative Language Teaching was introduced.

Emergence and Global Relevance of CLT

Communicative Language Teaching emerged in the 1970s as a response to structuralist and grammar-focused methods and was characterized by an emphasis on meaningful communication, learner interaction, and the development of communicative competence. It came from the works of Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980). CLT spread globally because it had a strong emphasis on fluency, authenticity, and functional use of language. Many countries from Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America have incorporated CLT into national curricula and teacher training programs as part of general educational modernization. According to Nunan (2003) and Littlewood (2014), while CLT has been successful in many developed contexts, research consistently demonstrates that CLT often meets resistance and adaptation problems in developing countries due to cultural and systemic constraints.

Adoption of CLT in Afghan Educational Settings

In Afghanistan, following 2001, CLT principles were integrated into the national English curricula and university syllabi, as policymakers announced their intentions to move away from traditional grammar-translation methods toward more communicative and learner-centered principles and practices (Hashimi, 2018). Subsequently, teacher training courses started highlighting communicative activities like group work, pair work, and real-life communication tasks. However, actual classroom practice did not align with these reforms. Many Afghan teachers still follow lecturing, translation, mechanical exercises, and memorization of texts due to limited training, low proficiency in English, and resource constraints (Ahmadzai, 2020; Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). Consequently, there is a huge gap between curriculum-level intentions and classroom realities.

Although CLT is officially promoted in Afghanistan, its implementation has remained inconsistent and largely ineffective. Research in Afghan schools and universities has demonstrated that very few communicative activities are conducted, students have little chance for authentic communication, and assessment systems still mainly stress grammar and reading rather than speaking and listening (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Cultural expectations, such as the authority of teachers, reluctance of students to speak publicly, and preference for teacher-led instruction, also conflict with the principles underlying CLT (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014). Furthermore, large class sizes, a lack of audio-visual resources, and unstable educational policies have restricted teachers' ability to adopt communicative methods. All these issues

suggest that CLT cannot be effectively implemented without a deeper understanding of contextual barriers and feasible adaptations.

Research Questions Guiding the Review

The following research questions have guided this review:

Main Research Question: How can Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) be critically evaluated and contextually adapted within the Afghan English language education system?

Sub-Research Questions

1. What are the theoretical foundations and core principles of CLT?
2. What challenges hinder the effective implementation of CLT in Afghanistan, and how can they be addressed through context-sensitive adaptation?

These questions shape the structure of the review and ensure a systematic and critical examination of CLT within the Afghan context.

Significance of the Study

Academic Importance

This review makes a meaningful academic contribution by extending the growing body of scholarship on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in low-resource and post-conflict contexts. While CLT has been extensively examined in international literature (Richards, 2006; Littlewood, 2014), relatively limited research has explored how this approach functions within Afghanistan's unique socio-cultural and educational landscape. Existing Afghan studies tend to focus primarily on surface-level concerns, such as insufficient teacher proficiency or shortages of instructional materials (Ahmadzai, 2020; Sarwari & Wahab, 2017), without offering deeper theoretical analysis or situating Afghan experiences within broader regional discussions of CLT in Asia and the Middle East. Additionally, there remains a noticeable lack of integration between Afghan-based studies and international research addressing culturally constrained or examination-driven CLT environments (Hu, 2002; Li, 1998).

By synthesizing local and global scholarship, this review addresses that gap and provides a comprehensive explanation of the persistent obstacles facing CLT implementation in Afghanistan. It further contributes to theoretical debates concerning the localization of communicative pedagogy, emphasizing that CLT cannot simply be transplanted from Western educational settings into developing contexts without careful and critical adaptation (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). In doing so, the review advances context-sensitive and evidence-based insights that have been largely absent from Afghan ELT research.

Practical Significance

The findings of this review carry important practical implications for teachers, learners, and curriculum developers in Afghanistan. From the perspective of teachers, the review highlights the discrepancy between the theoretical foundations of CLT and actual classroom practices. It draws attention to the need for adapting communicative activities to accommodate large classes, limited resources, and culturally conservative learning environments, as emphasized by Littlewood (2014) and Nunan (2003). For students, improved understanding and implementation of CLT principles may create greater opportunities for meaningful communication, increased classroom participation, and the development of real-world English

proficiency that traditional grammar-based instruction has often failed to achieve (Richards, 2006).

Moreover, this review offers valuable guidance for curriculum designers by identifying the disconnect between policy-level intentions and everyday instructional realities. Although official curriculum documents advocate communicative approaches, classroom practices in Afghanistan frequently remain teacher-centered (Hashimi, 2018). By presenting evidence-based analysis alongside practical recommendations, the review supports the development of more realistic, contextually appropriate teaching materials and professional training initiatives. Through acknowledging both challenges and feasible adaptations, it assists practitioners in enhancing the overall quality of English language teaching across schools, universities, and language institutes.

Policy Significance

At the policy level, this review contributes to ongoing discussions about national educational reform in Afghanistan. Although efforts have been made to modernize English curricula and improve teacher training systems, CLT-oriented reforms have often produced limited outcomes due to insufficient long-term investment and lack of contextual alignment. Policymakers therefore need a clearer understanding of the barriers impeding CLT implementation, including structural constraints such as overcrowded classrooms, inadequate professional development opportunities, and exam-driven assessment frameworks.

This review provides evidence-based insights to inform strategic planning and emphasizes the importance of aligning curriculum objectives, pedagogical practices, and assessment systems. It underscores the necessity of sustained teacher development initiatives and adequate resource allocation while situating Afghanistan's experience within broader international research on CLT reform in developing contexts. As noted by Hu (2002) and Li (1998), effective implementation requires gradual localization rather than the uncritical adoption of Western methodologies. Ultimately, this review lays the groundwork for shaping national strategies aimed at promoting sustainable and communicatively oriented English language education in Afghanistan.

Research Objectives

Main Objective

The main objective of this review is to critically examine the theoretical foundations, implementation, and contextual adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) within the Afghan English language education system.

Sub-Objectives

1. To analyze the theoretical underpinnings and core principles of Communicative Language Teaching.
2. To examine how CLT has been incorporated into Afghan English language policies, curricula, and classroom practices.
3. To identify the major contextual, institutional, and socio-cultural challenges affecting CLT implementation in Afghanistan and propose context-sensitive recommendations for sustainable adoption.

Literature Review

Communicative Competence

Communicative Language Teaching is based on the notion of Communicative Competence, which was first proposed by Hymes in 1972. According to Hymes, language learning is not only a matter of grammatical competence but also of knowing sociocultural norms that determine appropriateness of language use. That challenged the earlier, structuralist perspectives emphasizing form over function. Communicative Competence, according to Hymes (1972), means appropriate usage of language varieties in different contexts: the correlation of linguistic forms with social meanings. Canale and Swain (1980), on the basis of Hymes's work, developed communicative competence into a more systematic framework. Therefore, grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence comprise the different aspects of the model proposed by Canale and Swain (1980).

Grammatical competence was referred to as knowledge of syntax, vocabulary, and morphology, while sociolinguistic competence was knowledge of social rules of communication. Discourse competence accounts for cohesion and coherence in extended texts, while strategic competence encompasses the use of communication strategies that compensate for gaps in the learners' linguistic repertoire. Since then, this expanded model has become one of the most influential theoretical underpinnings for CLT globally, therefore finding immediate relevance in EFL contexts such as Afghanistan, where learners are expected to combine structural accuracy with functional abilities.

Principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The CLT is based on a set of pedagogical principles that underpin the methodological basis for encouraging authentic communication. Core in this method is meaning-focused instruction. This principle emphasizes comprehension and production of messages rather than rote memorization of linguistic forms (Richards, 2006). Meaning-focused tasks enable learners to develop real-life communicative ability, especially in situations where the English exposure outside the classroom is limited. The employment of authentic communication is another fundamental principle of CLT. Authenticity refers to those classroom activities that represent how languages are usually employed in natural situations, such as through role-plays, information-gap tasks, and problem-solving tasks (Littlewood, 2014).

These activities would then encourage learners to negotiate meaning, express their personal ideas, and interact for communicative purposes. CLT also focuses on developing a balance between fluency and accuracy. While fluency-based activities allow learners to express ideas in a natural way, there is still a need for accuracy to develop intelligible expression (Richards, 2006). Effective CLT pedagogy therefore combines both aspects by giving learners ample opportunities to take risks in communicating while at the same time giving feedback on linguistic forms. This balance is highly crucial in Afghanistan, as the traditional methods have heavily put emphasis on accuracy through grammar-translation methods, often at the cost of meaningful communication.

Global Critiques of CLT

Despite the fact that CLT has become very popular, there were many critiques of it, especially in developing and low-resource countries. Among the most important critiques are its limited appropriacy in resource-poor educational settings (Bax, 2003). Most CLT activities require

smaller classes, trained teachers, and easily accessible learning materials, which are found to a very small extent in Afghanistan. Large classrooms, inadequate teaching resources, and scarce access to technology make the implementation of authentic communicative tasks difficult. Another critique mentions issues with feasibility in contexts where cultural and educational traditions differ from the Western pedagogical assumptions on which CLT is based. While CLT promotes learner autonomy, interactive learning, and group work, in many Asian contexts, such as Afghanistan, classroom culture is teacher-centered with high respect for authority and a preference for explicit instruction (Hu, 2002).

Some scholars thus argue that full-scale implementation of CLT would conflict with local norms and expectations. Moreover, a poor command of English on the part of teachers themselves often restricts their capacity to manage spontaneous communication-based activities (Li, 1998). If they are not linguistically confident, teachers may fall back on traditional approaches, even when CLT is favored by policy documents. These global criticisms have considerable resonance for Afghanistan, where systemic barriers, like large classes, a shortage of teacher training, and a lack of authentic materials, complicate the implementation of CLT despite its theoretical appeal.

Research Methodology

This review used a narrative review design for synthesizing research into CLT in Afghanistan. The narrative review method is applicable for investigating emerging topics and for integrating findings from heterogeneous sources, including empirical studies, theoretical papers, and policy documents. A structured search was conducted using the following major academic databases: Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, Scopus, and ProQuest. This was done using keywords such as "Communicative Language Teaching and Afghanistan," "CLT challenges," "EFL in developing countries," and "English language pedagogy." Backward and forward citation tracking was also used to ensure completeness of coverage. The inclusion criteria are studies that focus on CLT, communicative competence, and/or English language teaching in Afghanistan or similar EFL contexts between the years 2000 and 2025.

The sources were identified from peer-reviewed journal articles, policy reports, theses, and dissertations, and book chapters. Those studies were excluded in instances where the study was irrelevant to CLT, dealt only with general education reform, or were a no-scholarly opinion. This approach allowed for a systematic yet flexible synthesis, whereby context-sensitive insights into CLT implementation, challenges, and adaptations in Afghanistan could be drawn out, informed by lessons from other comparable low-resource EFL contexts globally.

Historical Development of English Language Teaching in Afghanistan

English in Pre-2001 Context

Before 2001, the very limited and highly elitist English language education in Afghanistan took place within a few private schools and universities located in Kabul, as well as institutions affiliated with foreign embassies (Hashimi, 2018). The methodology adopted was largely grammar translation, where much emphasis was placed on rote memorization, translation exercises, and written forms of English at the expense of communicative competence (Ahmadzai, 2020).

Little opportunity existed for contact with spoken English due to the rarity of native-speaking teachers, scarcity of resources, and low level of societal demand for skills in English

communication (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Cultural and political factors further imposed a number of constraints on English education. During the Taliban regime (1996-2001), formal education for girls was largely banned and, for both genders, strictly curtailed, affecting the availability of opportunities to study foreign languages in general (Hashimi, 2018). Thus, the institutional framework for English teaching became very weak before 2001, and communicative approaches barely received any attention.

Post-2001 Reforms and International Influence

After the fall of the Taliban in 2001, Afghanistan received significant international support to reform education, including updating English language teaching. The Ministry of Education, together with donor agencies, NGOs, and a number of foreign universities, developed new curricula, teacher training courses, and English-language resources (Sarwari & Wahab 2017; Ahmadzai 2020). The adoption of Communicative Language Teaching principles became a hallmark of these reforms, reflecting broader global trends in ELT which advocate for interaction, real-life communication, and a learner-centered pedagogy (Richards 2006; Littlewood 2014).

International influence also was extended to teacher preparation. Many Afghan teachers attended workshops, training courses, and exchange programs through the British Council and USAID, among others (Hashimi, 2018). The objectives were to improve the English proficiency of teachers and provide them with the experience to make them familiar with the communicative methodologies. However, contextual barriers regarding implementation in large classes, low English proficiency teachers, and inadequate resources meant that there were restrictive options for post-2001 reforms in their effectiveness (Karim & Nassaji, 2020).

Current Curriculum and Policy Directions

Currently, English is included as a compulsory subject at Afghan secondary schools and forms one of the significant components of higher education programs. The national curriculum explicitly stresses communicative competence, with skills integration across listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Ahmadzai, 2020). Textbooks and teaching materials have been updated to include more communicative tasks, dialogues, and real-life situations. Policy directions have aimed at the alignment of teaching with international standards, the promotion of a student-centered pedagogy, and the development of teacher training through in-service workshops and professional development programs. Indeed, Hashimi (2018) and Sarwari & Wahab (2017) stated that despite these improvements, challenges do remain. Teacher-centeredness, exam-oriented assessment systems, and socio-cultural expectations turn out to be the main obstacles to the full implementation of communicative approaches (Littlewood, 2014; Hu, 2002).

CLT in Theory vs. CLT in Practice

Curriculum-Level CLT Adoption

CLT has been formally incorporated into Afghanistan's national curricula of English at school and higher education levels. Curriculum documents widely stress meaning-focused instruction, communicative competence, and interactive learning tasks (Ahmadzai, 2020; Hashimi, 2018). On the policy level, CLT principles are portrayed as central in modern English education, therefore signaling a clear shift from the traditional grammar-translation approach that

dominated pre-2001 teaching. These reforms reflect global trends and aim at preparing Afghan students for real-life English communication and international collaboration (Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006). Despite such adoption at the level of curriculum, the official guidelines often provide a general direction rather than detailed pedagogical guidance, thus leaving teachers with considerable latitude in interpretation and implementation in their classrooms. This discrepancy creates a gap between theory and practice, which has been noted as a persistent issue in CLT implementation worldwide (Hu, 2002).

Classroom Practices and Realities

Empirical studies demonstrate that Afghan classrooms often deviate from communicative ideals of official curricula. For instance, classroom observations show that instructional practices remain teacher-dominated, delivery is highly lecture-based, and activities are predominantly grammar-focused, especially in secondary schools and in large university classes (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). Several elements are responsible for this mismatch. Large-size classes, as usually attended by more than 40–50 students, restrict the opportunities for pair work, group discussions, or authentic interaction.

Limited teacher proficiency in English prevents spontaneous oral communication tasks, while resource constraints, such as a lack of audio-visual materials and textbooks, further hinder communicative activity (Ahmadzai, 2020; Hashimi, 2018). Furthermore, exam-driven assessment systems give more emphasis to grammar accuracy and reading comprehension rather than speaking and listening skills, which, in turn, inadvertently discourages communicative practice (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). All these realities point to the challenge of translating the theory of CLT into effective classroom practice.

Teachers' Interpretations of CLT

Teachers' perceptions and interpretations of CLT also significantly influence classroom outcomes. For example, many Afghan teachers conceptualize CLT essentially as a set of communicative activities rather than as a more holistic pedagogical philosophy involving learner-centeredness, interaction, and task-based instruction (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Other teachers may use only superficial modifications of communicative tasks so that they can fit into the current practice; for instance, using role-plays that are highly scripted or reducing pair work into rote repetition. Other teachers attribute non-fully implementation of CLT to cultural and institutional constraints such as students' reluctance to speak publicly and clinging to traditional respect for teacher authority (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014). These findings support the notion that there should always be professional development and ongoing teacher support to help minimize the gap that has always existed between the policy directives and effective communicative pedagogy (Richards, 2006).

Materials and Textbook Analysis

Materials and textbooks in Afghanistan have undergone revisions to include CLT principles, such as inserting dialogues, communicative exercises, and problem-solving tasks. However, it was observed that many textbooks remain grammar-heavy and exam-oriented without allowing much opportunity for authentic communication (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). This situation is exacerbated by the fact that teachers depend on prescribed scripts and have little scope for modifying activities. As a result, although curriculum materials may, in theory, be supportive of communicative approaches, in reality they tend to reinforce traditional, teacher-centered

methods. This may be perpetuating the gap between the theory and practice of CLT (Richards, 2006; Littlewood, 2014).

Major Challenges of Implementing CLT in Afghanistan

Teacher-Related Challenges

Teachers are at the core of CLT implementation; however, studies conducted among Afghan teachers show that they have multiple difficulties. The insufficient level of English is the usual problem that affects their ability to manage communicative activities and give linguistically correct feedback (Ahmadzai, 2020; Hashimi, 2018). Many teachers also report a lack of training in the methodologies of CLT since pre-service and in-service programs often focus more on grammar-based instruction rather than on communicative strategies. Further, traditional beliefs about teaching, including teacher-centered pedagogy, authoritative classroom roles, and reliance on rote memorization, further constrain the adoption of CLT. Where teachers may be familiar with the communicative principles, such long-held beliefs often prevent full integration into classroom practice (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014).

Student-Related Challenges

Students themselves encounter a number of challenges in benefiting from CLT. Most Afghan learners have low proficiency in English, especially with regard to speaking and listening, which reduces the extent to which they can contribute to communicative activities (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). It is indeed made worse by exam-oriented learning since all standardized assessments place greater emphasis on grammar, reading comprehension, and writing rather than communicative competence. Besides, cultural expectations about teachers' authority and classroom behavior make students more or less willing to speak, ask questions, or participate in group work, which can lead to passive learning and limited interaction, which goes against the interactive and learner-centered nature of CLT itself (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014).

Institutional and Systemic Challenges

A number of systemic factors at the institutional level impede the effective implementation of CLT. Large classes, with sizes of over 40–50 students being commonplace, lead to difficulties in conducting pair work, group discussions, or other interactive activities. In addition, the scarcity of resources, such as textbooks, audio-visual aids, and technological support, limits the possibility of real communication. Limited speaking opportunities within the curriculum and classroom schedules further restrict learners' practical use of English (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). In addition, inconsistent education policy and frequent changes to the curriculum confuse teachers, which negatively impacts the sustained use of communicative methodologies (Richards, 2006).

Socio-Cultural Challenges

Socio-cultural factors also significantly contribute to shaping the efficiency of CLT in Afghanistan. The cultural incongruence with the assumptions of CLT is evident, since most CLT approaches were initially developed in Western contexts emphasizing autonomy, learner-centeredness, and peer interaction (Hu, 2002). Afghan classrooms often follow hierarchical norms where students expect the teacher to lead every learning activity. Similarly, attitudes toward group work and discussion can limit participation. Students might feel uncomfortable expressing personal opinions in front of their peers or engaging in collaborative activities,

which challenges the implementation of interactive CLT activities (Littlewood, 2014; Karim & Nassaji, 2020).

Security and Economic Barriers

Finally, larger concerns over security and economic matters significantly shape CLT adoption. Political unrest and fighting in Afghanistan have disrupted school operations and access to training, while making schools unsafe to learn in (Hashimi, 2018). Economic constraints are yet another limiting factor to professional development, as many teachers cannot afford further training and institutions lack funding for workshops or resource acquisition (Ahmadzai, 2020). These challenges underscore the fact that CLT implementation in Afghanistan is not only a pedagogical issue but is strongly interlinked with structural, socio-cultural, and political realities.

Comparative Insights from Other Developing Countries

Lessons from Comparative Asian and Developing Contexts

CLT has been implemented in several developing countries, and this provides valuable lessons for Afghanistan. Comparative studies from Asian contexts indicate various opportunities and challenges in adapting CLT into socio-cultural, economic, and institutional realities similar to those of Afghanistan (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). For instance, research in Asian EFL settings indicates that although CLT has been adopted into curricula, classroom practices often remain teacher-centered due to large class sizes, examination-oriented assessment, and lack of teacher training (Karim & Nassaji, 2020).

In contexts like South Korea, teachers report significant difficulties in adopting communicative approaches due to institutional barriers (Li, 1998). Similarly, in China, teacher beliefs, cultural norms regarding authority, and structural obstacles such as large class sizes and a deficiency of teaching aids are a partial counterbalance to the effective implementation of CLT (Hu, 2002). Teacher-related constraints, learner proficiency issues, institutional limitations, and socio-cultural mismatches between Western CLT principles and local classroom traditions are common barriers across these contexts. Yet, countries that invest in sustained teacher training, contextually appropriate materials, and incremental reforms are also seen to gradually improve the outcomes in communicative competence (Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006).

Relevance of These Contexts to Afghanistan

These comparative insights are highly relevant in Afghanistan, which shares similar structural, cultural, and educational challenges. Afghan classrooms are often characterized by large student numbers, limited teaching resources, and teacher-centered practices (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). In addition, socio-cultural emphases on authority and exam-driven learning in Afghanistan also echo the challenges observed in other Asian countries (Hu, 2002; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Lessons drawn from these countries indicate that contextual adaptation is key to CLT success.

The strategies of gradual integration of communicative tasks, teacher capacity-building programs, and culturally appropriate materials could yield better results in the feasibility of CLT in Afghanistan. Moreover, the policies of prioritizing teacher support and professional development over top-down curriculum directives seem to yield better outcomes for narrowing down the policy-classroom practice gap, as various experiences of these developing countries have shown (Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006). Overall, Afghanistan can draw on these

international experiences in crafting locally adapted CLT approaches that take into consideration the structural constraints, cultural expectations, and resource limitations, while gradually improving students' communicative competence.

Results and Discussion

CLT in Theory vs. Practice in Afghanistan

The literature indicates that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been formally integrated into Afghanistan's national curricula, emphasizing meaning-focused instruction, communicative competence, and interactive learning tasks (Ahmadzai, 2020; Hashimi, 2018). Policy documents portray CLT as central to modern English education, reflecting a shift from pre-2001 grammar-translation approaches (Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006). However, in practice, classroom observations reveal significant deviations from these ideals. Instruction remains largely teacher-centered, lecture-based, and grammar-focused, particularly in secondary schools and large university classes (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Sarwari & Wahab, 2017). This demonstrates a persistent **gap between curriculum intentions and classroom realities**, highlighting the difficulty of translating theoretical principles into effective pedagogy (Hu, 2002).

Teacher-Related Findings

Teachers' proficiency, pedagogical beliefs, and interpretations of CLT significantly shape classroom outcomes. Afghan teachers often conceptualize CLT superficially as a set of communicative activities rather than a holistic learner-centered approach (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Limited English proficiency prevents spontaneous oral communication, while insufficient training in communicative methodologies reinforces reliance on traditional lecture and grammar-focused instruction (Ahmadzai, 2020; Hashimi, 2018). Cultural and institutional constraints, such as adherence to hierarchical norms and authoritative classroom roles, further restrict the integration of interactive tasks (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014). These findings suggest that **teacher capacity is a central factor influencing the gap between policy and practice**, underscoring the importance of sustained professional development and mentorship (Richards, 2006).

Student-Related Findings

Learner proficiency, motivation, and socio-cultural expectations also affect the implementation of CLT. Many Afghan students have limited speaking and listening skills, exacerbated by exam-oriented curricula that prioritize grammar and reading over communicative competence (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Cultural norms emphasizing teacher authority and passive learning reduce willingness to engage in pair work, group discussions, or interactive activities (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014). These factors collectively limit opportunities for authentic communication, illustrating the need for **context-sensitive adaptations** of CLT that respect local norms while encouraging learner participation.

Institutional, Socio-Cultural, and Systemic Constraints

Systemic challenges compound classroom difficulties. Large class sizes, resource scarcity, insufficient access to audio-visual materials, and unstable educational policies inhibit the adoption of communicative activities (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017; Richards, 2006). Socio-cultural factors, such as hierarchical norms and conservative expectations regarding classroom behavior, further constrain learner-centered pedagogy (Hu, 2002; Littlewood, 2014). Security

and economic barriers also limit teacher training opportunities and access to instructional resources (Ahmadzai, 2020; Hashimi, 2018). Collectively, these constraints indicate that CLT adoption in Afghanistan is influenced not only by pedagogical considerations but also by **structural, cultural, and political realities**.

Comparative Insights from Other Developing Contexts

Comparative studies from other Asian and developing countries highlight similar challenges and provide instructive lessons for Afghanistan. Research indicates that teacher beliefs, institutional constraints, learner proficiency, and socio-cultural mismatches often hinder full CLT implementation (Li, 1998; Hu, 2002; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Nonetheless, countries that invest in sustained teacher training, contextually appropriate materials, and incremental reforms demonstrate gradual improvements in communicative competence (Littlewood, 2014; Richards, 2006). These findings suggest that Afghanistan could benefit from **gradual integration of communicative tasks, teacher capacity-building programs, and culturally relevant materials**, rather than attempting wholesale adoption of Western CLT models.

Synthesis and Implications

Overall, the evidence demonstrates that the theoretical promise of CLT in Afghanistan has yet to translate into meaningful classroom practice. Key challenges are multifaceted, involving teacher preparedness, student readiness, institutional limitations, socio-cultural norms, and broader systemic issues. Successful implementation requires **contextual adaptation**, sustained professional development, alignment of assessment systems with communicative objectives, and long-term policy support (Bax, 2003; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011; Richards, 2006). Lessons from other developing contexts confirm that incremental, culturally sensitive approaches, supported by appropriate resources and administrative backing, are critical for bridging the gap between theory and practice (Karim & Nassaji, 2020; Littlewood, 2014).

In conclusion, Afghan ELT faces persistent barriers to CLT implementation, but a strategically adapted, contextually aware, and systematically supported approach has the potential to enhance learners' communicative competence, engagement, and confidence in English. These insights form the foundation for the **recommendations and future research directions** proposed later in this review.

Conclusion

This critical review examined the status of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Afghanistan, highlighting both its theoretical promise and the persistent challenges surrounding its implementation. Although English language education in Afghanistan has gradually shifted from traditional grammar-translation methods toward curricula that officially promote communicative principles, the translation of these ideals into classroom practice remains limited. The review revealed substantial gaps between policy intentions and instructional realities, influenced by a range of interconnected teacher-related, student-related, institutional, socio-cultural, and economic constraints (Ahmadzai, 2020).

The findings underscore that CLT cannot be adopted as a uniform, imported model; rather, it requires thoughtful, context-sensitive adaptation that aligns pedagogical practices with Afghanistan's cultural norms, classroom structures, and resource availability (Bax, 2003). Insights from other developing and post-conflict countries further demonstrate that successful CLT implementation depends on flexibility, locally relevant materials, and continuous

professional support (Karim & Nassaji, 2020). Teachers must receive sustained methodological training that empowers them to integrate meaningful communication, pair work, problem-solving, and learner engagement within the limits of their environments (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Moreover, systemic reform must include stronger alignment between curriculum objectives and assessment systems so that communicative competence, not rote memorization, becomes the central focus of evaluation.

Institutional structures also need to prioritize manageable class sizes, improved access to teaching materials, and supportive administrative policies that encourage innovative pedagogical practices. Crucially, long-term investment in teacher development, resource provision, and policy coherence is essential for bridging the gap between CLT theory and classroom application. With adequate support, Afghan EFL learners will have increased opportunities to practice authentic communication, develop confidence, and build the linguistic and pragmatic skills needed for academic and professional advancement. In conclusion, while the challenges are considerable, the potential benefits of a contextually responsive CLT approach are substantial. Meaningful progress requires a holistic, sustained commitment to educational reform that empowers teachers, respects cultural realities, and builds the foundations for more effective and communicative English language education across Afghanistan.

Recommendations

Teacher Training and Professional Development

Successful CLT adoption relies foremost on teacher proficiency and pedagogical competence. Therefore, Afghanistan should focus on continuous pre-service and in-service training programs with a clear focus on communicative approaches, learner-centered pedagogy, and practical classroom management strategies throughout the curriculum. Training should include hands-on workshops, micro-teaching sessions, and peer observation that provide opportunities for teachers to try out communicative activities and receive helpful feedback from their peers (Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2011). Indeed, international collaboration and exchange programs can also increase the exposure of teachers to different communicative practices.

Curriculum and Assessment Reform

Curricula should move away from grammar and examination-oriented teaching to the holistic development of all four language skills; listening, speaking, reading, and writing—emphasizing interaction among the students. According to Richards (2006) and Hashimi (2018), this calls for an assessment system that is consistent with communicative goals: performance tasks, oral presentations, group projects, and interactive assessment rather than just the repetition of stock phrases. Gradual reform, starting with pilot programs, allows smoother adoption while minimizing resistance.

Contextualizing CLT for Afghanistan

CLT principles should be modified according to the social-cultural and educational context in Afghanistan. Teachers are encouraged to use culturally appropriate materials, examples, and tasks that match students' experiences. Various flexible approaches for example, blended methodologies that mix CLT with traditional instruction, have been proposed to accommodate the expectations of learners and gradually build up communicative competence (Littlewood,

2014). Encourage group work, pair work, and interactional activities within the bounds of cultural sensitivity that promote student participation and engagement.

Increasing Resources and Technology Integration

Resources include textbook constraints, audio-visual aids, and classroom materials that limit the adoption of CLT. The investment in digital resources, language labs, and online platforms can widen the access to authentic English input with interactive exercises (Littlewood, 2014; Sutherland, 1997). Mobile apps, online dictionaries, and language learning software can support instruction inside the classroom, especially in the most remote areas (Yoon, 2008). Even low-cost, contextually appropriate materials such as picture cards, storyboards, and student-generated dialogues can support communicative practice effectively (Sarwari & Wahab, 2017).

Institutional Capacity Building

Institutional support and policy stability are necessary for the long-term success of CLT. This means that there has to be consistent policy directives given by the ministries of education, funding, and administrative support of the communicative initiatives by the higher institutions (Ahmadzai, 2020). Program sustainability can thus be nurtured through the establishment of teacher mentoring systems, regional resource centers, and mechanisms for monitoring. In addition, collaboration with international organizations and local stakeholders can enhance capacity building for implementing feasible and contextually relevant CLT reforms.

In sum, the way forward for CLT in Afghanistan is through a strategic combination of teacher development, curriculum and assessment reform, contextual adaptation, resource expansion, and institutional strengthening. These recommendations provide a practical roadmap for improving communicative competence among Afghan EFL learners while addressing structural, socio-cultural, and policy constraints.

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