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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@ucsiuniveristy.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.

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

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; Tas & Khan, 2020). Tas & 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).

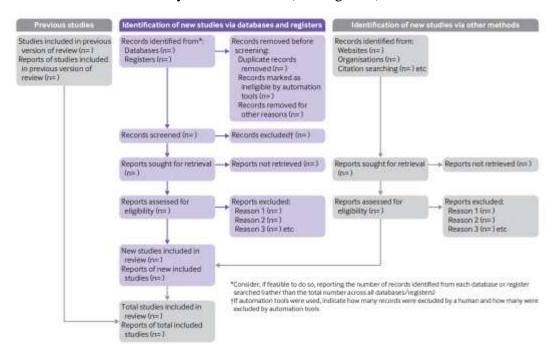


Figure 1. PRISMA 2020 flow diagram template for systematic reviews by Page et al. (2021)

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

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

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

				Chinese context
Fang Yuan	2011	A Brief Comment on	√	Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is gaining
Tang Tuan	2011	Communicative Language	٧	popularity in second language education. It discusses
		Teaching		"strong" and "weak" versions of CLT, its use in China, and
		reaching		_
				issues arising from its implementation. It highlights the
				need for balanced language teaching methods based on
			1	different teaching contexts.
Xiaoshan	2011	Communicative Language	1	Misunderstandings, complexities of implementing CLT in
Zeng		Teaching Obstacles and		China and strategies for successful implementation in
		Strategies	,	China's language education are proposed.
Xiaotong	2014	An Analysis of		The paper discusses Communicative Language Teaching
He		Communicative Language		(CLT) and its impact on language education in China. CLT
		Teaching Methodology and		faces challenges in implementation. The paper suggests a
		Its Application on Language		balanced approach, combining CLT with traditional
		Learning in China		methods for effective language learning.
Yingjie I.	2014	The Implementation of		This study examines the implementation of
J. Yang		Speaking Fluency in		Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Chinese EFL
		Communicative Language		classes, highlighting challenges and gaps between CLT
		Teaching: An Observation		principles and practice. Misunderstandings of CLT,
		of Adopting the 4/3/2		constraints like textbooks and education policies, and the
		Activity in High Schools in		importance of a motivating environment are discussed.
		China		
Shan Liu	2015	Reflections on	1	CLT's emergence, impact, and challenges in foreign
		Communicative Language		language teaching, especially in China.Challenges, student
		Teaching and Its Application		attitudes, and suggests solutions like broader
		in China		communicative activities are discussed. Experimental
				approaches like task-based teaching are highlighted for
				improved language education.
Xia Yu	2015	Audiolingual Method and	V	It discusses the challenges of implementing
		Communicative Language		Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Chinese
		Teaching in China: The		education. CLT, which emphasizes interaction and practical
		Case of Cultural		use of language, faces challenges due to a cultural
		Domestication and		preference for knowledge accumulation and seriousness in
		Resistance		learning.
Lijun	2020	An Analysis of		Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its
Zhang		Communicative Language	,	application in a Chinese high school English class is
				TITE TO THE STATE OF THE STATE

		Teaching Approach, an			examined. It analyzes a CLT class's outline, teaching
		English Class and its			process, benefits, and areas for development. While it
		Teaching Material			mentions challenges such as introverted students struggling
					to participate
Xiaoqing	2020	How Communicative		\checkmark	It discusses the adoption of Communicative Language
Liao		Language Teaching Became			Teaching (CLT) in China's English language education.
		Acceptable in Secondary			Initially met with resistance, CLT was seen as unsuitable
		Schools in China			for China's context. The State Education Development
					Commission (SEDC) played a role in promoting CLT and
					implementing measures to overcome resistance.
Lin Siew	2021	An Investigation of The Use	V	1	It examines the implementation of Communicative
Eng, Zhao		of Communicative			Language Teaching (CLT) in a Chinese higher education
Peidong		Language Teaching in a			institute's English classes. Findings show that CLT is not
		Higher Education Institution			fully adopted, and classes remain
		in China: A Case Study			teacher-centered.Measures to address the challenges are
					provided.
Zhou	2021	Practicing Communicative	V	1	It examines how Chinese college English teachers perceive
Tianli,		Language Teaching			and implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)
Nor		Approach of English			in English grammar instruction.Positive outcomes include
Shahila		Grammar Teaching:			improved classroom atmosphere and student confidence,
Mansor,		Teachers' Perspectives in			although challenges for lower-level students and classroom
Lay Hoon		China Colleges			management exist.
Ang,					
Sharon					
Sharmini					

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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