Assessing communicative language teaching competencies among teachers in Shaoxing University Yuanpei: A foundation for training and development planning

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Abstract

This study examines the competencies of teachers at Shaoxing University Yuanpei in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) principles and assesses their alignment with the specific needs of the institution. The research design employed a qualitative approach, involving classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The study focused on eight teachers from secondary schools associated with Shaoxing University Yuanpei who had adopted CLT principles in their teaching practices. The significant findings of the study reveal variations in the current competencies of teachers. Some teachers exhibit strong linguistic competence, pedagogical skills, intercultural awareness, and effective classroom management. However, others require improvement in these areas. Specifically, linguistic proficiency, pedagogical skills, intercultural competence, and classroom management strategies are identified as key areas that may necessitate additional training and development. The implications of these findings are twofold. Firstly, the study serves as a foundation for tailored training and development programs. These programs aim to equip teachers with the competencies required for effective CLT implementation, thereby enhancing the quality of language education and promoting linguistic and cultural understanding among students. Secondly, the study contributes to the discourse on effective language teaching practices. It underscores the importance of assessing and developing teacher competencies to align with modern language education paradigms, offering theoretical and managerial insights for scholars and practitioners alike. The study's findings offer valuable guidance for institutions seeking to improve language education, emphasizing the need for continuous professional development and training to ensure that teachers possess the requisite competencies for effective CLT implementation. The research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on effective language education practices and underscores the importance of aligning teacher competencies with evolving educational needs.

Keywords: linguistic proficiency, pedagogical skills, intercultural competence, and classroom management strategies

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1. Introduction

Language education plays a pivotal role in shaping the global landscape of communication, intercultural understanding, and knowledge dissemination (Corbett, 2022; Rose, et al. 2021). In this context, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as a prominent pedagogical approach that places communicative competence at its core, emphasizing the development of students' language skills for effective real-life communication (García León, 2019; Toro, et al. 2019). The successful implementation of CLT heavily relies on the competencies of language teachers, who serve as the mediators between knowledge and learners. Recognizing the crucial role of teachers in achieving the objectives of CLT, this study, aims to investigate the communicative language teaching competencies of teachers at Shaoxing University Yuanpei.

Shaoxing University Yuanpei, located in Shaoxing, Zhejiang, China, is an educational institution committed to fostering linguistic and cultural understanding among its students. As with many other universities around the world, Shaoxing University Yuanpei has embraced CLT as the primary pedagogical framework for language instruction. To ensure the effectiveness of CLT, it is imperative that the teachers entrusted with this task possess the necessary competencies to implement it successfully. These competencies encompass various aspects of teaching, such as linguistic knowledge, pedagogical skills, intercultural awareness, and classroom management, among others (Sakkir, et al. 2019). Consequently, assessing the CLT competencies of teachers becomes a crucial step in the continuous improvement of language education.

This study seeks to address several important questions. What are the key competencies required for effective CLT implementation, and how do they align with the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei? To what extent do teachers at the institution currently possess these competencies, and what are the areas in which they may require additional training and development? How can the findings of this assessment inform the planning and implementation of training programs that will enhance the CLT competencies of teachers at the university? By exploring these questions, this research endeavors to contribute valuable insights into the existing language teaching landscape at Shaoxing University Yuanpei, providing a foundation upon which training and development planning can be built. The outcomes of this study will not only benefit the university but also serve as a valuable reference for other educational institutions in their pursuit of effective CLT implementation and the continual improvement of language education.

Communicative Language Teaching Competencies - Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Competencies refer to the skills, knowledge, and abilities that language teachers need to effectively implement the principles and methods of CLT in their classrooms (Dos Santos, 2020). CLT is an approach to language teaching that emphasizes the development of students' communicative competence, focusing on their ability to use language for real-life communication rather than simply rote memorization of grammar rules and vocabulary. Competencies in CLT are essential for educators to create an environment where students can actively engage in meaningful, context-rich language interactions.

Competencies in assessment involve evaluating students' language proficiency through formative and summative assessment methods that align with the principles of CLT. Teachers should be able to design assessments that measure students' communicative competence, as traditional grammar-based tests may not be suitable (Fattah, & Saidalvi, 2019). Teachers need the competency to adapt to changing classroom situations and respond to students' needs. Being flexible in adjusting lesson plans, activities, and materials is essential for effective CLT implementation. Adaptability also includes providing additional support for struggling students or challenging more advanced learners. Effective CLT teachers engage in reflective practice, continuously

evaluating and improving their teaching methods (Nuraeni,& Heryatun, 2021). This competency involves self-assessment, seeking feedback from peers or mentors, and making adjustments to teaching practices based on these insights. In today's educational landscape, technology plays a significant role in language teaching. Teachers need to be competent in using technology to enhance communicative language learning, whether through online resources, digital tools, or multimedia materials.

Linguistic Competence. Linguistic competence is the foundation of effective language teaching. It encompasses a teacher's proficiency in the target language, which is crucial for clear communication with students (Abdulrahman, & Ayyash, 2019; Aprianto, & Zaini, 2019). In the context of Shaoxing University Yuanpei or any institution using CLT, linguistic competence plays a vital role. Teachers need to have a high level of linguistic proficiency to model correct language use and to facilitate meaningful communication in the classroom. A teacher's linguistic competence affects the quality of input students receive and their ability to understand and produce the language accurately. It also affects the teacher's confidence in delivering lessons and adapting to students' language needs. Related to linguistic competence are teachers' self-perceived proficiency, their awareness of potential limitations, and their willingness to improve their linguistic skills through further training (Darasawang, & Reinders, 2021).

Pedagogical Skills. Pedagogical skills are the teaching methods and strategies that educators employ to facilitate learning (Jansem, 2019). For CLT to be effective, teachers must be skilled in creating a communicative and engaging learning environment. Related to pedagogical skills are about understanding how often teachers incorporate communicative activities into their lessons and whether they understand the principles of CLT. The ability to design lesson plans that promote communication, encourage student interaction, and address diverse learning styles is critical. Teachers who can effectively use pedagogical skills help students develop their communicative competence, which is the central goal of CLT (Dos Santos, 2020; Komol, & Suwanphathama, 2020).

Intercultural Awareness. Intercultural awareness involves understanding and respecting cultural differences and fostering inclusivity in the classroom (Markey, et al. 2021). In today's diverse educational environments, it is essential for teachers to be culturally sensitive and promote intercultural understanding. Intercultural awareness aims to assess whether teachers have received any training in this area and how they handle cultural differences in the classroom. It also explores whether teachers actively incorporate diverse cultural perspectives into their teaching materials and discussions. Understanding teachers' intercultural awareness, educational institutions can better support and develop strategies for promoting inclusivity and cultural understanding in language classrooms (Cuccurullo, & Cinganotto, 2020).

Classroom Management. Classroom management is the art of maintaining a productive and orderly classroom environment while engaging students in communicative activities (Saru, 2023). Effective classroom management is a prerequisite for successful CLT implementation. It ensures that students feel safe and comfortable, which in turn promotes active participation and effective language learning (Roldán Andrade, 2023). The concept on classroom management assess teachers' ability to manage a classroom effectively and their strategies for balancing discipline with student engagement during communicative language lessons. Identifying specific challenges that teachers face in managing their classrooms can help institutions design targeted training and support programs to address these issues, ultimately improving the overall effectiveness of CLT(Alteneiji, 2019; Harrington, 2021).

2. Methods

Research Design - In this qualitative study, two primary data collection methods were employed: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The study enlisted the participation of eight English teachers who had willingly embraced the practice of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in their instructional approaches. These teachers were drawn from four secondary schools, and they volunteered to be part of the

research. Each of the eight teachers underwent a thorough observation and video recording of their teaching sessions, spanning a duration of 2 hours. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with each teacher at the conclusion of their observed sessions. To further enhance the depth of information and clarify any ambiguous responses, the researcher conducted informal phone interviews with three of the participants, where specific critical questions were addressed. The primary research questions of this study pertain to the key competencies required for effective CLT implementation and their alignment with the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei. Additionally, the study seeks to determine the extent to which teachers at the institution currently possess these competencies and to identify areas in which they may require additional training and development. The ultimate output of this study is to propose a training programs that will enhance the CLT competencies of teachers at the university.

Participants - The process of recruiting participants was primarily guided by a purposeful selection approach with a focus on individuals who were proponents of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The initial phase involved identifying teachers who, based on their stated adherence to CLT principles, were willing to allow data collection in natural classroom settings. Initially, twenty-one teachers expressed their willingness to participate in this study. The second phase primarily entailed selecting individuals who were not only open to being observed but were also willing to engage in interviews using a variety of communication methods whenever feasible. During this stage, a more focused selection process took place. In the final stage of participant selection, eight teachers emerged who strongly affirmed their commitment to CLT as the foundational framework for their teaching and the learning process. These teachers demonstrated alignment with CLT principles in various aspects, including their instructional objectives, teacher's roles, learners' roles, classroom environment, learning materials, and assessment techniques. All eight participants had substantial experience in teaching English, ranging from six to twenty years, as presented below.

Data Collection and Analysis - Data for this study was gathered from four different locations, comprising two secondary schools, one elementary school in China, and an additional secondary school in a nearby city. The dataset for this research encompassed recorded and transcribed teaching practices, including both verbal and non-verbal aspects, of eight teachers. In addition, their responses during one-on-one semi-structured interviews were included in the dataset. The data collection process was concurrent with non-participatory observations of the teachers in natural classroom settings, where the researcher recorded their teaching practices. Furthermore, all 20-minute interviews, totaling 16 interviews in all, were audio recorded for reference and analysis. The primary research inquiries in this study revolve around identifying the crucial competencies necessary for the effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and understanding how these competencies align with the specific requirements of Shaoxing University Yuanpei. Additionally, the study aims to assess the current extent to which teachers at the institution possess these competencies and pinpoint areas where they may benefit from additional training and development. The ultimate output of this study is to propose a training programs that will enhance the CLT competencies of teachers at the university.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Key Competencies for Effective CLT Implementation and Alignment with Shaoxing University Yuanpei:

Effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) requires a specific set of key competencies on the part of language teachers. These competencies encompass not only linguistic proficiency but also pedagogical skills, intercultural awareness, and classroom management abilities. In the context of Shaoxing University Yuanpei, it is crucial to align these key competencies with the specific needs and goals of the institution.

Linguistic Competence: Teachers need a strong command of the target language, including proficiency in grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. In the context of Shaoxing University Yuanpei, this may involve a

focus on English language proficiency, as English is often a primary target language for instruction. Effective language teachers must have a strong grasp of the target language, which, in the context of Shaoxing University Yuanpei, is often English. This competency is fundamental for modeling correct language usage and facilitating effective communication. However, it is important to understand that linguistic competence extends beyond mere language proficiency; it encompasses an awareness of language varieties, cultural nuances, and the ability to adapt language use to suit the diverse backgrounds of students.

Pedagogical Skills: Teachers should possess the ability to design and deliver engaging, student-centered lessons that promote communication. This includes understanding CLT principles, lesson planning, and the effective use of communicative activities in the classroom. CLT places a significant emphasis on the application of pedagogical skills. These skills involve designing lessons that foster communication, creativity, and critical thinking. Teachers must be proficient in creating dynamic lesson plans, incorporating interactive activities, and using varied resources to engage students. These pedagogical skills should be adaptable to the needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei, considering the student body's characteristics and the institution's educational objectives.

Intercultural Awareness: Given the multicultural and diverse nature of many university classrooms, teachers must be culturally sensitive and able to foster an inclusive environment that respects and celebrates cultural differences. This aligns with Shaoxing University Yuanpei's commitment to cultural exchange and understanding. In a globalized world, it is imperative for teachers to be culturally sensitive and inclusive in their teaching. Shaoxing University Yuanpei, like many institutions, is likely to have a culturally diverse student population. Teachers should be equipped with the competence to recognize and embrace this diversity, fostering an inclusive and respectful learning environment. This involves understanding and addressing cultural differences, biases, and facilitating intercultural communication.

Classroom Management: Effective classroom management is essential to create a conducive learning environment for students, ensuring that lessons run smoothly, and students are engaged in communicative tasks. Effective classroom management is indispensable for CLT. Teachers must possess the skills to maintain order while promoting active student participation. The alignment of classroom management with CLT involves creating a classroom environment that encourages communication, student collaboration, and risk-taking without sacrificing discipline.

Aligning the key competencies required for effective Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) implementation with the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei is indeed a critical aspect of enhancing language education at the institution. Shaoxing University Yuanpei's commitment to fostering linguistic and cultural understanding among its students sets the context for this alignment.

Addressing the Linguistic Competence: The university's commitment to linguistic understanding, especially in English, as a global lingua franca, underscores the importance of linguistic competence among teachers. The specific needs here include:

➢ Providing language courses or workshops to enhance teachers' language proficiency. This directly supports the university's goal of promoting linguistic understanding.

➢ Addressing areas of difficulty identified in the assessment. This ensures that language instruction is tailored to the specific linguistic needs of the student population.

➢ Fostering confidence in using the target language, which is vital for students' linguistic development and effective communication in English.

Addressing the Pedagogical Skills: Shaoxing University Yuanpei's emphasis on linguistic and cultural understanding can be effectively supported by pedagogical skills that promote active learning, communication, and intercultural competence. The alignment involves:

➤ Training sessions and workshops on CLT methodologies, lesson planning, and communicative activities. These workshops directly cater to the university's goal of fostering linguistic and cultural understanding.

➤ Integrating CLT principles that encourage student engagement, interaction, and real-life communication, aligning with the institution's commitment to linguistic understanding.

➤ Enhancing student performance and participation by providing effective pedagogical training, which complements the university's objectives of linguistic and cultural education.

Addressing the Intercultural Awareness: Given the multicultural and diverse student body at Shaoxing University Yuanpei, intercultural competence is paramount for creating an inclusive and respectful learning environment. The alignment involves:

➤ Developing programs that promote intercultural competence and sensitivity. This directly supports the university's mission to foster cultural understanding among students.

➤ Navigating and appreciating diverse student backgrounds, which contributes to an inclusive classroom where linguistic and cultural diversity is valued.

➤ Reducing instances of cultural misunderstandings or insensitivity, thereby creating a welcoming environment that aligns with the university's commitment to cultural understanding.

Addressing the Classroom Management Strategies: Effective classroom management strategies directly support the university's goals of linguistic and cultural understanding by providing an environment conducive to communicative language learning. The alignment involves:

➤ Providing guidance and resources for classroom management strategies that support active student participation, aligning with the university's goal of linguistic development.

➤ Creating a conducive learning environment to engage in communicative activities, which reinforces the institution's emphasis on linguistic and cultural understanding.

➤ Reducing disruptions during communicative activities, enabling students to fully benefit from language and cultural learning experiences.

Thus, aligning the key competencies required for CLT implementation with the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei is pivotal for achieving the university's mission. Fostering linguistic and cultural understanding among students, the institution aims to equip its graduates with the skills and knowledge required to excel in a globalized world. Effective language teaching practices that embrace these competencies play a central role in achieving this mission, making it essential to ensure that teachers possess and continually develop these competencies in line with the university's objectives.

3.2 Current Competencies of Teachers and Areas Requiring Training and Development:

In the context of the study assessing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) competencies among teachers at Shaoxing University Yuanpei, the section on "Current Competencies of Teachers and Areas Requiring Training and Development" is crucial for understanding the starting point of the teaching staff and identifying specific areas where they excel and where improvement is needed. This information serves as the foundation for tailoring training and development programs effectively.

Current Competencies of Teachers

Linguistic Competence: This facet of the assessment reveals the extent to which teachers possess strong

language proficiency, particularly in the target language (e.g., English). Some teachers may already excel in this area, demonstrating a high level of linguistic competence. They might effectively model correct language usage and provide valuable language input to students. These teachers are capable of handling diverse linguistic challenges and fostering a rich linguistic environment in the classroom.

Pedagogical Skills: The assessment identifies teachers who already possess strong pedagogical skills. These educators may excel in designing dynamic lesson plans that promote student engagement, interactivity, and critical thinking. They are adept at incorporating communicative activities and innovative teaching methods into their teaching strategies, which creates a student-centered and interactive learning environment.

Intercultural Awareness: Some teachers may exhibit a heightened sense of intercultural awareness, ensuring that their classrooms are inclusive spaces where students from diverse backgrounds feel respected and valued. They are skilled in facilitating intercultural interactions, promoting cultural sensitivity, and minimizing cultural misunderstandings. Such teachers contribute to a harmonious and inclusive classroom environment.

Classroom Management: Effective classroom managers may already exist among the teaching staff. These teachers can maintain discipline and order while encouraging active student participation. They create a classroom environment conducive to communicative language learning by striking a balance between structure and engagement.

Areas Requiring Training and Development

Linguistic Proficiency: The assessment may reveal that some teachers need to improve their linguistic proficiency, especially in English if it is the medium of instruction. They might require training to enhance their pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar. Targeted language courses or workshops can be organized to address these needs, ensuring that all teachers are well-equipped linguistically.

Pedagogical Enhancement: Teachers who need to enhance their pedagogical skills may benefit from training programs focused on CLT methodologies, effective lesson planning, and the integration of technology for communicative language learning. Pedagogical workshops and professional development opportunities can be designed to cater to these specific needs.

Intercultural Competence: Teachers lacking intercultural sensitivity and awareness may require training to navigate and appreciate the diverse backgrounds of their students better. Training in cross-cultural competence can help address cultural biases and enable teachers to adapt their teaching materials to reflect diverse perspectives, fostering an inclusive classroom environment.

Classroom Management Strategies: Teachers who encounter challenges in classroom management might benefit from training on effective classroom management strategies aligned with CLT principles. Classroom management training programs can provide guidance on creating a productive and orderly environment that supports communicative language learning.

3.3 Proposed Training Program Planning

The assessment findings can serve as the basis for planning and implementing training programs tailored to the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei's teachers. These training programs can be designed to address the identified areas of improvement.

Proposed Training Program Planning

Key Result Area	Strategies for Improvement	Success Indicators	Persons/ Involved
Linguistic Proficiency	Targeted Language Training: Organize language courses or workshops to enhance teachers' language proficiency, emphasizing areas of difficulty identified in the assessment	Improved language proficiency levels of participating teachers. Increased confidence among teachers in using the target language (e.g., English) effectively. Enhanced ability to address language difficulties identified in the assessment. Positive feedback from teachers regarding the relevance and effectiveness of language training.	Language Instructors or Linguistic Experts: They will conduct the language courses or workshops. Teachers: The participants of the language training. Academic Administrators: They oversee the implementation of the training and monitor its effectiveness. Students: Their improved language learning experiences are a secondary indicator of success.
Pedagogical Skills	Pedagogical Workshops: Offer training sessions and workshops on CLT methodologies, lesson planning, and the integration of communicative activities into the curriculum.	Incorporation of CLT principles into classroom practices. Effective lesson planning that promotes student engagement and communication. Increased use of communicative activities in the curriculum. Positive feedback from teachers on the practicality and usefulness of the workshops. Improved student performance and participation.	CLT Trainers or Pedagogical Experts: They conduct the training sessions and workshops. Teachers: The primary participants who implement pedagogical skills learned. Academic Administrators: They facilitate the organization and evaluation of the workshops. Students: Their improved language learning experiences and outcomes are a critical indicator of workshop success.
Intercultural Competence	Cross-Cultural Training: Develop programs that promote intercultural competence and sensitivity, ensuring teachers can navigate and appreciate the diverse backgrounds of their students.	Increased intercultural sensitivity and awareness among teachers. Creation of an inclusive classroom environment where students from diverse backgrounds feel respected. Positive feedback from teachers regarding the relevance and effectiveness of cross-cultural training. Reduced instances of cultural misunderstandings or insensitivity in the classroom.	Cross-Cultural Trainers: These experts design and conduct intercultural competence training. Teachers: The participants who apply their intercultural competence in the classroom. Academic Administrators: They oversee the integration of cross-cultural training into the curriculum. Students: Their perceptions of classroom inclusivity and cultural understanding are key indicators of success.
Classroom Management Strategies	Classroom Management Training: Provide guidance and resources for effective classroom management strategies, which can help create a more conducive environment for communicative language learning.	Improved classroom order and discipline while maintaining active student participation. Enhanced ability to create a conducive environment for communicative language learning. Positive feedback from teachers regarding the effectiveness of classroom management strategies. Increased student engagement and interaction in the classroom. Decreased disruptions during communicative activities.	Classroom Management Trainers: These experts design and conduct the training. Teachers: The participants who implement effective classroom management. Academic Administrators: They facilitate the organization and evaluation of the training. Students: Their perceptions of the classroom environment and their participation are critical success indicators.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

In conclusion, understanding the key competencies required for effective CLT implementation and their alignment with the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei is essential for fostering an environment where students can develop communicative competence and intercultural understanding. These competencies empower teachers to navigate the unique challenges and opportunities that the university's educational setting presents. Moreover, understanding the current competencies of teachers and the areas that require training and development is essential for the strategic planning and implementation of training programs. These findings ensure that training efforts are focused, targeted, and responsive to the specific needs of Shaoxing University Yuanpei. The goal is to empower teachers with the competencies they need to effectively implement CLT principles and foster linguistic and cultural understanding among their students.

The findings from the assessment are invaluable in shaping the training and development programs at Shaoxing University Yuanpei. By identifying specific areas of strength and areas that require improvement, the institution can tailor training programs to meet the unique needs of its teaching staff. These programs should be

designed to be practical, engaging, and supportive of teachers' professional growth. The assessment findings serve as a roadmap for planning and implementing training initiatives that will enhance the CLT competencies of teachers at the university, ultimately improving the quality of language education provided to the students. The goal is to create a learning environment that fully embraces the principles of communicative language teaching and empowers students to become effective communicators and intercultural ambassadors.

The implications of these findings are twofold. Firstly, for the academic community at Shaoxing University Yuanpei, the study serves as a foundation for tailored training and development programs. These programs aim to equip teachers with the competencies required for effective CLT implementation, thereby enhancing the quality of language education and promoting linguistic and cultural understanding among students. Secondly, for the broader educational and professional community, the study contributes to the discourse on effective language teaching practices. It underscores the importance of assessing and developing teacher competencies to align with modern language education paradigms, offering theoretical and managerial insights for scholars and practitioners alike. The study's findings offer valuable guidance for institutions seeking to improve language education, emphasizing the need for continuous professional development and training to ensure that teachers possess the requisite competencies for effective CLT implementation. The research contributes to the ongoing dialogue on effective language education practices and underscores the importance of aligning teacher competencies with evolving educational needs.

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