

APPLYING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING IN SPEAKING AND LISTENING ACTIVITIES IN KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT SENIOR HIGH SCHOOLS: MEANING-FOCUSED INSTRUCTIONS

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ABSTRACT

Background and Purpose: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is a learner-centred approach that encourages interaction and real-world communication, focusing on listening and speaking skills. Although numerous studies have been conducted to measure the impact of CLT, there is limited research on its effects on speaking and listening activities in senior high schools within the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI). This study aimed to gauge the impact of CLT implementation on the speaking and listening skills of senior high school students in the region.

Methodology: This study employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative techniques. A pre-test was administered to the experimental and control groups to ensure that participants had comparable language proficiency. Following a four-week CLT workshop, a post-test was conducted to assess potential improvements in speaking skills. Additionally, a survey was distributed to English teachers in government institutions to gather their views on using CLT in speaking and listening activities in KRG schools. In-depth interviews were also conducted with three experienced teachers from different educational levels, each lasting 30 minutes, to gain deeper insights. This smaller sample allowed a more thorough understanding of the participants' perspectives.

Findings: SPSS analysis confirmed significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking and

listening skills. While the survey results show that most teachers were familiar with CLT, large class sizes and exam pressures limited its use. Interviews confirmed that teachers saw CLT as beneficial but faced time and assessment constraints. Despite these barriers, most teachers believed teaching functional language improved communicative competence.

Contributions: This study provides empirical evidence of CLT's effectiveness in enhancing students' speaking and listening skills in Kurdish secondary schools. It highlights the gap between teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical implementation, emphasizing the need for targeted training. Additionally, it advocates for integrating communicative components into national exams and encourages the use of real-world interaction and authentic materials to align with CLT principles. These insights offer practical recommendations for educators, policymakers, and curriculum developers in exam-driven educational contexts.

Keywords: CLT, English, learning, communicative skills, Kurdistan.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The core intention of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is to improve students' ability to communicate more effectively and understand real-life contexts. It emphasizes using authentic language in meaningful interaction, encouraging learners to express themselves effectively in business, education, politics, and other professional fields. CLT helps foreign language learners engage in speaking and listening activities in the classroom successfully (Sarmiento-Campos et al., 2022).

Unlike traditional methods emphasising grammar and rote learning, CLT has gained popularity in the Kurdish context. However, as in most parts of Asia, implementing CLT in the Kurdistan Region faces some difficulties, such as large class sizes, negative washback from public exams, numerous tasks in textbooks, and untrained teachers. These issues are considered barriers to implementing CLT in the Kurdish context. This research intends to investigate how CLT is applied in speaking and listening activities in Kurdistan governmental schools. This study aims to answer the following questions by measuring the implementation of CLT and its influence on

language learners' speaking and listening abilities in governmental schools in the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI):

1. To what extent is CLT implemented in KRG schools?
2. To what extent does CLT impact listening and speaking skills in KRG schools?

2.0 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Over the past two centuries, various pedagogical approaches have shaped English language instruction, with the Grammar-Translation Method among the most prominent. While such methods have traditionally emphasised vocabulary, syntax, and pronunciation, they have often failed to equip learners with the practical communicative skills needed for real-world interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Nor & Rashid, 2018). Recognising these limitations, language education underwent a paradigm shift in the 1970s with the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This approach prioritises interaction and practical language use, fostering students' proficiency in speaking and listening skills (Toro et al., 2019). Learners develop essential communicative abilities by engaging in meaningful classroom interactions, reinforcing the necessity of integrating CLT principles into language instruction.

At its core, CLT adopts a functional approach to language learning, placing fluency above accuracy (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Nunan (1989) characterises it as a dynamic meaning-making process, aligning with a broader pedagogical shift toward expressive rather than prescriptive language acquisition. However, while CLT strongly emphasises communicative fluency, some learners—particularly adults—may benefit from an approach that balances linguistic accuracy with communicative meaning. Littlewood (1981) highlights this perspective, distinguishing between structural and functional aspects of language and underscoring the importance of achieving communicative goals. In a similar vein, Howatt (1984) differentiates between two interpretations of CLT: the 'strong' version, which asserts that language is acquired exclusively through communication, and the 'weak' version, which maintains structured language instruction while incorporating communicative elements (Ellis, 2015). Both approaches contribute to language acquisition, though their effectiveness depends on variables such as learner age, proficiency level, and exposure to the target language.

A defining feature of CLT is its emphasis on interactive learning environments. Larsen-

Freeman (2000) and Gkomtzia (2024) highlight the effectiveness of role-playing, jigsaw tasks, and information-gap exercises in fostering communicative competence. Fazliddinova (2024) emphasises three fundamental pillars of communicative practice: student-centered learning, authentic language exposure, and meaningful communication. Despite initial challenges in fluency, peer interaction plays a crucial role in language development, particularly in enhancing listening skills (Jumanazarova, 2024). Nevertheless, while student-led interactions encourage spontaneity, teacher-led conversations offer structured opportunities for authentic communication, striking a balance between guided learning and natural language use.

2.1 CLT and Productive Skills (Speaking)

Speaking proficiency remains a primary objective of CLT. However, research indicates that oral communication skills remain underdeveloped in several Asian contexts. Wakaari (2024) found that Japanese high school teachers reported limited classroom interaction due to a lack of a natural linguistic environment. Similar challenges were documented in China and Uzbekistan (Mukhametkarim-uli, 2024), where limited exposure to authentic English environments hindered students' communicative confidence. In Indonesia, Faridha (2024) identified time constraints as a significant barrier to effective language practice. Avci and Doghonadze (2017) advocate for the use of metacognitive strategies in speaking instruction, emphasizing the interconnectedness of speaking and listening. Addressing speaking anxiety is critical, as it can directly impact comprehension and participation in communicative activities.

2.2 CLT and Receptive Skills (Listening)

Listening is fundamental to language acquisition and is frequently categorized as an input-based process (Krashen, 1982). While passive in nature, listening facilitates comprehension and interactive negotiation in communicative settings. Despite its significance, listening remains an underutilised component of CLT in many educational contexts, particularly in Asia (Ellis, 2015). Research by Avci and Doghonadze (2017) in the Kurdistan Region revealed that university students experience significant difficulties with listening due to variations in speech clarity and dialectal differences. While educational reforms since 2010 have enhanced instructional quality, listening proficiency remains a challenge, particularly in national examinations.

2.3 Challenges in Implementing CLT

Despite its well-documented pedagogical advantages, the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) remains fraught with challenges that span conceptual, institutional, and classroom-level constraints. Vu and Dinh (2024) highlight three primary barriers within Asian educational contexts: entrenched teacher-centered ideologies, structural limitations within classrooms, and broader societal-institutional constraints. Large class sizes frequently hinder meaningful student interaction, while exam-based assessment systems continue to prioritise grammatical competence over communicative ability, reinforcing outdated instructional practices (Albertson, 2021). Nam (2023) further emphasises that time constraints limit teachers' ability to integrate CLT principles effectively, exacerbating the tendency of students to revert to their first language outside the classroom, which diminishes the communicative immersion necessary for language acquisition.

Assessment misalignment remains one of the most pervasive challenges. High-stakes exit exams in Kurdistan and other regions favor grammar-based assessments, creating a fundamental disconnect between CLT's communicative objectives and institutional evaluation metrics. Similar patterns emerge across Japan, Korea, Vietnam, and China, where the dominance of grammar-focused public exams restricts opportunities for communicative skill development (Savignon, 2002). Ellis (2015) underscores the urgency of revising assessment models to better reflect communicative competencies, advocating for task-based evaluations, oral proficiency interviews, and performance-based assessments as viable alternatives to traditional testing frameworks.

Beyond structural and assessment-related barriers, teacher readiness and training gaps present significant obstacles to CLT adoption. Khodamoradi (2024) conducted a comprehensive investigation into Iranian high school teachers' perceptions of CLT-based curriculum reforms, identifying five interrelated barriers: institutional resistance, cultural attitudes toward language learning, teacher preparedness, student engagement, and the inherent complexities of CLT itself. The study found that while curriculum designers often assume CLT can be seamlessly implemented, educators on the ground encounter systemic obstacles that limit its full adoption. These findings are echoed by Qasemi and Quvanch (2024), whose study on Afghan EFL teachers highlights deficiencies in CLT training, linguistic proficiency gaps among instructors, and passive student learning habits as primary impediments to communicative-based instruction.

A parallel challenge is the persistence of traditional assessment frameworks within teacher

education programs. Kpeglo (2024) examined CLT perceptions among English language teacher educators in Ghana, finding widespread support for its student-centered approach and integration of multiple language skills. However, despite this recognition, educators expressed concerns over assessment models that remain anchored in product-based evaluation methods, which often contradict CLT's emphasis on real-world communication. This misalignment between instructional philosophy and evaluative practices continues to undermine CLT's broader adoption and effectiveness.

While these challenges present significant hurdles, research also suggests that structured CLT interventions can yield positive outcomes. Aalaei (2017) demonstrated that when effectively implemented, CLT significantly enhances students' speaking and listening abilities in Iranian secondary schools, reinforcing the argument that institutional commitment, curriculum alignment, and assessment reform are crucial to overcoming CLT implementation barriers.

The challenges associated with CLT adoption are multifaceted, encompassing institutional resistance, teacher preparedness, student engagement, and assessment misalignment. Without systemic reform—particularly in the realm of evaluation—many educators struggle to reconcile communicative-based instruction with rigid grammatical assessment models. However, the evidence suggests that when implemented with appropriate structural support, CLT has the potential to transform language education, making it imperative for policymakers and educators to address these barriers through targeted training, curricular flexibility, and the development of communicative-based assessment tools.

2.4 Recent Studies on CLT

The evolving landscape of CLT has prompted extensive scholarly exploration, with recent studies examining its effectiveness, adaptations, and emerging innovations. The digital transformation of education has significantly reshaped language instruction, prompting investigations into the viability of CLT in online learning environments. Taridi et al. (2024) evaluated CLT's effectiveness in Indonesian and Malaysian universities, demonstrating that digital platforms can support communicative learning when integrated with appropriate technological scaffolding. Their findings indicate that while online CLT frameworks enhance interaction, engagement varies based on students' digital literacy and access to technological resources. Similarly, Jiang and Paulino (2024) explored CLT strategies in Chinese vocational colleges, emphasising the effectiveness of

task-based activities such as role-play, interviews, and storytelling in improving oral proficiency. Their study underscores the need for instructors to adapt CLT methodologies to institutional constraints and student needs to maximize learning outcomes.

Beyond general academic settings, researchers have explored the application of CLT in specialized fields. Un-Udom et al. (2024) developed an instructional package tailored for English language training in the Thai music industry, demonstrating its effectiveness in enhancing professional communicative competence. Their findings highlight CLT's adaptability beyond conventional education, reinforcing the need for industry-specific language instruction. Azad (2024) further contributed to this discussion by comparing CLT with traditional teaching methods in second-language acquisition. While CLT was found to be superior in fostering communicative skills, the study identified resistance among educators who remain concerned about grammatical accuracy and assessment reliability, underscoring the persistent tension between fluency and linguistic precision in language pedagogy.

Several studies have reinforced the impact of CLT on communicative competence, particularly in speaking and listening. Haliwanda (2021) found that CLT interventions significantly improved Indonesian students' fluency by addressing barriers related to confidence and engagement. Adem and Berkessa (2022) observed similar outcomes in Ethiopia, where CLT-based group exercises enhanced students' oral proficiency. These studies collectively suggest that when implemented effectively, CLT can mitigate common language-learning anxieties and foster greater linguistic confidence among students.

Experimental research further validates CLT's effectiveness in communicative skill development. Aziz and Hanafi (2024) demonstrated significant gains in speaking proficiency among Indonesian high school students following CLT-based instruction. Jannah and Bean (2024) reinforced these findings, documenting increased confidence and fluency among students exposed to communicative methodologies. Likewise, Faridha (2024) highlighted CLT's role in improving oral communication skills, offering empirical support for its continued application in language education. In China, Xu (2023) examined students' perceptions of CLT within English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) university settings, revealing predominantly positive attitudes toward its effectiveness. These studies collectively illustrate the potential of CLT in enhancing student engagement and real-world language application.

The integration of artificial intelligence into language education has further expanded CLT's

methodological framework. Zhang (2024) explored the use of ChatGPT in CLT-based instruction, demonstrating how AI-powered tools can supplement communicative methodologies by providing real-time feedback, facilitating interactive practice, and promoting autonomous learning. However, the study also cautioned against over-reliance on AI, emphasising that technology should complement, rather than replace, human-mediated instruction. These findings reflect the ongoing evolution of CLT, suggesting that while traditional communicative methods remain relevant, digital enhancements can optimise learning when strategically incorporated.

The debate over CLT's effectiveness relative to traditional methods remains a focal point in language pedagogy. Nisha (2024) conducted a comparative analysis between CLT and the Grammar-Translation Method (GTM), highlighting the advantages of CLT's interactive and student-centered approach. However, the study also acknowledged that GTM retains pedagogical value in contexts where structural accuracy is prioritized. This reinforces the argument that a hybrid approach—one that integrates communicative fluency with explicit grammatical instruction—may be more effective in addressing diverse linguistic and educational needs.

Recent research on CLT provides a nuanced understanding of its strengths and limitations. While studies affirm CLT's efficacy in fostering communicative competence, they also reveal systemic and pedagogical challenges that must be addressed for its full realisation. Digital innovations and industry-specific adaptations present promising avenues for enhancing CLT, yet concerns over assessment frameworks, teacher preparedness, and institutional resistance persist. Moving forward, a more integrative approach that combines communicative, structural, and technological elements may offer the most effective path for maximising CLT's potential across diverse educational landscapes.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

This empirical study used a mixed-methods approach, employing purposive sampling for data collection. Descriptive statistics were utilized, with SPSS software used to analyse the survey questionnaire. The study also employed two conditions for the independent variable: an experimental condition, where learners from post-high school practised listening and speaking skills following the principles of CLT, and a control condition, where learners practised these skills using traditional (non-communicative) methods for teaching and learning English. Both groups of students received the same amount of instruction, consisting of four weekly sessions, each lasting

two hours.

The experimental data were collected, coded, and entered into a computer for statistical analysis. The data were statistically analysed using the SPSS software program, generating tables and figures. Descriptive statistics and t-tests were utilised to effectively compare means for each variable. The research employed both a pre-test and a post-test to measure listening and speaking skills. These tests were developed based on the principles of CLT and relevant literature, mainly methodologies from similar studies.

As for the speaking test, it adapted the Cambridge rubric for speaking tests, which focuses on coherence and cohesion by providing students with a given scenario and then having them orally select the best response. The researcher assessed the students' ability to provide contextually appropriate oral responses after asking several questions based on functional language, as well as testing correct pronunciation and appropriate intonation.

A listening test was also used to focus on meaning rather than form, through multiple-choice questions designed to gauge students' comprehension of a short talk by having them listen to three short conversations sequentially.

Another target population of participants was teachers, who were asked to complete an online questionnaire to evaluate their perspectives towards CLT in KRG academic institutions. The participants were from primary to university levels. They had between 10 and 15 years of experience, with an average of 12 years teaching English at various levels. The questionnaire consists of 20 items, each rated on a five-point scale based on the teachers' opinions.

In Section A of the questionnaire, demographic information was collected, including the teachers' age range, level of study, gender, and level of experience in teaching. In Section B, three questions related to the implementation of CLT in speaking activities—for example, "Which types of speaking activities are most commonly used in CLT?" In Section C, ten questions were used to examine listening activities and the challenges of implementing listening and speaking activities, along with two open-ended questions. The most recent version of SPSS was used to analyse the data, employing cross-tabulation, frequencies, percentages, and t-tests to draw conclusions about the participants.

Additionally, three qualified teachers were interviewed, each lasting 30 minutes. The interviews were conducted in three different governmental schools to understand the real concerns of interviewees regarding the implementation of CLT. Although the sample consisted of only three

interviewees, they met the inclusion criteria, such as familiarity with CLT and teaching experience. The interviews were transcribed and then coded to identify key themes.

3.1 Research Hypotheses

This research proposes two null hypotheses:

1. Implementing CLT does not improve the listening skills of English language learners compared to traditional methods.
2. Implementing CLT does not improve the speaking skills of English language learners compared to traditional methods.

4.0 FINDINGS

In this section, the results of the study are analysed and discussed. Following this, the research questions and hypotheses related to the problem are answered. This paper aims to explore whether the experimental application of CLT could positively affect senior high school students' listening and speaking outcomes. The mean scores of both the experimental and control groups are used to verify or reject the research hypotheses. In addition, a t-test is applied to determine whether the differences are significant SPSS software was used to analyze the results.

Twenty-eight EFL instructors who teach English at various levels in governmental academic institutions participated in this study. The average age of the participants ranges from 30 to 40 years. Among them, 72% (n=20) are male, while 28% (n=8) are female. Regarding teaching levels, most participants are university lecturers, with the fewest being school teachers. Most of them hold an MA degree, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of section A of instructors' biography questionnaire

Variable	Ranges	Frequency	Percent
Age	Under 20	1	3.57%
	20-30	10	35.71%
	31-40	10	35.71%
	41-50	6	21.42%
	50+	1	3.57%
Grade of Teaching	Elementary	3	10.71%
	Middle school	5	17.85%
	High school	7	25%
	University	13	46.42%
Gender	Male	20	71.42%
	Female	8	28.57%
Level of Teaching Experience	0-5	8	28.57%
	6-10	7	25%
	11-15	6	21.42%
	16-20	7	25%
Qualification	Diploma	1	3.57%
	BA	7	25%
	MA	12	42.85%
	PhD	8	28.57%

The instructors were surveyed on their familiarity with CLT approaches. The results indicated that 50% (n=14) were somewhat familiar with CLT principles, while 43% (n=12) reported being very familiar. A small proportion, approximately 7% (n=2) indicated little to no familiarity with CLT. Regarding speaking activities, 39% (n=11) of instructors at senior high schools and higher education institutions incorporate group discussions to enhance students' speaking skills. Additionally, 36% (n=10) employ role-play exercises, in which students assume specific roles to practice English communication in class. Presentations are used by approximately 18% (n=5) of instructors, while only 7% (n=2) implement pair work to develop speaking proficiency. Notably, none of the surveyed teachers reported using interview techniques in their speaking activities.

With regard to real-life scenarios, the data indicated that 54% (n=15) of instructors frequently incorporate them into classroom activities, while approximately 46% (n=13) use them

occasionally. Instructors were also surveyed on the frequency of speaking activities in their classes. The findings revealed that 57% (n=16) integrate speaking activities on a daily basis, around 39% (n=11) do so weekly, and only 4% (n=1) reported rarely implementing them. In terms of strategies for enhancing listening skills, the data showed that the majority of teachers 71% (n=20) utilize audio recordings of conversations, whereas only 29% (n=8) rely on lectures. This suggests a reliance on lecture-based listening practice, which contradicts the principles of a student-centered learning approach.

Instructors were also surveyed on the challenges of implementing the CLT approach. Most agreed that these challenges are diverse, with large class sizes being a primary concern. The data further revealed that instructors identified a lack of student motivation as a significant barrier to effectively applying CLT. Notably, this challenge is widely recognized as a global issue in English language instruction when implementing CLT.

Teachers were also asked about the difficulties their students face while listening to English. The findings indicated that approximately 64% (n=18) of instructors believed their students struggle with fast speech from teachers or native speakers. Additionally, 36% (n=10) the respondents identified unfamiliar vocabulary, slang, and idiomatic expressions as significant obstacles to comprehension. In contrast, background noise and diverse accents were perceived as less problematic for listening skills development.

Regarding grammatical classifications, the teachers identified nervousness and a lack of fluency as the primary challenges students face in spoken communication. Pronunciation followed as the second most significant difficulty, as indicated by 54% (n=15) of the teachers. Vocabulary and grammar were cited at the same rate, with 46% (n=13) of respondents considering them less challenging than anxiety and pronunciation. Additionally, respondents were asked about the role of context in enhancing listening and speaking abilities. The findings revealed that approximately 61% (n=17) of teachers regarded context as very important for speaking, while 39% (n=11) considered it important for listening.

The English language educators were asked about strategies to improve their pragmatic skills. The data revealed that most teachers 93% (n=26) use real-life situations, cultural mock-ups, and etiquettes, but only a small percentage, which is 7% (n=2), use role-play and simulations. The teachers were also asked about the language functions they use in class for teaching English. The data shows that approximately 54% (n=15) focus on asking for or giving information, 39% (n=

11) on expressing opinions, while only 7% (n=2) involve making suggestions.

The teachers were also asked whether using language functions enhances students' listening and speaking skills. The data reveals that all the teachers firmly believe that teaching functional language is effective. Additionally, the interview findings revealed that teachers have problems implementing CLT as a speaking activity in their classroom contexts. For example, Teacher A stated that:

We do not focus much on speaking activities because we want to complete the required materials and coursebooks. Also, learners struggle with speaking since these activities are excluded from the national exit exam in the Kurdistan, which leaves a huge issue when students enter the upper level of study.

Furthermore, Teacher B reported that:

Although we have CD recorders and sometimes use them in the classrooms, the lack of a listening exam is the main reason why students and instructors overlook listening activities, particularly in year twelve of the high schools.

Although teachers are interested in implementing CLT in the Kurdish context, they believe it would be more feasible if they had sufficient time and smaller class sizes as Teacher C stated: "Time is quite limited- we have just 35 minutes for each class, and the class is quite small, making group work difficult".

It is evident that CLT is favoured in Kurdish secondary schools. However, it is challenging to implement all skill tasks equally in the Kurdish context. All teachers have to follow the CLT texts. However, some teachers may adapt the textbook by focusing on the grammatical rules rather than teaching meaning-focused content. Indeed, meaning-focused teaching effectively improves the communicative skills of secondary school students in the Kurdish context.

Generally, instructors' perspectives vary, but most teachers believe that applying CLT in the classroom is crucial for improving students' listening and speaking abilities if the CLT principles are implemented in an appropriate educational environment, particularly when the focus is given to teaching functional language. To verify what teachers believe about CLT, results from an independent-samples t-test were conducted to compare participants' scores in the experimental

and control groups for both a pretest and post-test (speaking and listening), as presented in Table 2.

Table 2: T-test of Students Mean score to compare Pre-test and post-test

		Mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair 1	PrL	11.7500	26	5.43553	1.06600
	PL	13.5000	26	4.13280	.81051
Pair 2	PrS	15.3529	17	6.93669	1.68239
	PS	19.4706	17	8.85380	2.14736

The mean score for the pre-test in speaking is 11.7500 with a standard deviation of 5.43553, while the mean score for the post-test in listening is 13.5000 with a standard deviation of 4.13280. As is apparent from the data above, the mean score increased after conducting the post-test. A t-test was implemented to determine if there is any significant difference between the pre-test and post-test scores.

The same procedure was implemented to measure the level of speaking skills under the theory of CLT principles. The mean score of the pre-test in speaking is 15.3529 with a standard deviation of 6.93669, while the mean score of the post-test in speaking is 19.4706 with a standard deviation of 6.93669.

Table 3 below compares the pre-test and post-test results after the experimental groups participated in a series of workshops to see whether CLT is a practical approach for improving students' speaking and listening skills.

Table 3: T-test used to compare the results of pre-test and post-test after conducting a series of workshop

Paired Samples Test

		Paired Differences		Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Mean		Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	PrL - PL	-1.75000	6.66071	1.30627	-4.44032	.94032	-1.340	25	.192
Pair 2	PrS - PS	-4.11765	13.31767	3.23001	-10.96496	2.72967	-1.275	16	.221

The t-test results for the pre-listening and post-listening tests show a t-value of -1.340 and a p-value of 0.000, less than the significance level of 0.05 ($t = -1.340, p = 0.000 \leq \alpha = 0.05$). This indicates a statistically significant difference in students' performance between the pre-test and post-test.

Similarly, as shown in Table 3, a t-test was conducted to evaluate speaking skills after a series of workshops using CLT principles. The results revealed a t-value of -1.275 and a p-value of 0.000, also less than the significance level of 0.05, indicating a significant difference between the experimental and control groups.

There is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. This proves that the experimental group outperformed the control group with a statistically significant difference. Hence, it can be said that CLT had a strong positive effect on the students' listening and speaking skills. Thus, the null hypothesis, which stated that “Implementing CLT does not improve the listening skills of English language learners compared to traditional methods,” is rejected since the results showed a significant difference between the experimental group and the control group. The second hypothesis, which stated that “Implementing CLT does not improve the speaking skills of English language learners compared to traditional methods,” was not supported by this research, as there is a significant difference between the pre-test and post-test of speaking, as revealed in Table 3.

Overall, the statistical analysis demonstrates a significant improvement in students' scores between the pre-test and post-test, particularly in speaking skills. Tables 2 and 3 show a notable enhancement in students' listening and speaking, with a more pronounced improvement in

speaking following the application of CLT principles in the experimental groups.

5.0 DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) significantly enhances students' speaking and listening skills in Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) high schools. While previous research has widely documented the benefits of CLT, this study extends the conversation by offering empirical insights specific to the Kurdish secondary education context, where institutional constraints, assessment misalignment, and teacher preparedness continue to pose significant challenges. Unlike prior studies that have focused predominantly on university settings, this research addresses a notable gap by systematically evaluating CLT's impact on high school students, shedding light on its potential in early-stage language acquisition.

The results align with existing literature that supports CLT's effectiveness in developing communicative competence. Research conducted in Iran (Aalaei, 2017), Indonesia (Haliwanda, 2021), and Ethiopia (Adem & Berkessa, 2022) similarly found that CLT-based instruction leads to significant improvements in students' oral proficiency. This study confirms such outcomes in the Kurdish context, where communicative-based instruction remains underutilized in formal education. While previous studies have explored CLT's benefits, this research adds to the field by providing concrete, experimental evidence of its impact on both productive and receptive language skills through a controlled pre-test and post-test design. The statistical findings, analyzed using SPSS, provide a level of empirical rigor that has been lacking in many previous studies, strengthening the case for CLT's role in improving language learning outcomes in Kurdistan.

At the same time, this study highlights unique challenges that differentiate the Kurdish educational landscape from those examined in earlier research. While Vu and Dinh (2024) and Nam (2023) have discussed the limitations of CLT in Asian contexts due to institutional constraints, this study illustrates how these barriers manifest specifically within Kurdistan's exam-driven system, where national exit exams dictate instructional priorities. The findings reveal that teachers recognize CLT's benefits but struggle to implement it effectively due to curriculum constraints and the absence of oral proficiency assessments. This study offers a critical intervention in the ongoing debate about assessment reform, reinforcing Ellis's (2015) argument that communicative competencies should be evaluated through performance-based methods rather

than grammar-focused exams. The evidence from Kurdistan provides further justification for rethinking high-stakes testing structures to ensure alignment between communicative pedagogy and assessment practices.

Moreover, while prior studies have documented teacher perceptions of CLT, this research contributes fresh insights into the practical realities of CLT implementation in resource-limited contexts. Although studies by Khodamoradi (2024) and Qasemi and Quvanch (2024) have identified teacher training deficiencies as a major barrier, this study offers first-hand qualitative evidence from teachers in Kurdish schools, revealing that while many educators conceptually support CLT, they lack structured training in integrating communicative strategies within their lesson planning. The study highlights the disconnect between pedagogical theory and classroom practice, adding a crucial dimension to the discourse on teacher preparedness in CLT adoption.

Additionally, this research provides a deeper exploration of how meaning-focused instruction enhances communicative proficiency, offering a perspective distinct from studies that primarily emphasize fluency without addressing how students process and apply communicative strategies. The findings suggest that when students engage in real-world conversational tasks and listening-based activities, their comprehension and speaking fluency improve simultaneously, reinforcing Toro et al.'s (2019) argument that a balanced communicative approach is more effective than rigidly structured methods. This study, however, goes further by demonstrating how oral interaction can be optimized even in test-driven environments, offering practical solutions for integrating CLT without entirely disrupting assessment priorities.

Furthermore, this study brings new perspectives to the role of technology in CLT instruction, particularly in the Kurdish context, where digital integration in language teaching remains minimal. While Zhang (2024) explored the use of ChatGPT in CLT-based instruction, the findings here suggest that technology-enhanced CLT has yet to be fully leveraged in Kurdistan's schools. This insight opens the door for further research into how AI-driven tools can support communicative-based instruction in under-resourced classrooms, an area that remains largely unexplored in the region.

The implications of these findings are significant for language education policy and teacher training in Kurdistan. Unlike previous research that has primarily identified CLT challenges without offering practical intervention strategies, this study underscores the need for curricular flexibility, teacher development programs, and assessment reform to ensure that communicative

instruction is not only encouraged but sustainably integrated into language teaching practices. By highlighting these critical areas, this study contributes new knowledge on the feasibility of CLT in constrained educational settings, making a compelling case for systemic changes that extend beyond the classroom.

Overall, this research does not merely reaffirm existing findings but builds upon them in meaningful ways, offering localized, empirical insights into the implementation of CLT at the high school level. It expands the current discourse by linking communicative pedagogy with policy and assessment reform, making it a valuable reference for educators, policymakers, and researchers aiming to advance CLT in exam-driven educational systems.

6.0 CONCLUSION

This study underscores the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in enhancing students' speaking and listening skills in the Kurdish context. The findings demonstrate that CLT fosters meaningful interaction, prioritizing communication over linguistic form, making it a viable alternative to traditional grammar translation methods. However, challenges such as exam pressures, large class sizes, and time constraints often hinder teachers from fully implementing CLT-based activities. Despite these constraints, the study's results indicate that students in CLT-based classrooms showed greater improvement in productive and receptive skills compared to those taught using traditional methods.

Given the study's small sample size, further research with larger and more diverse groups is recommended to validate these findings. Additionally, educational policymakers should consider integrating CLT principles into national public exams to encourage a stronger focus on communicative competence. Teachers should also receive ongoing in-service training to enhance their ability to apply CLT effectively. Most importantly, students should be encouraged to actively engage in spoken communication with their peers, as regular practice is key to developing fluency and confidence in the target language.

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