

Exploring the Realities of Communicative Language Teaching in Elementary Classrooms: A Cross-Country Phenomenological Study of Filipino Teachers

DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.15260295

Suzine Edera-Petiluna

San Jose Central Elementary School – SPED Center, DepEd – Dinagat Islands, Philippines
Graduate School Student, Graduate School of Education, University of the Visayas, Cebu City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0004-1150-6733> | suzine_eder-petiluna@uv.edu.ph

Glenn Mark C. Escarda

English Instructor, Rides Language School, Bando City, Ibaraki, Japan
Graduate School Student, Graduate School of Education, University of the Visayas, Cebu City, Philippines
<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1038-6475> | escardaglenmark@gmail.com

Abstract

This qualitative study employed a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences of Filipino teachers implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in public elementary schools in Japan and the Philippines. The aim was to understand the challenges, strategies, and insights that shape their teaching practices in diverse educational contexts. A purposive sampling method was used to select eight participants—four from each country—who met the criteria of at least one year of teaching experience and the use of CLT in their English language classrooms. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews conducted online, and thematic analysis was employed to identify key patterns across the data. The findings revealed that while CLT is valued for promoting communication, its implementation varied significantly between Japan and the Philippines. In Japan, the application of CLT was influenced by cultural norms, large class sizes, and limited resources, while in the Philippines, teachers faced similar challenges but were more inclined to rely on traditional methods. Key themes identified included diverse interpretations of CLT principles, challenges related to time constraints and student reluctance, and the need for more targeted professional development. The study offers important implications for enhancing teacher training and creating supportive educational environments that foster more effective use of CLT. Further research could explore how CLT can be adapted to different regional contexts and how students perceive the impact of CLT on their language learning.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Assistant Language Teacher, English Language Teaching (ELT), Professional Development*

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has evolved into a cornerstone approach in global language education, championed for its emphasis on communication as the central goal of language learning. Rooted in the communicative competence theory proposed by Hymes (1972), CLT prioritizes students' ability to engage meaningfully in real-world communication over the rote memorization of grammar rules. Its focus on interactive activities, authentic materials, and task-based learning has made it an appealing approach in both English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. The core of CLT lies in providing learners with the opportunities to practice language in contexts that closely mirror real-life situations, thereby enhancing their ability to communicate effectively (Kasumi, 2015). However, despite its theoretical appeal, the practical implementation of CLT in the classroom has been a subject of debate, as it requires a shift from traditional teacher-centered methods to more learner-centered practices that may not always align with local educational structures and cultural expectations (Dörnyei, 2009).

The application of CLT becomes particularly significant in elementary education, where the foundation for future language skills is laid. In elementary classrooms, young learners are often introduced to English as their second language, making it critical to create an environment where language use feels relevant and engaging. However, implementing CLT in these settings presents specific challenges, such as adapting the approach to the developmental levels of young learners and ensuring that it aligns with educational goals. In the Philippines, the adoption of CLT has been part of a broader educational reform aimed at enhancing students' ability to communicate in English. Despite its integration into the national curriculum, teachers often face barriers such as large class sizes, insufficient teaching resources, and varying levels of student motivation, which can hinder the successful implementation of CLT (Bargo & Go, 2021). Similarly, in Japan, while CLT has gained traction as part of the nation's English education policy, its integration into classrooms has been slow. Teachers often struggle with balancing communicative activities with the pressure of preparing students for high-stakes exams and overcoming ingrained cultural norms that prioritize rote learning and teacher authority (Abe, 2013; Nishino, 2008).

The distinct educational contexts of the Philippines and Japan provide an interesting basis for comparative analysis, particularly in examining how Filipino teachers working in these different environments apply CLT principles in their classrooms. This study sought to explore how Filipino educators, who may experience CLT differently based on the educational landscape of their respective countries, conceptualize and implement this approach. The research aimed to capture the nuances of their lived experiences, focusing on their beliefs, practices, and challenges when adopting CLT in elementary classrooms. The phenomenological methodology employed in this study allowed for a deeper understanding of the subjective experiences of teachers, providing insights into the ways they navigate both the theoretical framework of CLT and the practical realities of classroom teaching (Rambe, 2017). This approach ensured that the study goes beyond a mere description of practices and delves into the lived experiences that shape teachers' pedagogical decisions.

An essential aspect of this research is its contribution to bridging the gap in existing literature on CLT, particularly regarding its application in elementary classrooms in diverse cultural settings. Although several studies have examined CLT in secondary and tertiary education, there is limited research that explores the application of CLT in elementary schools, especially in countries with differing educational systems. The study also contributes to understanding the impact of local educational policies, teaching traditions, and cultural values on the successful implementation of CLT. Previous studies have shown that teachers' beliefs and practices regarding CLT are shaped not only by their professional training but also by the educational cultures within which they work (Gorsuch, 2000). The cross-country comparison of Filipino teachers in Japan and the Philippines presents a unique opportunity to explore how these factors interact to influence the realities of CLT implementation at the elementary level (Ogayon & Tangalin, 2020).

The findings from this research provided valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities Filipino teachers face when implementing CLT in diverse educational contexts. These insights are crucial for informing teacher training programs, curriculum development, and policy recommendations aimed at improving English language education in both the Philippines and Japan. Furthermore, the study helped identify strategies for overcoming the obstacles that teachers encounter, thereby enhancing the quality of language instruction for young learners. As global interest in communicative language teaching continues to grow, understanding how it functions in different classroom environments is essential for refining teaching practices and improving student outcomes in language learning (Kasumi, 2015; Dörnyei, 2009).

Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes meaningful interaction and real-world language use over rote learning and grammar-based instruction. According to Nasimova (2022), CLT encourages learner-centered approaches, aiming to develop students' communicative competence through authentic tasks. Xiao (2024) supports this by highlighting how interactive activities like role-plays and group work enhance engagement and language use in classroom settings. These practices reflect CLT's emphasis on fluency, collaboration, and contextual learning. Despite its theoretical strengths, CLT faces practical limitations in many educational systems. Chen (2024) notes that large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and a lack of resources often hinder its full implementation. In many Asian contexts, as discussed by Wei, Lin, and Litton (2018), CLT is sometimes only partially adopted due to institutional constraints and traditional teaching cultures. Teachers may also lack sufficient training or confidence to shift from lecture-based to interactive instruction.

In the Philippines, Barrot (2018) and Sonsona and Sitoy (2024) found that although educators recognize the value of CLT, they often blend it with more traditional methods to meet curriculum and assessment demands. Meanwhile, Esgrina (2024) highlights the need for further training to strengthen the communicative competence of Filipino English teachers, particularly at the basic education level. Similarly, Lestari and Margana (2024) emphasize that successful CLT integration in Indonesia's Kurikulum Merdeka requires ongoing professional development and systemic support. In Japan, CLT is promoted in policy but inconsistently practiced in classrooms. Nowlan and Samuell (2020) observe modern adaptations of CLT using technology and intercultural activities, while Nishino (2008) reveals that Japanese teachers often struggle to align their beliefs with practice due to rigid systems and testing pressures. These perceptions point to a common challenge across countries: while CLT is conceptually valued, its implementation is shaped by local realities, teacher readiness, and educational priorities—highlighting the need for deeper exploration of teachers' lived experiences in CLT classrooms.

The reviewed literature reflects both the promise and complexity of implementing CLT, particularly in Asian EFL contexts. While Filipino and Japanese educators increasingly recognize its value, their experiences are shaped by institutional frameworks, professional preparedness, and cultural factors. This stresses the need to explore the lived realities of teachers in elementary settings, thereby contributing to a more developed understanding of CLT in varied educational landscapes. Understanding these classroom realities can help inform more context-sensitive approaches to teacher training and curriculum design. Ultimately, such understandings can bridge the gap between CLT theory and practice, ensuring more effective language learning outcomes for young learners.

Design and Method

This study employed a qualitative research design with a phenomenological approach, which was best suited for exploring the lived experiences of Filipino teachers in their implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in elementary classrooms. The phenomenological approach allowed the researcher to understand the essence of participants' lived experiences and how they made sense of their teaching practices within their specific cultural and educational contexts. The study aimed to uncover the meanings that teachers assigned to their experiences of implementing CLT, offering an in-depth understanding of the challenges, strategies, and insights that shaped their teaching practices. This design provided a nuanced exploration of how Filipino teachers in Japan and the Philippines perceived and navigated the complexities of CLT in their classrooms (Giorgi, 2012; Sheets-Johnstone, 2017).

The participants in this study were Filipino elementary school teachers currently teaching English in public schools, either in the Philippines or Japan. Eight participants were included in the study—four from each country—selected through purposive sampling. This sampling method ensured that participants had relevant experiences to contribute to the research. Participants were required to meet certain criteria: at least one year of teaching experience, current employment in the same school, and the use of CLT in their English language classrooms. Teachers with less than one year of experience or those working in private language schools were excluded from the study. The inclusion of teachers from both the Philippines and Japan offered a comparative perspective on how CLT was applied in different educational contexts, with a focus on the challenges and opportunities unique to each setting (Rego et al., 2018; Sarfo et al., 2021).

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, a method that allowed flexibility for participants to share their thoughts and experiences while the researcher probed deeper into key themes. This interview format facilitated the gathering of rich, detailed narratives regarding participants' perspectives on CLT (Adams, 2015; Leech, 2002). To accommodate the geographical locations of the participants, interviews were conducted online using platforms such as Zoom, Skype, or Google Meet. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes, providing participants sufficient time to express their views. The interview questions focused on several areas, including participants' understanding of CLT, the specific strategies and activities employed in their classrooms, challenges encountered in implementing CLT, and how cultural and institutional factors shaped their practices. The interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data, which is a widely used method for identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. This method allowed the researcher to identify recurring themes across the interview transcripts, focusing on participants' beliefs, practices, and challenges related to CLT (Naeem et al., 2023; Christou, 2023). The analysis followed a systematic process, beginning with multiple readings of the transcripts to familiarize the researcher with the data. Initial codes were generated to categorize significant statements and ideas, which were then grouped into broader themes. These themes were reviewed and refined to ensure they accurately reflected the participants' experiences. Finally, the themes were defined and described, with detailed examples from the data illustrating each theme. The results of the analysis were interpreted in light of existing literature on CLT, providing insights into how Filipino teachers in different educational contexts perceived and implemented CLT (Wiltshire & Ronkainen, 2021).

Ethical considerations were strictly followed throughout the study. All participants were provided with an informed consent form prior to participation, which outlined the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Participants were assured that their personal information and identities would remain confidential and that their participation would not affect their professional standing. The study allowed participants to withdraw at any time without consequence. Audio recordings were securely stored and anonymized during analysis and reporting to ensure confidentiality. The findings were presented in a way that respected the privacy and integrity of the participants, accurately representing their experiences while protecting their anonymity (Cacciattolo, 2015).

Results and Discussion

This section provides an in-depth analysis of the emergent themes drawn from the interview responses of the Filipino teachers who participated in this study. These themes offer a detailed understanding of how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is interpreted and implemented within elementary classrooms, highlighting the diverse factors that influence teaching practices. The analysis is structured around five key clusters: Understanding of CLT, Classroom Practices and Strategies, Implementation Challenges, Contextual and Cultural Influences, and Teacher Growth and Reflection. Each cluster reflects a critical aspect of the teachers' experiences, from their interpretations of CLT principles to the strategies they employ in the classroom, the challenges they face, and the cultural and contextual factors that shape their practices. This section will explore each of these clusters in detail, providing a comprehensive discussion of the findings and their implications for CLT in diverse educational settings.

Table 1: Emergent Themes

Emergent Themes	Theme Cluster
Understanding of CLT	Diverse Interpretations of CLT Principles
	Focus on Communication over Grammar
	Student-Centeredness as a Key Aspect
Classroom Practices and Strategies	Use of Interactive Activities
	Adaptation to Learners' Needs
	Integration of Real-World Language Use
Implementation Challenges	Large Class Sizes and Limited Resources
	Time Constraints and Rigid Curriculum
	Learner Hesitation to Speak English
Contextual and Cultural Influences	Traditional views on Teacher Authority
	Cultural Factors Affecting Classroom Interaction
	Educational Norms in Japan and the Philippines
Teacher Growth and Reflection	Learning CLT through Experience
	Need for Targeted Training
	Aspirations to Enhance Communicative Teaching Practices

Note: This table shows the three emergent themes from the extracted significant statements of the participants using Thematic Analysis

Theme 1: Understanding of CLT

The first set of findings shows how teachers make sense of communicative approaches in their classrooms, revealing varying interpretations shaped by their educational backgrounds, teaching contexts, and classroom experiences. Participants described their understanding in ways that emphasized meaningful interaction, student participation, and the practical use of English over rigid grammatical accuracy. These perspectives show that while teachers generally embraced the idea of improving communication, their conceptualizations of what this entails were not uniform. The diversity in views also reflected the influence of training and exposure to different teaching methodologies, indicating that foundational knowledge significantly impacts how communicative teaching is perceived and applied.

Diverse Interpretations of CLT Principles. The data revealed that teachers had different understandings of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), shaped by their professional backgrounds, training, and classroom environments. While all participants acknowledged the value of promoting communication in the classroom, their interpretations of CLT principles varied. Some teachers viewed it as simply encouraging students to speak in English during class, while others emphasized the importance of allowing learners to express themselves freely without focusing too much on accuracy. These differences suggest that CLT is understood in flexible ways, with each teacher adapting its meaning to fit their specific teaching context. Babayev (2023) explained that the characteristics of CLT include learner-centered instruction, meaningful interaction, and the use of real-life communication, which may not always be clearly defined or consistently applied by all teachers.

Teachers with access to formal training tended to describe CLT in terms of student-centered learning, authentic communication, and task-based activities. However, others—especially those who relied on classroom experience rather than training—often focused on surface-level communication practices, such as recitation or question-and-answer sessions. Some participants mentioned that school requirements or time constraints made it difficult to fully implement communicative lessons, leading them to use traditional, grammar-based methods alongside CLT techniques. These findings show that while CLT is widely recognized, a consistent and shared understanding among teachers remains a challenge, highlighting the need for clearer and more practical guidance (Babayev, 2023).

Focus on Communication over Grammar. Participants across both Japanese and Filipino contexts emphasized that encouraging learners to communicate their thoughts, even with grammatical errors, was a core part of their classroom practice. They believed that when students were allowed to speak freely without fear of constant correction, they became more engaged and confident in using English. Activities such as role-plays, group discussions, and games were commonly used to promote fluency and natural language use. Teachers noted that these tasks helped students focus on expressing meaning rather than worrying about form. This approach aligns with the core principles

of CLT, which prioritize the development of communicative competence and meaningful interaction in language learning.

Despite this emphasis, some participants highlighted the challenge of balancing communication-focused lessons with institutional expectations for grammar instruction. In Japan, several teachers noted that while they tried to prioritize speaking activities, school policies and standardized testing still placed a heavy emphasis on grammatical accuracy. This tension between policy and practice made it difficult to fully adopt communicative strategies in some classrooms. Smith (2025) confirmed that Japanese education often struggles with implementing communicative goals due to deeply rooted traditions that favor correctness and structure over interaction. Filipino teachers, on the other hand, reported slightly more flexibility, but they too encountered pressure from administrators or parents who expected visible progress in grammar. These experiences show that while teachers support CLT in principle, contextual limitations can affect its practical application.

Student-Centeredness as a Key Aspect. Participants emphasized the importance of making students active participants in the learning process. They described how student-centered activities, such as project-based tasks, collaborative learning, and personalized discussions, created a more engaging classroom atmosphere. Many teachers shared that they designed their lessons to allow students more autonomy and voice, encouraging them to make choices and contribute to classroom decisions. Teachers observed that when students were placed at the center of instruction, their motivation and willingness to communicate increased noticeably. This approach helped reduce anxiety and made the classroom a more supportive space for language practice.

However, implementing a student-centered approach was not without its challenges. Teachers in Japan mentioned that some students were hesitant to take initiative, often waiting for teacher instructions due to their prior educational experiences that emphasized teacher authority and rote learning. Filipino teachers also encountered difficulties, particularly in managing large class sizes where giving equal attention to each student proved difficult. Despite these challenges, the participants believed that focusing on students' needs and interests led to more meaningful learning outcomes. As Badjadi (2020) explained, learner-centered teaching promotes not only language development but also critical thinking and learner independence, making it a valuable approach in CLT-oriented classrooms. The participants' efforts to involve students more actively reflect the broader shift toward viewing learners as co-constructors of knowledge rather than passive recipients.

The study revealed varied interpretations of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) among teachers, shaped by factors like training, culture, and educational policies. While most teachers emphasized communication over grammar and student-centeredness, challenges such as large class sizes and traditional norms affected the full implementation of CLT principles. Despite these obstacles, the teachers remained committed to promoting meaningful communication, highlighting the value of CLT for language development and the need for ongoing support in its application. These findings highlight the importance of localized teaching strategies that align with teachers' realities. They also point to the need for sustained professional development programs that empower educators to navigate contextual challenges effectively.

Theme 2: Classroom Practices and Strategies

Classroom practices and strategies are key to the effective implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). In this theme, teachers' approaches to engaging students, adjusting to their needs, and incorporating real-world language use are explored. These strategies not only improve students' language skills but also create a more interactive and meaningful learning environment. The following sections will examine specific practices such as the use of interactive activities, the adjustment of lessons to meet learners' different needs, and the inclusion of authentic language experiences into classroom instruction.

Use of Interactive Activities. The use of interactive activities emerged as a fundamental teaching strategy in the classrooms of both Japanese and Filipino teachers. Participants frequently incorporated group work, role-playing, and games to facilitate communication and language practice. These activities were particularly valued for their ability to engage students and encourage peer interaction, which in turn helped them build confidence in using English. Teachers observed that interactive tasks allowed students to learn through experience, simulating real-life situations where language is used for practical purposes. Ajaj (2023) highlights that such activities promote not only language acquisition but also collaboration and critical thinking, promoting an improved understanding of the language.

Despite the recognized benefits, the execution of interactive activities often posed challenges related to class size, time limitations, and varying student levels. In some classrooms, especially those with large groups, managing active participation proved to be difficult. Teachers in Japan, for example, reported that they had to constantly monitor and guide student interactions to ensure effective participation. Filipino teachers noted similar struggles in maintaining order and focus during group activities. Nonetheless, these teachers agreed that when interactive activities were successfully integrated, they significantly enhanced students' language abilities, as they allowed for more hands-on

learning. Thus, while challenges exist, interactive activities remained a vital tool for encouraging communication and creating a dynamic learning environment.

Adaptation to Learners' Needs. Adapting teaching practices to meet the diverse needs of learners emerged as a central strategy for many teachers in the study. Teachers from both Japan and the Philippines highlighted the importance of modifying lessons to cater to varying levels of English proficiency. Those with advanced students were challenged with more complex tasks, while learners with lower proficiency levels received additional support through simpler activities and more guided practice. These strategies ensured that all students had the opportunity to engage with the content in a way that matched their individual capabilities. Athanases et al. (2015) emphasize that such adaptive approaches are essential for helping every student progress at their own pace, while maintaining a dynamic and inclusive classroom environment.

In addition to modifying content based on proficiency, teachers also considered students' cultural backgrounds and personal interests when adapting lessons. For example, teachers in Japan often incorporated cultural elements familiar to students, such as references to Japanese popular culture, which helped make language learning more engaging and contextually relevant. Likewise, in the Philippines, teachers adapted content to reflect the local socio-economic conditions of their students, ensuring that lessons felt more personal and relatable. Tono and Negishi (2012) argue that this level of adaptation is important for student engagement and ensuring the practicality of language instruction. Connecting the language learning process to students' everyday experiences not only improved their language skills but also increased their motivation to participate actively in the classroom.

Integration of Real-World Language Use. The integration of real-world language use into English language teaching was a key focus for many of the teachers in the study. Participants reported that incorporating authentic materials and real-life scenarios into their lessons helped students connect more directly with the language they were learning. In both Japan and the Philippines, teachers highlighted the value of using resources such as news articles, advertisements, and videos that featured natural language use, providing students with a clearer sense of how English is used in everyday life. This approach not only improved students' understanding of vocabulary and grammar but also enhanced their listening and speaking skills, as they were exposed to language used in practical, real-world contexts. According to Illes and Akcan (2016), integrating real-life language use is essential for helping learners understand the relevance of what they are learning and how it applies outside the classroom, leading to more meaningful engagement with the language.

Teachers also emphasized the importance of creating opportunities for students to use English in practical situations. For example, teachers in both countries organized activities like role-playing exercises, where students simulated real-life interactions, such as ordering food in a restaurant or making phone calls in a business setting. These exercises not only allowed students to practice language in a way that felt relevant to their daily lives but also helped build their confidence in using English in real-world situations. In Japan, some teachers reported using local community events or online resources to expose students to English used in authentic settings, while in the Philippines, teachers often linked classroom lessons to students' real-life needs, such as preparing them for job interviews or social interactions in English. As Illes and Akcan (2016) suggest, this kind of contextual learning encourages learners to see English not just as an academic subject but as a tool for communication in the wider world, thus boosting their motivation to use the language outside the classroom.

This theme emphasized the importance of engaging students through interactive activities and real-world language use. Teachers in both Japan and the Philippines focused on student-centered approaches, adapting lessons to meet learners' needs and making language learning relevant to their everyday lives. These practices helped create more dynamic and meaningful learning experiences, promoting better communication skills and enhancing students' motivation to use English outside the classroom.

Theme 3: Implementation Challenges

The implementation of communicative language teaching is often hindered by various challenges that teachers encounter in their classrooms. Despite the potential benefits of CLT, teachers in both Japan and the Philippines face obstacles such as large class sizes, limited resources, time constraints, rigid curricula, and learners' hesitation to speak English. These challenges can significantly impact the effectiveness of CLT practices, making it difficult for teachers to fully engage students and promote meaningful language use. The following discussion will explore these issues in more detail, highlighting their impact on teaching practices and student learning outcomes.

Large Class Sizes and Limited Resources. Large class sizes and limited resources present significant challenges in the implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT), as revealed in the experiences of teachers in both Japan and the Philippines. Many teachers reported struggling to maintain meaningful interaction in classrooms with over 30 students, which often made it difficult to engage every learner actively. With such large groups, it was challenging for teachers to provide individual attention or facilitate the small group discussions that are central to CLT. Additionally, the lack of classroom resources, such as audio-visual aids, internet access, and teaching materials,

further limited the effectiveness of interactive activities that are key to the CLT approach. These challenges were consistent across both countries, as teachers faced logistical and resource constraints that hindered their ability to implement communicative methods effectively.

Research supports these findings, noting that large class sizes create a high teacher-to-student ratio that can severely affect the quality of language instruction (Marzulina et al., 2021). Without adequate resources, teachers struggle to create an environment that supports active communication, making it harder for students to practice real-life language use. In many cases, teachers found themselves resorting to traditional, more teacher-centered methods due to the lack of time and resources to engage in more interactive or communicative practices. These limitations reflect the broader issue of resource scarcity and its impact on the quality of language teaching, as larger classes reduce the amount of time each student has to practice speaking and listening in English (Bahanshal, 2013).

Time Constraints and Rigid Curriculum. These were identified as significant barriers in the successful implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) by the teachers involved in this study. Many participants shared that the prescribed curriculum left little room for flexibility, and this often led to a focus on completing required content rather than fostering meaningful language interaction. Teachers felt pressured to cover all the necessary material within limited timeframes, leaving little opportunity for communicative activities or student-centered approaches. The challenge of balancing curriculum demands with CLT principles was especially evident in the Japanese context, where there is a strong emphasis on standardized testing and exam preparation. This rigid focus on exam outcomes further limited the opportunity for teachers to engage students in the real-world communication that is central to CLT.

Additionally, participants indicated that time constraints during class sessions often resulted in rushed lessons, which undermined the quality of learning. The limited class hours available for English instruction, coupled with the need to cover multiple subject areas within a set time, made it difficult for teachers to incorporate interactive or real-life communication tasks. According to research, time pressure not only reduces the quality of teaching but also negatively affects students' comprehension and performance (Martina et al., 2020). The lack of flexibility in adapting the curriculum to better meet the students' needs further hindered the effective integration of CLT, as teachers were often forced to prioritize grammar instruction and test preparation over communicative practices. This misalignment between the curriculum and CLT principles highlights the persistent challenge faced by educators in adapting to more communicative and student-centered teaching methods.

Learner Hesitation to Speak English. Another challenge highlighted by many participants in this study was students' reluctance to speak English. A common concern among teachers was that students often lacked the confidence to use English in the classroom, despite understanding its importance for communication. The hesitation was particularly evident in large classes where students were less likely to participate in speaking activities for fear of making mistakes or being ridiculed by peers. Teachers noted that this reluctance was exacerbated by a lack of positive reinforcement and a classroom culture that did not always encourage risk-taking in language use. This type of environment, where students are apprehensive about speaking, directly conflicts with the communicative goals of CLT, which rely on active student participation and engagement.

The issue of learner hesitation aligns with findings from previous research, which indicates that students' fear of making errors in front of their peers can significantly hinder their speaking practice (Rumlus, 2020). The pressure to speak "correctly" in a second language often results in a preference for silent learning or passive participation, further limiting the opportunities for meaningful communication in the classroom. Teachers in the study emphasized that creating a supportive, low-stakes environment was crucial to overcoming this challenge. Some participants found success in using smaller group activities or pair work, where students felt more comfortable practicing their speaking without the fear of judgment. Despite these efforts, the deeply ingrained cultural and psychological factors contributing to hesitation still presented a significant barrier to implementing communicative methods effectively. The need for building students' confidence and providing more opportunities for low-pressure speaking practice was seen as essential for improving learners' willingness to engage in English conversations.

The participants' shared experiences revealed that implementing communicative language teaching was often hindered by several interconnected challenges within their school contexts. Large class sizes, limited materials, strict time allocations, and inflexible curricula made it difficult to fully apply interactive and student-centered approaches. In addition, many learners showed hesitation in using English during class, which further impacted the communicative goals of the lessons. These challenges emphasized the need for ongoing support, flexible planning, and contextual adjustments to better align CLT practices with the realities of the classroom.

Theme 4: Contextual and Cultural Influences

Context and culture play an important role in how English language teaching methods are understood and practiced. Participants in this study described how local beliefs, behaviors, and expectations shaped their teaching experiences. These included how authority was seen in the classroom, how students interacted with teachers and peers, and how

the educational systems in Japan and the Philippines influenced classroom routines and goals. These cultural and contextual elements often influenced the way communicative language teaching was applied in real classroom situations.

Traditional views on Teacher Authority. Many participants in the study shared those traditional views on teacher authority significantly shaped their classroom interactions and instructional decisions. In both Japanese and Filipino educational settings, the teacher is commonly seen as the main source of knowledge, and students are expected to follow instructions respectfully without questioning. This view sometimes clashed with the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which encourages a more collaborative and interactive learning environment. Participants explained that, at times, learners hesitated to actively participate in class discussions or activities because they were accustomed to listening quietly and deferring to the teacher. This teacher-centered expectation limited opportunities for students to take more ownership of their learning.

This tension between traditional authority and communicative methods created challenges in applying CLT fully. According to Elliott (2009), the perception of teachers as unquestioned experts can restrict open communication and critical thinking in the classroom. Similarly, Tzuo and Chen (2011) emphasized that understanding when to assert authority and when to step back is essential in modern teaching approaches. The participants in this study often found themselves negotiating between being a figure of authority and a learning facilitator. Some reported gradually adjusting their approach by encouraging more student input and interaction while still maintaining classroom structure and discipline. This balancing act revealed the complexity of adapting communicative teaching in contexts where teacher authority is deeply rooted in educational traditions.

Cultural Factors Affecting Classroom Interaction. Cultural influences were seen by participants as key factors shaping how students participate during classroom activities. Many noted that learners in Japan often hesitate to actively engage in communicative tasks, which can be linked to the cultural emphasis on harmony, silence, and avoiding mistakes. This preference for indirect communication and concern for not standing out was observed to affect how students respond to interactive English language tasks. These findings align with Stone (2012), who highlighted how Japanese socio-cultural norms can limit verbal interactions in task-based language learning environments. Teachers in this study often had to adjust their strategies to gently encourage participation without putting undue pressure on learners, acknowledging that cultural sensitivity plays an essential role in effective language instruction.

Differences in cultural expectations between Filipino and Japanese practices also impacted teacher-student communication and classroom dynamics. Filipino teachers, who were used to more expressive and participatory classroom environments, often had to recalibrate their approaches to match the quiet and reserved behavior of their Japanese students. Some participants expressed that students' reluctance to speak or volunteer answers was not necessarily a sign of disengagement, but a reflection of their upbringing and schooling experiences. These observations mirror Reyes et al. (2023), who emphasized how cultural norms shape language learning and classroom interactions. Adapting to these differences required patience and a shift in expectations, with teachers often using non-verbal cues and encouragement to slowly build students' confidence.

Educational Norms in Japan and the Philippines. Participants in the study described how educational expectations and classroom norms in Japan differ significantly from those in the Philippines, shaping their teaching strategies and classroom management styles. Filipino teachers noted that the Japanese education system places a strong emphasis on structure, discipline, and uniformity, which contrasts with the relatively flexible and interactive teaching styles they had previously used in the Philippines. For example, activities like group discussions and open dialogue, which are common in Philippine classrooms, often needed to be adjusted or simplified to suit Japanese students who were more accustomed to teacher-centered instruction. These cross-cultural adjustments reflect Bisenio's (2024) findings, where Filipino English teachers in Japan were shown to negotiate their teaching identities while navigating institutional expectations and cultural boundaries.

In contrast, the Philippine context often encourages learner participation, with more spontaneous classroom interaction being acceptable and even expected. Participants shared that they initially struggled to adjust their communicative and student-centered approaches in Japan, where learners were less vocal and more reliant on teacher direction. They expressed the need to find a balance between their own training and what is deemed appropriate within the Japanese classroom culture. This is consistent with the insights of Madrunio et al. (2016), who pointed out that the Philippine English language education framework emphasizes communicative competence, whereas Japanese practices still lean toward accuracy, formality, and exam-oriented instruction. As a result, Filipino teachers had to modify their teaching approaches to effectively engage students while still aligning with the educational norms of their host country.

The data gathered reveals that contextual and cultural factors significantly affect how communicative language teaching is understood and applied. Participants' experiences show that traditional views on teacher roles, cultural attitudes toward classroom interaction, and differing educational norms between Japan and the Philippines often

shape classroom behavior and teaching strategies. These influences underline the importance of cultural sensitivity and adaptability in promoting more effective and meaningful English language instruction.

Theme 5: Teacher Growth and Reflection

Teachers' professional growth and reflection play an essential part in shaping effective communicative language teaching. The development of their understanding of CLT through hands-on experience, the need for targeted training to improve their teaching skills, and their aspirations to enhance their practices for better student outcomes are important aspects of this process. These factors collectively influence their ability to implement CLT successfully in various classroom settings.

Learning CLT through Experience. For many teachers, learning Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been an evolving process shaped largely by their experiences in the classroom. While some participants noted that their formal training included theoretical aspects of CLT, they emphasized that hands-on experience has been instrumental in solidifying their understanding and application of its principles. Over time, many teachers adapted their teaching methods to meet the dynamic needs of their students, developing a more profound sense of how to create communicative, student-centered environments. Their ability to incorporate interactive activities, encourage student participation, and balance communication-focused lessons with language structure emerged more clearly as they reflected on their practice. This growth through experience mirrors findings from Maestre (2016), who suggests that practical application plays a pivotal role in refining teachers' approaches to CLT.

As teachers gained more experience, they began to personalize CLT methods according to their specific classroom contexts. This included experimenting with different classroom activities, adjusting teaching styles, and continuously reflecting on the effectiveness of these approaches. The teachers in this study indicated that, over time, they became more confident in their CLT practices, gradually shifting from a more traditional, teacher-centered approach to one that embraced student interaction and real-world language use. Maestre (2016) notes that experience-driven learning enables teachers to better align their practices with CLT principles, ultimately fostering a more engaging and communicative classroom environment. The participants' reflections on their journey from theory to practice demonstrated how learning CLT is a continuous, adaptive process shaped by both successes and challenges in real-world teaching scenarios.

Need for Targeted Training. The need for targeted training emerged as a significant theme among the participants in this study, with many teachers expressing that their professional development opportunities often lacked the depth and specificity required to implement Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) effectively. While some teachers had attended general training sessions, they often felt that these programs did not cater to the unique challenges faced in the Japanese classroom context, such as large class sizes, limited resources, and the cultural differences between Filipino teachers and their Japanese students. Teachers mentioned that they would benefit from more specialized training that focuses on the practical application of CLT in their everyday teaching practices. Eshete et al. (2024) suggest that for teachers to effectively implement new methodologies, the training must be both relevant and focused on the specific needs and challenges teachers encounter in their teaching environments.

Moreover, teachers noted that the current professional development programs lacked a strong emphasis on reflective practices and adaptation. They expressed a desire for training that would allow them to evaluate and refine their teaching methods based on real classroom experiences. Many participants indicated that learning through experience was crucial to their professional growth, but they recognized that without formal, targeted training, they struggled to systematically improve their CLT practices. As Kshetree (2023) emphasizes, continuous, targeted professional development plays a critical role in enhancing teachers' competencies and enabling them to meet the evolving needs of their students. Teachers in this study highlighted that structured training programs that align with the specific demands of teaching English in Japan would greatly support their professional growth and improve their ability to apply CLT more effectively.

Aspirations to Enhance Communicative Teaching Practices. The participants in this study expressed a strong interest in refining their communicative teaching practices, emphasizing their desire to engage students in more dynamic and interactive learning experiences. Many teachers noted that enhancing communication skills in their classrooms would help students develop the confidence and competence to use English in real-life situations. There was a consistent aspiration to move beyond traditional teaching methods and incorporate more student-driven activities, such as debates, pair work, and task-based learning. This aligns with the perspective shared by Buzdugan et al. (2025), who highlight the importance of employing interactive strategies in language teaching to boost both student participation and language retention.

Despite the enthusiasm to improve their teaching methods, teachers acknowledged that there were significant challenges in achieving their aspirations due to factors such as limited resources, time constraints, and large class sizes. While they were committed to developing more communicative approaches, the participants recognized the need for further professional development and training to enhance their skills. Workshops, seminars, and peer

collaborations were seen as crucial in providing teachers with practical tools to implement communicative language teaching more effectively. Buzdugan et al. (2025) emphasize that continuous professional development is essential for equipping teachers with the necessary strategies to foster communication skills in the classroom, and this was a common aspiration among the participants in this study.

Conclusion

The study examined the experiences of Filipino English teachers working in public elementary schools in both Japan and the Philippines, with a particular focus on their understanding and implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The findings revealed that while CLT is widely valued for promoting communication, Filipino teachers in these two countries adapted its principles in various ways to suit their specific classroom environments. In Japan, cultural differences, educational norms, and language barriers shaped the way CLT was implemented, with teachers often navigating challenges such as large class sizes, limited resources, and time constraints. In the Philippines, despite similar challenges, teachers were more likely to rely on traditional methods due to the structure of the educational system, although there was also a desire to adopt more interactive and communicative teaching practices.

The study has important implications for both practice and policy in the field of English language teaching in public elementary schools in Japan and the Philippines. First, it highlights the need for more tailored professional development programs for Filipino teachers working in these countries. Such programs should address the unique challenges identified, such as large class sizes, limited resources, time constraints, and cultural influences that affect the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Additionally, the findings suggest that school administrators and policymakers in both Japan and the Philippines should place greater emphasis on creating supportive environments for CLT, which includes reducing barriers to teacher autonomy, integrating more interactive and communicative activities in the curriculum, and promoting student-centered learning approaches.

Further research could expand on the findings of this study by exploring how CLT can be more effectively adapted to different educational contexts and the challenges faced by Filipino teachers in various regions of Japan and the Philippines. Studies comparing the effectiveness of CLT in urban versus rural schools would be valuable, as differences in resources and student demographics may have a significant impact on teaching practices. Research focusing on student perspectives could also provide deeper insights into how CLT influences their motivation and language acquisition. Longitudinal studies tracking teacher development and student progress over time could offer a more comprehensive understanding of the long-term effects of CLT and its role in professional growth. This study highlights the importance of continuous reflection and professional growth for teachers, particularly in diverse and challenging educational environments. Addressing the unique challenges faced by Filipino teachers in Japan and the Philippines, and providing them with necessary training and resources, can enhance the effectiveness of CLT and improve English language education. Ongoing research will further refine these approaches, contributing to the broader field of English language teaching in international contexts.

References

- Abe, Emiko. (2013). Communicative language teaching in Japan: Current practices and future prospects. *English Today*. 29. 10.1017/S0266078413000163.
- Adams, William. (2015). Conducting Semi-Structured Interviews. 10.1002/9781119171386.ch19.
- Ajaj, Israa. (2023). The Effectiveness of Interactive Teaching Strategies in Teaching English Language. *مجلة آداب الفراهيدي*. 15. 483-492. 10.51990/jaa.15.52.2.25.
- Athanases, Steven & Bennett, Lisa & Wahleithner, Juliet. (2015). Adaptive Teaching for English Language Arts. *Journal of Literacy Research*. 47. 83-114. 10.1177/1086296X15590915.
- Babayev, Javid. (2023). Characteristics of the CLT. 10.5281/zenodo.10073707.
- Badjadi, Nour. (2020). Learner-Centered English Language Teaching: Premises, Practices, and Prospects. *IAFOR Journal of Education*. 8. 7-27. 10.22492/ije.8.1.01.
- Bahanshal, Dalal. (2013). The Effect of Large Classes on English Teaching and Learning in Saudi Secondary Schools. *English Language Teaching*. 6. 49-49. 10.5539/elt.v6n11p49.
- Bargo, Darwin & Go, Mildred. (2021). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Strategies in Daily Lesson Plans of Oral Communication Teachers and their Alignment to Standards in Curriculum Guide. *International Journal of Linguistics, Literature and Translation*. 4. 89-104. 10.32996/ijllt.2021.4.6.11.
- Barrot, Jessie. (2018). Exploring the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in the Philippines: A Tertiary Teachers' Perspective. *Advanced Science Letters*. 24. 2284-2287. 10.1166/asl.2018.10936.
- Bisenio, Joselito. (2024). Filipino English teachers in Japan: Exploring subject positioning in teaching experiences. *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews*. 22. 1864-1871. 10.30574/wjarr.2024.22.3.1907.
- Buzdugan, Olena & Oskina, Nataliia & Stryga, Eleonora & Avramenko, Bogdana & Dyshel, Ganna. (2025). Strategies for Effective Communication in English Language Teaching at Universities. *Salud, Ciencia y Tecnología - Serie de Conferencias*. 4. 1473. 10.56294/sctconf20251473.
- Cacciattolo, Marcelle. (2015). Ethical Considerations in Research. 10.1007/978-94-6300-112-0_4.

- Chen, Xi. (2024). A Literature Review of Communicative Language Teaching: Effectiveness and Deficiencies. *Frontiers in Sustainable Development*. 4. 59-63. 10.54691/29x4vp51.
- Christou, Prokopis. (2023). How to use Thematic Analysis in Qualitative Research. 1. 1-17. 10.4337/jqrt.2023.0006.
- Dörnyei, Z. (2009). The 2010s Communicative language teaching in the 21st century The 'principled communicative approach'. 34th National 3. Convention of TESOL, 33-42.
- Elliott, Julian. (2009). The nature of teacher authority and teacher expertise. *Support for Learning*. 24. 10.1111/j.1467-9604.2009.01429.x.
- Esgrina, Francisco Jr. (2024). COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE OF FILIPINO ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHERS: BASIS FOR A DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM. *LLT Journal: A Journal on Language and Language Teaching*. 27. 686-711. 10.24071/llt.v27i2.5597.
- Eshete, Muluaem & Gezahegn, Girma & Shure, Mohammed. (2024). English Language Teachers' Continuous Professional Development Target Needs: Lacks, Want and Necessities. 7. 107-130. 10.59122/174F53yo.
- Giorgi, Amedeo. (2012). The Descriptive Phenomenological Method in Psychology. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology*. 43. 3-12. 10.1163/156916212X632934.
- Gorsuch, Greta. (2000). EFL Educational Policies and Educational Cultures: Influences on Teachers' Approval of Communicative Activities. *TESOL Quarterly*. 34. 10.2307/3587781.
- Illes, Eva & Akcan, Sumru. (2016). Bringing real-life language use into EFL classrooms. *ELT Journal*. 71. ccw049. 10.1093/elt/ccw049.
- Kasumi, Hysen. (2015). Communicative Language Teaching and Its Impact on Students' Performance. *Journal of Educational and Social Research*. 5. 10.5901/jesr.2015.v5n1s1p155.
- Kshetree, Arun. (2023). Teaching and Trainings for Professional Learning of English Teachers. *Butwal Campus Journal*. 6. 32-41. 10.3126/bcj.v6i1.62952.
- Leech, Beth. (2002). Asking Questions: Techniques for Semistructured Interviews. *Political Science & Politics*. 35. pp. 665-668. 10.1017/S1049096502001129.
- Lestari, Muji & Margana, Margana. (2024). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Implementation In Kurikulum Merdeka: A Lesson From English Teachers' Voices. *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching*. 12. 1657. 10.33394/joltt.v12i4.11266.
- Madrunio, Marilu & Pefianco Martin, Isabel & Plata, Sterling. (2016). English Language Education in the Philippines: Policies, Problems, and Prospects. 10.1007/978-3-319-22464-0_11.
- Maestre, Jacky-Lou. (2016). Teachers' Beliefs, Practices and Challenges in Using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an ESL Context in the Philippines.
- Martina, Feny & Syafryadin, Syafryadin & Rakhmanina, Lisa & Juwita, Sisma. (2020). THE EFFECT OF TIME CONSTRAINT ON STUDENT READING COMPREHENSION TEST PERFORMANCE IN NARRATIVE TEXT. 8. 323. 10.33394/joltt.v%vi%i.2625.
- Marzulina, Lenny & Erlina, Dian & Holandayah, Muhammad & Harto, Kasinyo & Desvitasari, Deta & Angreini, Dessi. (2021). English Teachers' Strategies in Managing Large Classes: A Case Study. *Indonesian Research Journal in Education [IRJE]*. 5. 417-432. 10.22437/irje.v5i2.15705.
- Naeem, Muhammad & Ozuem, Wilson & Howell, Kerry & Ranfagni, Silvia. (2023). A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. 22. 10.1177/16094069231205789.
- Nasimova, Muattar. (2022). Communicative language teaching. *Общество и инновации*. 3. 222-228. 10.47689/2181-1415-vol3-iss5/S-pp222-228.
- Nishino, Takako. (2008). Japanese Secondary School Teachers' Beliefs and Practices Regarding Communicative Language Teaching: An Exploratory Survey. *JALT Journal*. 30. 10.37546/JALTJJ30.1-2.
- Nowlan, Andrew & Samuell, Christopher. (2020). Communicative Language Teaching: Contemporary Applications in Japan.
- Ogayon, Isidra & Tangalin, Imelda. (2020). COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: ITS EFFECT ON THE SPEAKING COMPETENCE OF GRADE 11 LEARNERS. *INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT*. 12. 368-377. 10.34218/IJM.11.9.2020.005.
- Rambe, Sojuangon. (2017). COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING. *English Education : English Journal for Teaching and Learning*. 5. 54. 10.24952/ee.v5i2.1180.
- Rego, Arménio & Cunha, Miguel & Jr, Victor. (2018). How many participants are necessary for a qualitative study? Practical guidelines. 17. 43-57.
- Reyes, Roselyn & Tongkoh, Adzmina & Chavez, Jason. (2023). Transitional Challenges And Factors Affecting English-Speaking Learners In Learning The Filipino Language. *Journal of Namibian Studies : History Politics Culture*. 33. 1720-1744. 10.59670/jns.v33i.3141.
- Rumlus, Grediana. (2020). The Way To Overcome Students' Hesitation In Speaking English At The 10 Th Grade Of Senior High School In Bekasi. *Jurnal Indonesia Sosial Sains*. 1. 60-63. 10.36418/jiss.v1i2.18.
- Sarfo, Jacob Owusu & Debrah, Timothy & Gbordzoe, Newton & Afful, William & Obeng, Paul. (2021). Qualitative Research Designs, Sample Size and Saturation: Is Enough Always Enough?. *Journal of Advocacy Research and Education*. 8. 60-65. 10.13187/jare.2021.3.60.
- Sato, Kazuyoshi & Kleinsasser, Robert. (1999). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): Practical Understandings. *Modern Language Journal*. 83. 10.1111/0026-7902.00037.

- Sheets-Johnstone, Maxine. (2017). In Praise of Phenomenology. *Phenomenology & Practice*. 11. 5-17. 10.29173/pandpr29340.
- Smith, Christine. (2025). Challenges in English Language Education in Japan: Policy vs. Practice. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*. 6. 53-63. 10.24018/ejedu.2025.6.2.912.
- Sonsona, Ramir Philip Jones & Sitoy, Jaslie. (2024). Investigating the Use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Strategies to Promote Innovative Teaching and Learning Approach. *Jurnal Pendidikan Indonesia*. 13.
- Stone, Paul. (2012). Implications of the socio-cultural context for the co-construction of talk in a task-based English as a foreign language classroom in Japan. *Classroom Discourse*. 3. 10.1080/19463014.2012.666034.
- Tono, Yukio & Negishi, M.. (2012). The CEFR-J: Adapting the CEFR for English language teaching in Japan. *JALT Framework & Language Portfolio SIG Newsletter*. 5-12.
- Tzuo, Pei-Wen & Chen, Der-Thanq. (2011). Re-conceptualizing Teacher Authority: When to Exact. *New Horizons in Education*. 59.
- Wei, Liping & Hsin-Hui, Lin & Freddie, Litton. (2018). Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in EFL Context in Asia. *Asian Culture and History*. 10. 1-1. 10.5539/ach.v10n2p1.
- Wiltshire, Gareth & Ronkainen, Noora. (2021). A realist approach to thematic analysis: making sense of qualitative data through experiential, inferential and dispositional themes. *Journal of Critical Realism*. 20. 10.1080/14767430.2021.1894909.
- Xiao, Yang. (2024). The Application of Communicative Language Teaching in English Classroom Activities. *Journal of Education and Educational Research*. 9. 113-116. 10.54097/4mj6n559.