An Impact Assessment on a Communicative Language Training Program for Language Teachers

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ABSTRACT

This study presents the outcomes of an impact assessment conducted on a training program centered around Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The program was implemented among a group of eighty-five university lecturers from both private and public institutions in Northern Mindanao, Philippines. The selected participants specialized in English language education and were treated as a cohort for this research endeavor. The study is grounded in the integration of CLT and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) theories, which emphasize the use of meaningful tasks to facilitate language learning, encourage communication, and promote interaction.

Data collection for the study encompassed several methodologies, including five sessions of Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), individual interviews, and survey questionnaires administered via Google Forms. The primary focus of the research was to analyze the influence of the CLT training on various aspects, including participants' perceptions of CLT approaches, their patterns of interaction, utilization of language learning activities, and resulting learning outcomes.

The findings of the study unveiled a significant transformation in participants' initial negative perceptions of the communicative approach. Subsequent to the CLT training, participants began to exhibit positive views and insights, particularly concerning the approach's impact on interaction patterns, utilization of various language learning activities, and overall enhancement of learning experiences. Furthermore, the assessment of the training program itself garnered highly favorable ratings from both trainers and trainees alike, specifically highlighting its well-structured format, organized content, and overall efficacy.

These discoveries strongly advocate for the effectiveness of the CLT methodology in the domain of language instruction. Notably, the study showcases how CLT has the potential to not only facilitate learner engagement but also foster the development of language proficiency. Moreover, this research offers empirical evidence that reinforces the affirmative impact of CLT training within the context of university lecturers. It serves as a validation of the significance of incorporating communicative approaches into language teaching practices and advocates for the pursuit of further research initiatives and opportunities for ongoing professional development in this domain.

Key words: Communicative Language Teaching, Training Program, Assessment

Introduction

Recent scholarly investigations have placed substantial emphasis on the pivotal role of communicative language training (CLT) in shaping effective language instruction for educators. Notably, Nguyen's (2021) study delved into the impact of a CLT professional development initiative on Vietnamese language instructors' pedagogical methods. The findings of this research illuminated the affirmative influence of CLT training, underscoring its role in fostering interactive teaching strategies and nurturing heightened student engagement and communication within the classroom environment.

Further highlighting the significance of CLT, Li and Zang (2020) explored the implementation of the approach within the realm of Chinese language education. Their study underscored the transformative impact of CLT in elevating students' communicative prowess, thereby invigorating their motivation and enthusiasm for language acquisition. Similarly, the inquiry undertaken by Wang and Li (2022) focused on EFL (English as a Foreign Language) instructors in China, scrutinizing the effects of a CLT training initiative on their teaching practices. Their research showcased that the training engendered a deeper grasp of CLT principles, consequently prompting a shift toward more student-centered and communicatively-oriented language instruction.

In tandem with these investigations, Yildirim's research (2023) delved into the influence of a CLT training course on Turkish language educators. The study illuminated the constructive impact of CLT training, with discernible enhancements observed in instructors' attitudes, classroom dynamics, and modes of interaction. This positive transformation translated into amplified student engagement and enhanced language proficiency.

Guided by the pivotal insights garnered from these contemporary studies, the present inquiry set out to examine the ramifications of a CLT training program on the perceptions of university lecturers regarding CLT approaches, interaction dynamics, utilization of instructional activities, and resulting learning outcomes. By delving into the particular context of Northern Mindanao, this research not only advances the existing knowledge base but also underscores the indispensability of embedding communicative methodologies within language instruction frameworks.

Aligned with the well-established importance of CLT for language educators and the encouraging outcomes unveiled by recent inquiries, the current investigation sought to furnish empirical substantiation of the efficacy of CLT training for university lecturers. The findings serve to enrich the burgeoning repository of CLT-related research, guiding the formulation of tailored training initiatives that ultimately facilitate the widespread adoption of communicative language teaching practices across language classrooms.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the recognized benefits of communicative language teaching (CLT) in language education, the need to investigate the training needs and impact assessment of CLT among language teachers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Northern Mindanao, was a deemed imperative. There were limited studies that specifically examined CLT's effects on language teachers and their instructional practices. Therefore, this study sought to explore the answers to:

1. The specific training needs of HEI language teachers in Northern Mindanao in relation to communicative language teaching approaches; and
2. How the CLT training program influenced language teachers' perceptions of CLT approaches, interaction patterns, activity utilization, and learning outcomes.

Framework of the study

The research framework utilized in this impact study was drawn from Kirkpatrick's (2009) Model of Evaluation, which provides a comprehensive framework for evaluating training programs. It consists of four levels of evaluation that assess different aspects of program outcomes, allowing for a systematic and structured analysis of the program's impact.
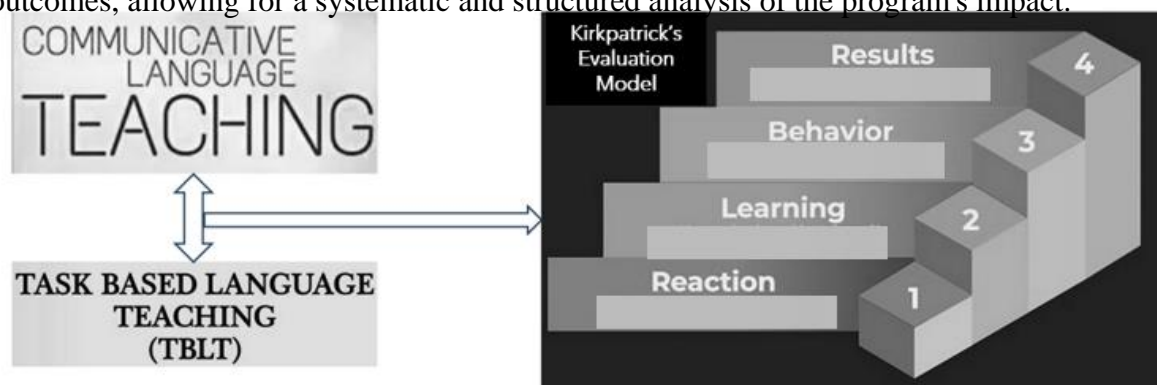

Figure 1. The Theoretical Framework

Figure 1 shows the theoretical framework of the study. The paper integrated Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT), drawing upon the contributions of influential researchers in the field. For CLT, Rivers (1981) emphasizes the significance of meaningful communication and interactive language use. Her research highlighted the need for learners to develop both accuracy and fluency in their language skills. Moreover, Canale & Swain (1980) developed the influential Communicative Competence Model, which serves as a cornerstone of CLT. Their model underscores the integration of linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences to achieve effective communication. In this research study, the integration of CLT informed the selection and design of tasks that promote real-life communication, fostering an environment where learners engage in authentic language use.

Furthermore, Task-Based Language Teaching has been extensively researched by prominent scholars. Peter Skehan (2018) made significant contributions to TBLT, emphasizing the role of tasks in language learning. He argues for the integration of task-based activities in the classroom to promote language acquisition and fluency. Jane Willis (2016), known for her work on task-based learning and syllabus design, developed the notion of "task-supported language teaching." Her approach highlights the use of tasks as a basis for language learning and as a means of promoting communicative competence. Furthermore, Rod Ellis (2018) has conducted extensive research on TBLT, focusing on task design, sequencing, and the cognitive processes involved in language learning through tasks. The theoretical foundation provided by these researchers influenced the design and implementation of language teaching activities in the study, wherein learners engaged in interactive and collaborative activities, such as pair or group work, role-plays, and simulations, to practice the target language in authentic contexts.

Generally, the incorporation of these theoretical perspectives on CLT and TBLT investigated the training needs and impact assessment of the CLT training program. This provided a

comprehensive approach to understanding the effectiveness and implications of CLT training among language teachers in HEIs in Northern Mindanao.

As shown in the figure, the arrow points to Kirkpatrick's (2009) Model. The first level is the Reaction level, which focuses on gathering feedback from participants regarding their satisfaction, engagement, and perception of the training program. This level aimed to understand how the language teachers responded to the program and their overall experience. Data collection methods such as surveys, interviews, and observation were employed to assess participants' reactions and attitudes.

The second level is the Learning level, which assessed the acquisition of knowledge, skills, and competencies by the language teachers. It evaluated whether the training program effectively enhanced their understanding and application of communicative language teaching principles. Evaluation methods at this level included pre- and post-tests, skills demonstrations, and portfolio assessments.

Moving to the third level, the Behavior level evaluated whether the training program has influenced changes in the language teachers' teaching practices and behaviors. It assessed the extent to which participants have successfully incorporated communicative language teaching techniques into their classroom instruction. Evaluation methods at this level involved classroom observations, lesson plan reviews, and self-reporting by the language teachers.

Lastly, the fourth level of the Kirkpatrick Model is the Results level, which examined the impact of the training program on broader outcomes, particularly on students' language proficiency, engagement, and overall learning outcomes. This level explored whether the communicative language training program has positively influenced students' language learning experiences. Evaluation methods at this level included student assessments, surveys, and comparative analysis of student performance data.

By employing the Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation, this research framework allowed for a comprehensive assessment of the communicative language training program's impact on language teachers and their subsequent influence on student outcomes.

Methodology

This research utilized Creswell's (2018) mixed-methods research design, combining qualitative and quantitative approaches. The qualitative component involved Focus Group Discussion (FGD) sessions and interviews to gather in-depth insights into participants' perceptions and experiences with CLT training. Krueger's (2015) FGD prompts and Kvale's (2019) interview guide questions were utilized in this paper. These qualitative data provided rich descriptions and perspectives on the impact of the training program.

The quantitative component of the research involved survey questionnaires administered through Google Forms. The questionnaires collected quantitative data on participants' perceptions of CLT approaches, interaction patterns, activity utilization, and learning outcomes. Statistical analysis techniques, such as descriptive statistics and inferential analysis, were used to analyze the quantitative data and identify patterns and relationships.

Furthermore, the research adopted a pre- and post-test design to assess the impact of the CLT training program. The pre-test was conducted before the training program to establish baseline data on participants' perceptions and instructional practices. The post-test was administered after the training program to measure any changes and improvements in participants' perceptions and practices.

Results

The research study yielded several significant results regarding the training needs and impact assessment of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) training program among language teachers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Northern Mindanao. The key findings are subsequently revealed.

Table 1. Matrix of the Respondents' Training Needs

Training Needs	Specific Areas of Improvement	Recommended Actions
Classroom Management	Creating a conducive learning environment for communicative language teaching	Provide training on establishing classroom routines, managing student interactions, and promoting learner autonomy
Task Design	Designing authentic and engaging tasks that promote communicative language use	Offer workshops on task-based language teaching principles, provide examples of effective task design, and encourage teachers to develop their own tasks
Technology Integration	Incorporating technology tools and resources in communicative language teaching	Conduct training sessions on using digital tools, online platforms, and multimedia resources to enhance language learning and foster communication
Assessment Strategies	Implementing formative and summative assessments aligned with communicative language teaching	Provide guidance on designing performance-based assessments, using rubrics, and assessing oral communication and interaction
Teacher-Student Interaction	Facilitating meaningful teacher-student interactions in the target language	Conduct workshops on effective questioning techniques, providing constructive feedback, and encouraging student participation
Collaborative Learning	Promoting collaborative learning opportunities among students	Introduce cooperative learning strategies, group projects, and pair work activities to foster communication and peer interaction
Authentic Materials	Selecting and utilizing authentic materials to enhance language learning	Train teachers on locating and adapting authentic resources, such as news articles, videos, and real-world materials, to create authentic language learning experiences
Professional Learning Communities	Establishing communities for ongoing professional development and support	Encourage participation in professional learning communities, mentoring programs, and peer observations to foster collaboration and sharing of best practices

The matrix provides a comprehensive overview of the specific training needs identified in the impact study on HEI language teachers in Northern Mindanao regarding communicative language teaching approaches. It highlights key areas for improvement and suggests targeted actions to address these needs. By addressing these training needs, the study aimed to enhance the quality of language instruction and ultimately improve language learning outcomes for students in the region.

The training needs identified in the matrix cover various aspects of communicative language teaching, ranging from classroom management and task design to technology integration and assessment strategies. These findings shed light on the specific challenges that language teachers in Northern Mindanao may face when implementing communicative language teaching approaches in their classrooms. The matrix provides a roadmap for addressing these challenges by recommending practical actions, such as workshops, training sessions, and the promotion of professional learning communities; which was likewise postulated by Kru (2022).

The recommended actions outlined in the matrix emphasize the importance of professional development and ongoing support for language teachers. By offering targeted training programs and fostering collaborative learning environments, the study aims to empower teachers with the necessary skills, knowledge, and resources to effectively implement communicative language teaching approaches. Moreover, the matrix underscores the significance of creating authentic language learning experiences for students by utilizing authentic materials, promoting meaningful teacher-student interactions, and fostering collaborative learning opportunities.

By implementing the recommendations from the matrix, educational institutions in Northern Mindanao can proactively address the training needs of their language teachers and contribute to the improvement of language instruction. Based from Lu's (2022) study, this can lead to enriched language learning experiences for students, enhanced language proficiency, and the development of effective communicative skills among learners in the region.

Table 2. How the Training Program Influenced Teacher's Perceptions

Aspect	Findings
Perceptions of CLT Approaches	Shifted positively: Valued communicative language teaching, learner autonomy, authentic language use. Teachers expressed a stronger belief in the importance of meaningful communication and interactive language use.
Interaction Patterns	Increased student-student interactions: More pair and group work, student-centered discussions. Classroom observations showed teachers facilitating more student-centered discussions, promoting active participation.
Activity Utilization	Improved integration of CLT activities: Authentic materials, task-based activities, real-life language use. Lesson plans and instructional materials exhibited a higher utilization of authentic materials and task-based activities.
Learning Outcomes	Enhanced performance and proficiency: Improved post-training assessments, increased fluency, and accuracy in oral communication. Post-training assessments demonstrated improved performance and increased proficiency in oral communication skills.

The research findings highlight the significant impact of the CLT training program on language teachers' perceptions, interaction patterns, activity utilization, and learning outcomes. Firstly, the program led to a positive shift in teachers' perceptions, as they began to value the principles of communicative language teaching, including learner autonomy and authentic language use. This change in perception is crucial, as it reflects a deeper understanding and appreciation for the importance of meaningful communication in language learning. According to Bowen (2022), by embracing communicative language teaching approaches, teachers can create a more engaging and interactive learning environment for their students.

Secondly, the training program effectively influenced interaction patterns in the classroom. The increase in student-student interactions, along with more pair and group work, fostered collaborative learning and promoted active participation among students. This shift from teacher-centered to student-centered discussions empowered learners to take ownership of their learning process and develop their communication skills through meaningful interactions. The findings, similar with the research of Strei (2021) suggest that the CLT training program successfully enhanced the quality and dynamics of classroom interactions, ultimately facilitating a more communicative and engaging language learning environment.

Furthermore, the integration of CLT activities demonstrated a positive impact on activity utilization. Teachers showed an improved understanding of how to incorporate authentic materials and task-based activities into their lesson plans and instructional materials. This integration provided learners with opportunities to engage in real-life language use and tasks that reflect authentic communication situations. Mei (2021) posits that by utilizing such

activities, language teachers can create a bridge between classroom learning and real-world language use, fostering a deeper understanding and application of the target language.

Lastly, the research findings indicated enhanced learning outcomes as a result of the CLT training program. Post-training assessments revealed improved performance and increased proficiency in oral communication skills among students. The program's focus on meaningful communication and interactive language use contributed to students' increased fluency, accuracy, and confidence in using the target language. These positive learning outcomes highlight the effectiveness of the CLT training program in equipping language teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to facilitate language learning experiences that promote active engagement, authentic communication, and successful language acquisition.

In summary, the research results demonstrate that the CLT training program has a transformative impact on language teachers' perceptions, interaction patterns, activity utilization, and learning outcomes. By fostering a shift towards communicative language teaching, promoting student-centered interactions, and integrating authentic activities, the program equips teachers with the tools to create a dynamic and engaging language learning environment. The positive outcomes observed, such as improved performance and increased proficiency in oral communication, underline the significance of implementing CLT approaches in language education settings. These findings support the effectiveness of the CLT training program in enhancing language teachers' practices and ultimately improving the language learning experiences of students.

Furthermore, Weir's (2008) pre-test was conducted as an initial assessment of the language teachers' knowledge, skills, and competencies regarding communicative language teaching principles before the training program. It involved administering a comprehensive assessment instrument consisting of questions, tasks, and scenarios aligned with the program's learning objectives. The pre-test aimed to establish a baseline understanding and identify areas for improvement among the teachers. It was administered in a controlled environment, providing standardized conditions for all participants. The results of the pre-test served as a starting point for designing a targeted training program that addressed the specific needs of the teachers, ensuring effective professional development in communicative language teaching.

The pre-test assessed the teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical application of communicative language teaching principles. It included questions that evaluated their understanding of concepts such as learner autonomy, authentic language use, and meaningful communication. By analyzing the pre-test results, the training program organizers gained insights into the teachers' initial knowledge levels and identified any gaps or areas that required further development. This information played a crucial role in tailoring the program to meet the specific needs of the teachers, facilitating their growth in understanding and application of communicative language teaching principles.

The post-test was conducted as a follow-up assessment after the completion of the training program to evaluate the impact and effectiveness of the program on the language teachers' knowledge, skills, and competencies related to communicative language teaching principles. It served as a means to measure the teachers' progress and growth in understanding and applying communicative language teaching approaches.

The post-test assessment consisted of a series of questions, tasks, or scenarios that assessed the teachers' theoretical knowledge and practical application of communicative language teaching principles. The same with Breneman's (2023) findings, it aimed to evaluate the extent to which the training program had influenced their understanding and proficiency in implementing communicative language teaching strategies in the classroom. The post-test

included various formats, such as multiple-choice questions, short-answer responses, or practical demonstrations, allowing the teachers to showcase their acquired knowledge and skills.

The results of the post-test provided insights into the teachers' post-training performance and their ability to apply the principles of communicative language teaching in their instructional practices. Comparing the post-test results with the pre-test data allowed for an assessment of the training program's effectiveness in enhancing the teachers' knowledge and skills. The post-test findings contributed to an overall evaluation of the impact of the training program and provided valuable information for further improvement and refinement of future training initiatives.

Conclusions

In conclusion, the research study focused on evaluating the impact of a communicative language teaching (CLT) training program on language teachers' perceptions, interaction patterns, activity utilization, and learning outcomes. The findings revealed significant positive changes in these areas as a result of the training program.

The study highlighted that the CLT training program successfully influenced language teachers' perceptions, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation for the principles of communicative language teaching. Teachers began to value meaningful communication, interactive language use, and learner autonomy, which are key aspects of CLT.

Furthermore, the program had a positive impact on interaction patterns in the classroom, promoting student-student interactions, pair work, and group work. This shift from teacher-centered to student-centered discussions facilitated collaborative learning and active participation among students, creating a more engaging and communicative language learning environment.

The integration of CLT activities also played a significant role in the training program's effectiveness. Teachers demonstrated an improved ability to incorporate authentic materials and task-based activities into their lesson plans, providing learners with opportunities for real-life language use and authentic communication experiences.

Importantly, the research findings indicated enhanced learning outcomes as a result of the CLT training program. Students showed improved performance and increased proficiency in oral communication skills, highlighting the program's effectiveness in equipping teachers with the necessary skills and strategies to facilitate successful language acquisition.

Overall, the research study demonstrated the positive impact of the CLT training program on language teachers' practices and student learning outcomes. The findings emphasize the importance of providing comprehensive and targeted training to language teachers, focusing on communicative language teaching approaches, to create dynamic and engaging language learning environments.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the study on the impact of a communicative language teaching (CLT) training program for language teachers, the following recommendations can be made for future research:

1. Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies would provide valuable insights into the long-term effects of CLT training programs on language teachers' practices and student outcomes. Following teachers over an extended period of time would allow researchers to assess the sustainability of the training program's impact, observe any changes in teaching practices over time, and analyze the persistence of improved student learning outcomes. Longitudinal studies would provide a comprehensive understanding of the long-term benefits of CLT training and inform the development of more effective and sustainable professional development programs.

2. Comparative Studies: Comparative studies comparing the impact of CLT training programs across different contexts, such as diverse educational settings or regions, would provide a broader understanding of the program's effectiveness and its applicability in various contexts. Comparing the outcomes of CLT training in different educational contexts, such as primary, secondary, or tertiary levels, or in different cultural and linguistic contexts, would help identify factors that may influence the success and implementation of CLT approaches. Comparative studies would contribute to the development of tailored training programs that address the specific needs and challenges of different educational contexts.

3. Mixed-Methods Research: Incorporating mixed-methods research designs would enrich the understanding of the impact of CLT training programs by combining quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative measures, such as standardized language proficiency tests, can provide objective data on student outcomes, while qualitative methods, such as classroom observations, interviews, or focus group discussions, can offer insights into teachers' experiences, perceptions, and implementation of CLT principles. By utilizing both quantitative and qualitative approaches, future research can provide a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the complex dynamics and outcomes associated with CLT training programs.

By undertaking these future research recommendations, scholars can further advance the field of communicative language teaching, refine training programs, and contribute to evidence-based practices that promote effective language instruction and improved student learning outcomes.

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