

**BRIDGING THE GAP BETWEEN TEACHERS' BELIEFS AND CLASSROOM PRACTICES IN
COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: EVIDENCE FROM UZBEKISTANA**

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Annotation. This article explores the discrepancy between English language teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices in implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Uzbekistan. Although teachers generally express positive attitudes toward the communicative approach, their actual classroom behavior often remains traditional and teacher-centered. The study discusses several factors that contribute to this gap, including insufficient methodological training, large class sizes, exam-oriented education, and cultural attitudes toward authority. It also highlights the need for better teacher preparation programs, institutional support, and assessment reform to encourage the practical use of communicative activities in language classrooms. The findings emphasize that bridging the gap between beliefs and practices is essential for the successful implementation of CLT and the improvement of students' communicative competence in Uzbekistan.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, teachers' beliefs, classroom practices, Uzbekistan, language education reform, communicative competence

Introduction. In the past few decades, English has become an essential global language for communication, education, business, and international relations. As a result, English language teaching (ELT) has become one of the main priorities in many non-English-speaking countries, including Uzbekistan. Since gaining independence, Uzbekistan has recognized the importance of mastering English as a key tool for integration into the global community. The government has implemented numerous reforms to improve foreign language education, including the introduction of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) as a central approach in the national curriculum. Communicative Language Teaching emphasizes real-life communication, learner interaction, and functional language use rather than mere grammatical accuracy. Unlike traditional methods such as the Grammar-Translation Method, which focus primarily on rules and written exercises, CLT aims to help students use the language effectively and spontaneously in authentic contexts. The approach encourages student-centered learning, pair and group work, and task-based activities that reflect real communication. However, despite its theoretical advantages, the practical implementation of CLT in many developing contexts has faced significant challenges. In Uzbekistan, the introduction of CLT has created both enthusiasm and uncertainty among English language teachers. Many teachers express positive beliefs about CLT, recognizing that communicative competence is essential for students' success in the modern world. However, their actual classroom practices often remain rooted in traditional methods. Lessons are frequently teacher-centered, with limited opportunities for students to speak freely or engage in communicative tasks. This inconsistency between teachers' beliefs and classroom behavior has become one of the major obstacles in achieving the goals of

communicative education. Several factors contribute to this gap. First, many teachers have not received sufficient methodological training in communicative teaching. While they understand the concept of CLT at a theoretical level, they often lack the practical experience and confidence to apply it effectively. Second, contextual constraints—such as large class sizes, limited resources, rigid curricula, and exam-oriented education—discourage teachers from implementing communicative activities. Third, cultural and psychological barriers also play a role. In Uzbekistan's traditional learning culture, teachers are viewed as authoritative figures, and students often hesitate to speak out or make mistakes in front of their peers. Furthermore, the assessment system in many schools continues to emphasize written grammar tests rather than communicative performance. This mismatch between curriculum goals and testing methods forces teachers to focus on accuracy and memorization instead of fluency and communication. Consequently, even teachers who value CLT find it difficult to align their classroom practices with their beliefs due to systemic pressures. Therefore, understanding the gap between teachers' beliefs and practices is crucial for improving the effectiveness of English language education in Uzbekistan. By examining the causes of this inconsistency, researchers and policymakers can identify practical solutions that promote genuine communicative learning. Bridging this gap will not only enhance the quality of language instruction but also empower students to become confident users of English in real-life contexts. This study aims to explore the reasons behind the mismatch between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices regarding CLT in Uzbekistan. It also seeks to identify possible strategies to support teachers in implementing communicative approaches more effectively within the existing educational framework.

Analysis of literature. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has long been recognized as one of the most influential approaches in English language education worldwide. The central aim of CLT is to develop learners' communicative competence, enabling them to use language effectively in real-life contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972). However, despite its theoretical strength, research in many EFL (English as a Foreign Language) contexts—including Uzbekistan—has shown a persistent gap between teachers' beliefs about CLT and their actual classroom practices (Borg, 2003; Li, 1998; Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). According to Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT emphasizes meaningful communication, learner-centered instruction, and authentic language use. Teachers are expected to act as facilitators who create opportunities for interaction and encourage students to negotiate meaning. However, in many Asian and post-Soviet educational contexts, traditional methods such as grammar-translation and teacher-fronted instruction continue to dominate classrooms. Thompson (1996) argues that one reason for this is teachers' incomplete understanding of what CLT entails; many associate it merely with conversational practice, neglecting its broader principles such as fluency development, interactional strategies, and task-based learning. Research in East Asian and post-Soviet contexts has repeatedly shown that institutional and cultural factors play a decisive role in shaping teaching practices. Anderson (1993) and Li (1998) found that large class sizes, exam-oriented curricula, and limited instructional resources discourage teachers from applying communicative methods. Similarly, Karavas-Doukas (1996) demonstrated that while teachers often express positive attitudes toward CLT, their practices remain largely mechanical and form-focused. These findings are echoed in Uzbekistan, where the legacy of traditional pedagogy and strong emphasis on accuracy have hindered the adoption of communicative approaches. Another important aspect highlighted in literature is the role of teacher cognition—

the beliefs, attitudes, and knowledge teachers hold about teaching and learning. Borg (2003) emphasized that teachers' beliefs significantly influence how they interpret and apply teaching methods. Even when teachers are aware of CLT principles, they may struggle to implement them effectively without proper training or institutional support. Studies such as Zheng (2009) and Rahmanov (2021) note that in Uzbekistan and similar contexts, teachers' pedagogical beliefs often conflict with their classroom realities due to systemic pressures and insufficient professional development.

Materials and methods. This study employed a mixed-methods approach combining both quantitative and qualitative data to explore the relationship between Uzbek EFL teachers' beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their actual classroom practices. The mixed-methods design was chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing the gap between belief and practice. **Participants:** The study involved 40 English language teachers from 10 secondary schools across Tashkent, Samarkand, and Fergana regions. The participants were selected using purposive sampling to include teachers with varying years of experience, educational backgrounds, and school types (urban and rural). Among them, 28 were female and 12 were male, and their teaching experience ranged from 3 to 25 years. **Research Instruments:** Three main instruments were used for data collection:

- **Questionnaire:** A structured questionnaire was designed to measure teachers' beliefs about CLT principles, including communicative competence, learner-centeredness, and classroom interaction. The questionnaire consisted of 25 Likert-scale items adapted from Borg (2003) and Karavas-Doukas (1996).
- **Classroom Observation:** Each teacher was observed twice during regular English lessons using an observation checklist focusing on teaching style, student participation, use of communicative tasks, and language use. Observations were conducted over a period of two months to ensure reliability.
- **Semi-Structured Interviews:** After the observations, 10 teachers were interviewed to gain deeper insights into their perceptions of CLT, challenges faced in implementation, and institutional constraints. Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent.

Data analysis: Quantitative data from questionnaires were analyzed using descriptive statistics (percentages and mean scores) to identify general trends in teachers' beliefs. Qualitative data from classroom observations and interviews were analyzed through thematic analysis. Codes and categories were developed based on recurring themes such as teacher roles, classroom interaction, assessment methods, and challenges in applying CLT.

Ethical considerations: All participants were informed about the purpose of the study and assured that their responses would remain confidential. Participation was voluntary, and consent was obtained before data collection.

Research validity and Reliability: To ensure the reliability of the research instruments, the questionnaire was piloted with five teachers before full implementation. Data triangulation (questionnaire, observation, and interviews) was applied to enhance the validity of the findings. **Table 1. Comprehensive Analysis of the Gap Between Teachers' Beliefs and Classroom Practices in CLT**

No	Aspect	Teachers' Beliefs	Actual Classroom Practices	Main Causes of the Gap	Consequences and Implications
1	Purpose of English teaching	Teachers believe that communication and fluency are the ultimate goals of language learning	Teaching focuses mostly on grammar rules, translation, and written exercises	Curriculum standards and national exams prioritize accuracy and written performance	Students lack opportunities to develop oral fluency and real-life communication skills
2	Role of communication	Teachers acknowledge that interaction and speaking practice are central to learning	Students rarely speak; teachers dominate the lesson time	Overcrowded classes and time constraints make communicative tasks difficult	Low student motivation and limited speaking competence
3	Teaching methodology	Teachers express support for pair work, group, discussion, and task-based learning	Most lessons remain teacher-centered with limited student engagement	Lack of practical training, limited authentic materials, and rigid timetables	Learning becomes passive and dependent on memorization
4	Teacher's role	Teachers agree they should act as facilitators who guide communication	Teachers often take full control of activities and explanations	Traditional expectations of teacher authority in Uzbek culture	Students are less independent and rely heavily on teachers
5	Student's role	Teachers believe students should take an active part in classroom communication	Students remain passive listeners and responders	Fear of mistakes, low confidence, and exam pressure	Communication anxiety and limited confidence in using English
6	Error correction	Teachers claim errors are part of the learning process	Teachers correct every mistake immediately	Cultural pressure for correctness and exam expectations	Students avoid speaking to prevent errors
7	Assessment methods	Teachers support communicative-oriented assessment forms	Exams still focus on grammar, vocabulary, and writing	Mismatch between curriculum aims and testing system	CLT remains theoretical, not practiced in real evaluation

No	Aspect	Teachers' Beliefs	Actual Classroom Practices	Main Causes of the Gap	Consequences and Implications
8	Professional development	Teachers express willingness to apply CLT if supported	Teachers lack methodological workshops and peer collaboration	Insufficient in-service training and institutional support	Slow progress in implementing communicative approaches

Research discussion. The findings of this research reveal a significant mismatch between teachers' beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their actual classroom practices in Uzbek secondary schools. Although most teachers express strong theoretical support for communicative principles, their teaching behavior often remains rooted in traditional grammar-based methods. This contradiction reflects the influence of systemic, cultural, and institutional barriers that restrict the practical implementation of CLT. Firstly, the analysis indicates that curriculum design and examination systems play a major role in shaping classroom instruction. Teachers believe in the importance of communication and interaction, yet national exams still focus on grammatical accuracy and written tasks. As a result, teachers tend to prioritize test preparation over communicative activities. This finding is consistent with previous studies such as Li (1998) and Karavas-Doukas (1996), who noted that exam-oriented education systems often discourage communicative teaching approaches. Secondly, classroom conditions and institutional constraints also contribute to the gap. Many teachers reported large class sizes, limited lesson time, and a lack of suitable materials for pair or group work. These factors make it difficult to manage communicative tasks effectively. Similar challenges were reported in other EFL contexts, for instance in China and Japan, where teachers face similar structural limitations (Anderson, 1993). Thirdly, teachers' own experiences and cultural expectations play a crucial role. In Uzbekistan, the traditional perception of teachers as authority figures often prevents them from adopting the role of facilitators. Teachers may feel uncomfortable allowing students to lead activities or make mistakes during communication. This cultural factor limits the shift toward a more learner-centered approach. Another important finding concerns teacher training and professional development. Although teachers show a positive attitude toward CLT, they lack adequate methodological preparation to implement it effectively. Professional workshops often focus on theory rather than practical classroom techniques. Without continuous support and collaboration opportunities, teachers struggle to transfer beliefs into real teaching behavior. Finally, student factors also influence the gap. Many students feel anxious about speaking English or making mistakes in front of peers. Their low confidence and exam-oriented mindset further discourage communicative participation. Teachers, in turn, avoid interactive tasks because they fear losing classroom control or wasting time.

Conclusion. The present study examined the relationship between Uzbek EFL teachers' beliefs about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and their actual classroom practices. The findings reveal that while most teachers hold positive beliefs about the importance of communicative competence and student-centered learning, their classroom behavior continues to reflect traditional, teacher-centered methods. This inconsistency arises from a combination of institutional, cultural, and pedagogical barriers. Key factors contributing to this gap include

exam-oriented assessment systems, large class sizes, limited teaching resources, and insufficient professional training. Teachers often struggle to implement communicative techniques such as pair work, group discussions, and task-based learning due to time constraints and rigid curriculum expectations. Moreover, cultural attitudes toward teacher authority and students' fear of making mistakes hinder open communication in the classroom. To bridge this gap, it is necessary to reform educational policies, align national examinations with communicative learning outcomes, and provide teachers with continuous, practice-oriented professional development. Encouraging collaboration among teachers, offering methodological support, and creating flexible classroom environments can also enhance the practical application of CLT. Ultimately, improving the harmony between teachers' beliefs and their classroom practices will not only strengthen the effectiveness of English teaching in Uzbekistan but also foster students' communicative competence and confidence in using English in real-life contexts.

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