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INTEGRATING EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY INTO COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: ENHANCING INTERACTION AND LEARNER AUTONOMY IN THE MODERN EFL CLASSROOM

Imomova Navruza Inaxboy qizi
Chirchik State Pedagogical University Faculty of Tourism
Department of Linguistics and English Language Teaching
Email: inavruza678@gmail.com

Abstract
As digital tools transform the global educational landscape, English language classrooms worldwide are transitioning from traditional, teacher-centered models to interactive, learner-centered approaches. This article examines how technology can be strategically integrated within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to enhance learning outcomes for diverse, international audiences. It highlights innovative digital tools that foster authentic communication, discusses benefits and challenges across cultural contexts, and proposes evidence-based pedagogical strategies for optimizing technology-supported communicative tasks in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom worldwide.

1. Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) prioritizes meaningful interaction, purposeful communication, and learner-centered instruction (Richards, 2006). With the rapid advancement of digitalization, technology has become integral to language pedagogy by facilitating new modes of communication and broadening access to authentic input. Research indicates that, when effectively integrated, technology enhances communicative competence, collaboration, and learner autonomy (Hockly, 2016; Wang & Vásquez, 2012).

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2. Theoretical Connections Between Technology and CLT

2.1. Interaction and negotiation of meaning

CLT draws on theories that highlight the importance of interaction in language development. Long's (1996) Interaction Hypothesis argues that learners acquire language through negotiation of meaning during communicative exchanges. Technology-enhanced communication—video calls, online discussions, or chat tools—supports such interaction by offering flexible, multimodal spaces for real-time or asynchronous negotiation.

2.2. Socio-cultural perspectives on communication

Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural theory posits that learning occurs through social interaction and scaffolding. Digital tools extend sociocultural learning opportunities by enabling collaboration beyond the physical classroom. Research shows that online collaborative tasks support co-construction of meaning and scaffolded communication (Lantolf & Thorne, 2006).

2.3. Learner autonomy and digital literacy

Digital environments allow learners to take greater control of their learning, reflecting principles of autonomy essential to modern CLT (Benson, 2011). Learning Management Systems (LMS), mobile apps, and AI-driven platforms support self-directed practice, feedback, and reflection.

3. Practical Applications of Technology within CLT

3.1. Technology to enhance speaking and interaction

Video conferencing tools such as Zoom and Teams facilitate synchronous communication, allowing students to participate in role plays, interviews, and intercultural exchanges. Research shows that these environments increase interactional opportunities and reduce speaking anxiety (Sun, 2020).

3.2. Collaborative writing and digital co-construction

Collaborative platforms like Google Docs, Padlet, and Wikis enable learners to co-construct texts, negotiate language choices, and engage in peer editing. Studies

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indicate that online collaborative writing enhances interactional competence and grammatical accuracy (Kessler, 2018).

3.3. Authentic communication through social media

Social media platforms provide real audiences and authentic communicative contexts. Activities such as digital storytelling, vlog creation, or participation in online forums support creativity and audience awareness (Godwin-Jones, 2018). These tasks align with CLT's emphasis on meaningful, real-world communication.

3.4. AI tools for communicative practice

AI-powered chatbots and language apps provide dynamic interaction, personalized feedback, and low-anxiety practice environments. Early studies suggest that conversational AI enhances learner confidence and promotes sustained engagement (Li, 2021).

4. Benefits of Integrating Technology into CLT

4.1. Increased motivation and engagement

Digital tools create interactive, multimodal environments that heighten learner motivation (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Gamified platforms and creative projects enhance engagement and reduce communication barriers.

4.2. Access to authentic language use

Technology connects learners with global communities, authentic materials, and real communicative contexts, aligning with CLT's focus on real-life communication (Gilmore, 2007).

4.3. Immediate and personalized feedback

Digital platforms and AI tools provide instant corrective feedback, enabling learners to monitor and adjust their performance (Heil et al., 2016).

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4.4. Expanded collaboration opportunities

Technology supports collaboration both inside and outside the classroom, facilitating peer learning, group projects, and intercultural communication.

5. Challenges and Considerations

Despite significant benefits, several challenges must be considered:

- **Digital divide:** Unequal access to devices and stable internet can limit participation (van Dijk, 2020).
- **Teacher training:** Many teachers lack sufficient training in technology-enhanced pedagogy (Hubbard, 2013).
- **Over-reliance on technology:** Using tools without pedagogical purpose can reduce learning quality (Chapelle, 2016).
- **Privacy and safety concerns:** Students need instruction in digital citizenship and online safety.

Effective integration requires aligning technological tools with communicative goals rather than using technology for its own sake.

6. Pedagogical Recommendations

1. **Begin with communicative goals, then select the tool.** Technology must serve pedagogy, not vice versa.
2. **Design tasks requiring meaningful communication**, such as problem-solving, role play, or collaborative projects.
3. **Blend synchronous and asynchronous tools** to create rich interaction patterns.
4. **Provide scaffolding and digital literacy training** to support effective participation.
5. **Balance technology with face-to-face communication** to maintain human interaction central to CLT.
6. **Evaluate tools regularly** to ensure they support learner needs and communicative outcomes.

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7. Conclusion

Technology can significantly enhance Communicative Language Teaching when integrated purposefully. By supporting authentic communication, collaboration, and learner autonomy, digital tools enrich the learning environment and prepare learners for real-world English use. However, successful implementation requires thoughtful pedagogical design, teacher training, and awareness of potential challenges. As technology evolves, educators must remain reflective and intentional, ensuring that communicative competence remains at the heart of instructional practice

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