

**A Comparative Study of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and AI-Assisted Language Teaching in Rural Undergraduate English Classrooms**

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**Abstract**

English Language, with all its multi-dimensional usage, holds a prominent position in the job market apart from core skills, for high paying careers. In order to succeed in the increasingly globalized academic and professional world, undergraduate students must be proficient in English. However, most researchers observe that, even today, rural college students—except for a few—continue to perceive English as a nightmare. As a result, many struggle to perform confidently during interviews and eventually feel disappointed and excluded from the job market. To overcome this struggle students, have to follow the new strategies and approaches in learning the language with ease and interest.

In this context, the present paper focuses on teaching – learning strategies that are taken up in the rural undergraduate classroom. It highlights on a comparative study of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and AI-assisted language instruction in English classroom. Further, it examines the theoretical observations, instructional strategies, advantages, and limitations of both approaches. It also looks at the feasibility to synchronize both these approaches in the English classroom for the benefit of rural students.

**Keywords** English Proficiency – Rural Undergraduates – Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) – AI-Assisted Language Instruction – Integration of CLT and AI Language Instruction

**Introduction**

English is emerged as one of the primary languages in various fields like education, science and technology, business and international communication. As a result, English proficiency has a major impact on academic achievement and employability in India, particularly based on undergraduate education. However, in this circumstance, effective English instruction is still difficult, especially in rural Degree Colleges where students are mostly from vernacular medium backgrounds and have very less exposure to communicative English settings. Hence, the teaching methods are shifted from Grammar-

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focused and teacher-centered approaches to Communicative Language Teaching, which emphasizes meaningful interaction and day to day regular communication. Consequently, CLT is being widely used in Degree Colleges of Andhra Pradesh in particular, because it places a high priority on learner participation, fluency and functional language use. According to Richards, “CLT aims to a) make communicative competence the goal of language teaching and b) develop procedures for the teaching of the four language skills that acknowledge the interdependence of language and communication.” (Richards, 155)

In recent times, Language teachers have started to change language instruction due to the developments in educational technology with AI. Consequently, AI-assisted language instructions by using chatbots, speech recognition software, adaptive learning platforms and automated feedback systems can help students to improve their language skills. However, the effectiveness of any technological tool depends on the knowledge and expertise of the language teachers who manages and facilitates the language learning environment.

### **Literature Review:**

The efficiency of CLT in second language acquisition has been an area of research interest for several scholars. Communicative competence was first discussed by Hymes (1972), who focused on the ability to apply one's language appropriately within a social context. This model was further addressed by Canale and Swain (1980), who identified discourse, grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence as part of language ability. Research on the effectiveness of CLT describes that this approach enhances the functional use of language, interaction skills, and confidence in speaking among learners.

On the other hand, research carried out in rural Indian classrooms highlights some obstacles to the implementation of CLT, such as large class sizes, poor teacher preparation, curricula that are focused on exams, and a low self-esteem situation among students. In the field of applied linguistics, researchers examine the potential for the application of Artificial Intelligence (AI) to assist individuals in gaining proficiency in the second language. Accordingly, AI-based language learning systems such as Intelligent Tutoring Systems (ITS), Automated Essay Scoring (AES), and Pronunciation Tutoring Systems have been developed to raise the degree of engagement and autonomy of students in the classroom (Holmes et al., 2019). According to current research, the majority of these systems provide immediate feedback to the students regarding their performance. They enable learners to study according to their level of proficiency, and offer more opportunities to practise the language, which is essential for those students who spend minimal time with the instructors. However, Zawacki-Richter et al. (2019) cautions that **“despite the enormous opportunities that AI might afford to support teaching and**

**learning, new ethical implications and risks come in with the development of AI applications in higher education”** (Zawacki, 2). Some of the concerns are the digital divide, data privacy, and over-dependence on technology. In rural and resource-constrained educational settings, they become critical challenges.

This comparative study focuses on the efficacy of Communicative Language teaching methods in encouraging interactions among learners and technology based on Artificial Intelligence that brings greater possibilities on one hand and the concerns that raise about the disparities in technology accessibility, over-reliance on technology, its consequences and scope to synchronize the two approaches.

### **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) Techniques in Rural Colleges**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) stresses student-centric, functional use, and real communication. In the perspective of Richards, CLT can be understood as “a set of principles about the goals of language teaching, how learners learn a language, the kinds of classroom activities that best facilitate learning, and the roles of teachers and learners in the classroom.” (Richards, Jack C. 2) In the undergraduate colleges located in rural areas, this approach is highly effective where students have little exposure to the English language outside the classrooms. The CLT approach is highly relevant in the rural classroom environment, because it integrates classroom learning and real-world language use. As a result, students’ confidence and communicative capabilities can be enhanced.

The following methods are used to increase communicative skills in students belonging to rural areas.

#### **i. Role Plays**

Role plays require students to participate in predetermined roles and real-life settings such as job interviews, customer services, conversations between doctors and patients, class presentations, and business meetings. Through these activities students apply their English language skills in meaningful rather than mechanical ways. In rural settings, role-playing further assists students in minimizing fear and nervousness by creating a favorable and organized forum for speaking. In this process, the teachers play the roles of facilitators by facilitating the discussions, gently correcting mistakes, and motivating students to take part in the conversations.

#### **ii. Group Discussions and Pair Work**

Group discussions and pair work are the backbone activities of CLT practice as they encourage interaction, cooperation, and learning by peers. Group work and Pair work are particularly helpful in rural colleges where the students feel a certain hesitation about speaking English before the teachers. Learners engage in discussions on familiar themes such as education, social affairs, and technology. Pair work enables learners to engage in

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dialogue work and question and answer activities. All the above activities increase fluency and listening and turn-taking skills. Collaborative learning creates an environment where learners rely on each other and better students help less able learners. Henceforth, learners are confident in expressing themselves. Collaborative learning activities enable learners to develop skills in social behavior like teamwork and treating all opinions equally.

### iii. **Information Gap Activities**

In information gap tasks, students are required to interact in order to complete an activity because each of the students in an activity has only partial information needed for the task. For instance, some students may have a short dialogue with missing lines, while others have the appropriate responses needed to complete it. In another example one learner may describe a picture while others can draw it based on the description. In the rural undergraduate settings, the use of information gap activities promotes spontaneous communication and active listening. This is because learners must ask questions for clarification and respond accordingly, thereby learners use the language meaningfully rather than memorizing grammar rules. Moreover, these activities help to improve problem-solving and strategic abilities, as learners use paraphrases, meanings, and alternative expressions whenever there is a breakdown in communication.

### iv. **Task-Based Learning**

Task-Based Learning (TBL) is a practical application of CLT where learning of a language takes place through performing meaningful tasks. Such tasks may involve email writing, making presentations, carrying out surveys, summarizing articles, and solving practical problems in English. In rural institutions, task-based learning effectively integrates language learning and the students' academic and professional objectives. Through the learners' engagement in tasks, which could pertain to communication in the work environment or even in daily life, they realize how English is applicable outside the classroom and beyond passing exams. Moreover, TBL is learner-centered, promoting activity, critical thinking, and autonomy in learning.

### v. **Classroom Debates and Discussions**

Debates and structured discussions are powerful CLT techniques that develop higher-order language skills. In these activities students have to express opinions, justify arguments, and listen to and/or respond to counterarguments on, topics such as social media, systems of education, the environment, and/or employment trends. As a result, this activity takes the students beyond basic sentences to higher levels of language use, even in rural classrooms. Through this process, the learner acquires vocabulary, coherence, persuasive language, and logical reasoning. It also promotes critical thinking and confidence in public

speaking. Moreover, regular exposure to debates boosts the ability to think in English, clearly articulate ideas, and participate in academic and professional engagement.

Similarly, collaborative learning with CLT activities create an environment where learners rely on each other and better students help less able learners. Henceforth, learners are confident in expressing themselves. Furthermore, collaborative learning activities enable learners to develop skills in social behavior such as teamwork and treating all opinions equally. In this context, teachers play the roles of facilitators by facilitating the discussions, gently correcting mistakes, and motivating students to take part in the activities.

#### **Advantages of CLT**

- Helps enhance real-life communications.
- Improves LSRW skills
- Facilitates learner interaction and confidence building
- Enhances social skills
- Reduces emphasis on grammar rules memorization and promotes practical language use.

#### **Challenges of CLT in Rural Colleges**

- Students' limited exposure to English outside the classroom.
- Learner anxiety and fear of mistake-making.
- Large class size prevents class participation.
- Inadequate classroom infrastructure for interactive activities.
- Limited access to language laboratories and technology.
- Evaluation methodologies remain centered on written grammar-based analysis.

#### **AI-Assisted Language Teaching Techniques/ Approaches**

Due to intense developments in education technology, AI has started changing language learning. AI-supported language teaching involves the integration of intelligent computing systems with language teaching and learning in English to provide learners with tailored learning experiences. Currently, in undergraduate classes, English language learning in rural colleges, AI-support programs are effective supplements to teaching in class interaction, personal student interaction with tutors, as well as varying levels of competence among learners in classes. Holmes reviewed on AI in education as “step-by-step personalized instructional and dialogue systems, through AI-supported exploratory leaning the analysis of student writing, intelligent agents in game based environments and student-support chatbots, to AI-facilitated student/ tutor matching that puts students firmly in control of their own learning.” (Holmes, 82)

### **i. AI Chatbots and Conversational Practice**

In English classrooms located in rural areas with limited resources, educators can utilize AI chatbots via low-data mobile applications or platforms that work offline (such as Google Read Along (previously Bolo – Semi-offline), Hello English App – Low-Data Mode, Duolingo Chatbot, etc.) during class and outside of it. Instructors might implement a chatbot-based activity once or twice a week, where students engage in simple dialogues like introducing themselves, discussing daily activities, or answering interview questions. Students can operate individually or team up using shared devices if necessary. Educators support learners by offering topic suggestions and motivating them to jot down new vocabulary or phrases encountered during the conversations. This method lessens students' anxiety about speaking, as chatbots provide risk-free practice opportunities. It also enables learners to improve their English skills outside of the classroom without relying heavily on constant internet connectivity.

### **ii. AI-Based Pronunciation and Fluency Tools**

Teachers in rural colleges can use AI-based pronunciation tools like ELSA Speak, Speechlingetc through basic smartphones and low-bandwidth applications. During class, teachers may model pronunciation first and then students practice using AI tools giving speech recognition feedback. Learners can listen to correct pronunciation, record their speech, and repeat practice at their own pace. Teachers do not have to go to full-fledged language labs; even one device or phones owned by the students can be shared in smaller groups. This gives students an opportunity to practice sounds, stress, and intonation regularly and thus build on their fluency with self-confidence even in the absence of expert trainers or advanced infrastructure.

### **iii. AI-Supported Writing and Grammar Tools**

In the rural English classroom, the application of AI-assisted writing softwares (Grammarly, Write & Improve, and QuillBot) are possible with limited data when the softwares are used primarily to assist students in short pieces of writing such as paragraphs, letters, and short compositions. In this process, the teacher can instruct the students to write the assignments on paper and later verify the matter using AI softwares during the practice sessions. In the proposed method, the teacher instructs the students to analyze their mistakes and keep a notebook to record the corrections for future reference. Thus, to overcome the limitation of acquiring correction from the teacher in a large classroom, the software proves to be a complementary tool, and students will be in a position to enhance their writing skills using very limited digital resources.

**iv. AI-Enabled Vocabulary Enrichment Approach**

AI-assisted vocabulary building applications like Duolingo, Quizlet, or WordUP can be used effectively within rural English classes by teachers to display five to ten words per week to students. In this process, AI-assisted applications assist students with word pronunciation, definition explanations by way of example sentences, as well as quizzes to gauge learning process accomplishment by the students. Through these activities, students develop vocabulary by listening to the words, speaking the words, and completing vocabulary exercises either in class or as group tasks. Moreover, teachers are advised to engage learners to relate new words to experiences as well as class discussions by the learners. Thus, the applications are useful to teachers and students by providing an advantage over vocabulary building by offering the following advantages.

**v. AI-Assisted Multilingual Scaffolding Approach**

It is the process by which students learn the target language with the help of AI tools, which connect to their native languages. It is highly efficient in rural undergraduate English classrooms where learners depend mostly on their native languages to understand better. Teachers can use AI tools like Google Translate, DeepL Translator, Linguee, TeamWiki, and so on, which allow controlled translation, explanations in two languages, and the preparation of glossaries in order to let learners understand concepts, guidelines, and terms. By this process, it would be easy for students to understand concepts in their languages initially before proceeding to English. As such, teachers can devise activities in such a way that students compare expressions of both languages and try restating ideas in English.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has emerged as a powerful tool with significant implications for the field of English language teaching (Huang et al., 2023).

**Advantages of AI-Assisted Language Teaching**

- Customised learning experiences.
- Immediate and continuous feedback.
- Increased learner autonomy and motivation.
- 24/7 availability even beyond class boundaries.
- Reduces the load of the teacher during teaching.

**Challenges of AI-Assisted Language Teaching**

- The digital divide among the rural population (lack of devices and connectivity)
- High initial costs of infrastructure and training.
- Teachers need digital literacy and technical support.
- Data privacy and ethics.
- Focusing on technology can lead to less social interaction.

**Comparative Analysis of CLT and AI-Assisted Language Teaching**

Aspect	CLT	AI-Assisted Language Teaching
Teaching Focus	Communication and Interaction	Personalization and automation
Role of the Teacher	Facilitator	Guide and technology mediator
Learner Engagement	Social and Collaborative	Individualized and self-paced
Feedback	Teacher-dependent and Delayed	Immediate and automated
Suitability for Rural Colleges	Effective with trained teachers	Limited by digital infrastructure
Skill Development	Speaking and listening	Writing, pronunciation, grammar

On analyzing both the approaches, it can be clearly visualized that CLT gives more emphasis to human interactions and social communications, with a focus on the meaningful usage of language skills and abilities through various activities and tasks. The activities like role plays, group discussions, pair work etc provide confidence in the learners by engaging in communicative situations that are close to real-life situations of everyday conversations and interactions. On the other hand, AI-based language teaching and training differs significantly in terms of individualization and extensive practice facilities available according to the abilities of the students. Both the approaches have certain limitations. Therefore, the integration of CLT and AI can effectively address the limitations of both approaches by combining human interaction with personalized, technology-supported learning. It signifies a paradigm shift in pedagogy. It opens up new avenues for innovation, making education more collaborative, efficient and impactful.

**Recommendations**

1. The government and learning institutions can strive to close the digital divide by implementing infrastructure in rural colleges.
2. The introduction of AI tools in rural colleges should start with low-cost, mobile-based, and offline-enabled applications.
3. Teachers can be updated on CLT and the use of AI-based language teaching tools effectively.
4. A learning strategy that combines Communicative Language Teaching and the use of Artificial Intelligence-assisted systems should be employed in order to enhance English learning outcomes.
5. Methods of language testing need to move from grammar tests to cover other aspects such as speaking, listening, and presentations.
6. Students need to be encouraged to take an ownership role in their own learning by practicing using AI by themselves and by engaging with CLT activities.

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## **Conclusion**

CLT and AI-assisted Language Teaching are both crucial components of English teaching for undergraduate students. In terms of pedagogy, CLT still offers strong advantages in creating interaction, fluency, and authentic communication, especially with the support of experienced teachers. On the other hand, AI-assisted English teaching integrates innovation with personalization, immediacy, and autonomy, making it an important supportive tool for teaching English. In rural colleges, there may be certain limitations regarding the use of AI; however, step-by-step implementation can greatly benefit students. Based on the above discussion, it can be concluded that the most successful approach for improving the English level of undergraduate students would be an integration of CLT philosophy with AI tools.

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