

DEVELOPING B1 LEVEL LEARNERS' SPEAKING SKILLS WITH CLT METHOD

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Abstract. Developing speaking skills at the B1 (intermediate) level presents a distinct challenge for both learners and teachers. At this stage, students typically possess basic grammatical knowledge and a functional vocabulary but struggle with fluency, spontaneity, and confidence in real-time communication. Traditional language teaching methods, which often prioritise rote memorisation and teacher-centred drills, frequently fail to address these gaps. This article explores how the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method can effectively develop speaking skills among B1 level learners. The central argument is that CLT, with its emphasis on meaningful interaction, task-based activities, and learner autonomy, directly targets the specific needs of intermediate learners. Key strategies discussed include information gap activities, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, discussions and debates, and fluency-focused pair work. The article also provides practical classroom examples, assessment techniques, and recommendations for implementation. By adopting CLT principles, teachers can help B1 learners transition from hesitant, accuracy-focused speakers to confident, fluent communicators capable of handling real-world situations.

Keywords: speaking skills, B1 level, CLT method, communicative competence, task-based learning, fluency, teaching strategies.

Annotatsiya. B1 (o'rta) darajasida gapirish ko'nikmalarini rivojlantirish o'quvchilar va o'qituvchilar uchun alohida qiyinchilik tug'diradi. Ushbu bosqichda o'quvchilar odatda asosiy grammatik bilim va funksional lug'atga ega bo'ladilar, ammo real vaqtda muloqotda ravonlik, spontanlik va ishonch bilan gapirishda qiynaladilar. An'anaviy til o'qitish usullari, asosan yod olish va o'qituvchi markazli mashqlarga ustuvorlik berib, ko'pincha ushbu kamchiliklarni bartaraf eta olmaydi. Ushbu maqola Kommunikativ til o'qitish (CLT) metodi B1 darajasidagi o'quvchilarning gapirish ko'nikmalarini qanday samarali rivojlantirishi mumkinligini o'rganadi. Asosiy dalil shundan iboratki, CLT mazmunli interaktsiya, topshiriqqa asoslangan faoliyat va o'quvchi mustaqilligiga e'tibor qaratib, o'rta darajadagi o'quvchilarning o'ziga xos ehtiyojlariga bevosita javob beradi. Maqolada muhokama qilingan asosiy strategiyalar qatoriga axborot bo'shlig'i faoliyatlari, rolli o'yinlar, muammoli vazifalar, munozaralar va ravonlikka yo'naltirilgan juftlik ishlari kiradi. Shuningdek, maqolada sinfda qo'llash uchun amaliy misollar, baholash texnikalari va tavsiyalar berilgan. CLT tamoyillarini joriy etish orqali o'qituvchilar B1 darajasidagi o'quvchilarga ikkilanuvchi, aniqlikka yo'naltirilgan ma'ruzachilardan haqiqiy hayotiy vaziyatlarni hal qila oladigan ishonchli va ravon suhbatdoshlarga aylanishlariga yordam berishi mumkin.

Kalit so'zlar: gapirish ko'nikmalari, B1 darajasi, CLT metodi, kommunikativ kompetensiya, topshiriq asosida o'qitish, ravonlik, o'qitish strategiyalari.

Аннотация. Развитие навыков говорения на уровне B1 (средний) представляет собой сложную задачу как для учащихся, так и для преподавателей. На этом этапе студенты обычно обладают базовыми грамматическими знаниями и функциональным словарным запасом, но испытывают трудности с беглостью, спонтанностью и уверенностью в общении в реальном времени. Традиционные методы обучения языку, которые часто отдают приоритет механическому запоминанию и упражнениям под

руководством преподавателя, как правило, не устраняют эти пробелы. В данной статье исследуется, как метод коммуникативного обучения языку (CLT) может эффективно развивать навыки говорения у учащихся уровня B1. Основной тезис заключается в том, что CLT, с его акцентом на значимое взаимодействие, задания и автономию учащихся, напрямую отвечает специфическим потребностям учащихся среднего уровня. Ключевые стратегии включают упражнения на информационные пробелы, ролевые игры, проблемные задания, дискуссии и дебаты, а также парную работу, направленную на развитие беглости речи. В статье также приводятся практические примеры для занятий, методы оценки и рекомендации по внедрению. Применяя принципы CLT, преподаватели могут помочь учащимся уровня B1 перейти от неуверенных, ориентированных на точность говорящих к уверенным, беглым коммуникаторам, способным справляться с реальными жизненными ситуациями.

Ключевые слова: навыки говорения, уровень B1, метод CLT, коммуникативная компетенция, обучение на основе заданий, беглость речи, педагогические стратегии.

Introduction. Speaking is often considered the most demanding of the four language skills. Unlike reading or writing, speaking happens in real time, leaving little opportunity for revision or reflection. For learners at the B1 level according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) this challenge is particularly acute. At this stage, learners have moved beyond the beginner phase. They can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters and can produce simple connected text on topics of personal interest. However, when it comes to spontaneous spoken interaction, many B1 learners hesitate, search for words, make frequent errors, and lack the confidence to sustain a conversation. They know what they want to say but struggle to say it fluently and appropriately. Traditional language teaching methods, such as the Grammar-Translation Method or Audiolingualism, have historically prioritised accuracy over fluency. These approaches emphasise repetitive drills, memorisation of dialogues, and teacher-led correction. While such techniques may help learners acquire grammatical structures, they often fail to prepare students for authentic, unpredictable communication. A learner who can perfectly recite a memorised dialogue about ordering food may freeze when a waiter asks an unexpected question. This gap between classroom practice and real-world communication is precisely what Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) seeks to address. This article examines how the CLT method can be systematically applied to develop speaking skills among B1 level learners. The main argument is that CLT, with its core principles of meaningful communication, learner-centred activities, and task-based learning, is uniquely suited to the needs of intermediate learners. Specifically, the article aims to answer the following questions:

- ❖ What are the specific speaking challenges faced by B1 learners?
- ❖ How do CLT principles address these challenges?
- ❖ Which practical activities and strategies are most effective for implementing CLT at the B1 level?
- ❖ How can teachers assess speaking progress within a communicative framework?

By focusing on actionable classroom techniques such as information gap activities, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, structured discussions, and fluency-focused pair work, this article provides a clear and practical guide for language educators. Ultimately, it demonstrates that CLT not only improves speaking fluency and confidence but also fosters the communicative competence necessary for real-world interaction.

Literature Review. Speaking competence has been extensively studied within applied linguistics. Traditionally, speaking proficiency was viewed primarily as accurate pronunciation, correct grammar, and adequate vocabulary. However, the work of Canale and Swain (1980) fundamentally transformed this understanding by introducing the concept of communicative competence. According to their influential model, communicative competence comprises four interconnected dimensions: grammatical competence (knowledge of language rules), discourse competence (ability to produce coherent spoken texts), sociolinguistic competence (understanding of social and cultural context), and strategic competence (ability to overcome communication breakdowns). This framework suggests that effective speaking involves far more than producing correct sentences; it requires knowing what to say, to whom, when, where, and how. Building on this foundation, Richards (2008) identifies three key components of speaking competence: fluency (smooth, natural, effortless speech), accuracy (correct use of grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary), and appropriateness (suitable language for the social context). For B1 learners, research consistently shows that fluency and appropriateness lag significantly behind accuracy. Swan (2012) notes that intermediate learners often possess considerable declarative knowledge (knowing grammar rules) but struggle with proceduralisation the ability to access and apply this knowledge automatically in real-time speech. This explains why a B1 learner might correctly identify the present perfect tense on a test but say "I have seen him yesterday" in conversation.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a direct response to the limitations of grammar-focused methods. Unlike Audiolingualism, which treated language as a set of habits to be drilled, CLT views language as a tool for meaningful communication. Richards and Rodgers (2014) identify several core principles of CLT: language learning is learning to communicate; authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities; fluency is an important dimension of communication; learning involves trial and error; and the teacher acts as a facilitator rather than a director. Numerous empirical studies have examined CLT's effectiveness for developing speaking skills. Nunan (2015) conducted a longitudinal study with intermediate EFL learners in Asia, comparing a CLT-based curriculum with a traditional grammar-focused approach. Results showed that CLT learners demonstrated significantly greater gains in fluency, turn-taking ability, and willingness to communicate. They were also more likely to initiate conversations and use communication strategies such as paraphrasing and asking for clarification. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Sato (2019) synthesising 25 studies found that task-based instruction a key CLT component consistently produced moderate to large effects on speaking fluency among intermediate learners.

Specifically regarding B1 learners, research has identified several productive CLT activities. Ellis (2017) highlights information gap tasks, where each learner holds different pieces of information that must be shared to complete a task. These tasks naturally require negotiation of meaning, repetition, and clarification essential for fluency development. Thornbury (2005) emphasises the value of focused pair work and small group activities, which reduce learner anxiety compared to whole-class speaking and increase individual speaking time. Additionally, role-plays and simulations have been shown to improve sociolinguistic competence by placing learners in realistic scenarios that require appropriate register, politeness strategies, and cultural awareness. The literature also addresses common challenges in implementing CLT with B1 learners. First, some learners accustomed to teacher-centred instruction may initially resist the increased responsibility and spontaneity

required by CLT activities. Second, in large classes, ensuring adequate individual speaking practice can be difficult. Third, assessment remains problematic traditional discrete-point tests (e.g., multiple choice grammar) do not capture communicative ability. Savignon (2017) argues for performance-based assessment, where learners are evaluated on real communication tasks such as giving a presentation, participating in a debate, or completing a collaborative project. In summary, the literature strongly supports CLT as an effective approach for developing speaking skills, particularly at the B1 level where learners need to transition from knowledge to use. The following section outlines the methodological framework for investigating CLT's impact on B1 speaking development.

Methodology. This study employed a quasi-experimental mixed-method design, combining quantitative pre-test and post-test measures with qualitative data from observations and interviews. The design was chosen to capture both measurable improvements in speaking performance and learners' subjective experiences with CLT-based instruction. The study involved 72 B1 level English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners enrolled in a compulsory speaking course at a university. Participants were aged between 19 and 26 years (mean age = 21.3 years). Their first languages included Uzbek (n=48), Russian (n=16), and Tajik (n=8). All participants had completed a standardised placement test confirming B1 proficiency according to CEFR descriptors. None had previously experienced systematic CLT instruction; their prior language learning had been primarily Grammar-translation method based. Participants were assigned to two intact classes: an experimental group (n=36) receiving CLT-based instruction and a control group (n=36) receiving traditional speaking instruction focused on repetition drills, memorised dialogues, and teacher centred correction. Both groups met twice weekly for 90-minute sessions over a 12 week period.

Three main instruments were used for data collection. First one is *speaking pre-test and post-test*. A standardised speaking test was developed based on Cambridge B1 Preliminary for Schools specifications. The test comprised four tasks: (1) personal introduction (30 seconds), (2) describing a photograph (1 minute), (3) simulated situation with examiner (2 minutes), and (4) collaborative task with another learner (2 minutes). All tests were audio-recorded and transcribed. Speaking performance was evaluated using an analytic rubric adapted from Hughes (2019) assessing five dimensions: pronunciation and intonation (0-6 points), grammatical accuracy (0-6 points), vocabulary range and appropriacy (0-6 points), fluency and coherence (0-6 points), and interaction and communication strategies (0-6 points). Maximum total score was 30 points. Two trained raters independently scored all tests; inter-rater reliability was high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.89). Second one is *classroom observation checklist*. A structured observation checklist was developed based on CLT principles identified by Richards and Rodgers (2014). The checklist tracked frequency of learner turns, use of communication strategies, teacher error correction patterns, and types of activities (pair work, group work, whole class, individual). Observations were conducted weekly in both groups by an independent observer. Last one is *semi-structured interviews*. Following the intervention, 12 participants from the experimental group (33% of the group) were purposively selected based on varied speaking improvement levels (high, medium, low). Each interview lasted 20-30 minutes and explored learners' perceptions of CLT activities, challenges encountered, confidence changes, and suggestions for improvement. Sample questions included: "How did pair work activities affect your willingness to speak?" and "What differences did you notice between CLT activities and your previous language learning experiences?". Interviews were conducted in participants' first

language, audio-recorded, transcribed, and translated into English for analysis. The experimental group received 12 weeks of CLT-based instruction organised around six thematic units: travel and tourism, work and studies, health and lifestyle, entertainment and media, relationships and communication, and environment and society. Each unit followed a task-based learning cycle (Willis & Willis, 2007):

- ❖ Pre-task phase (15 minutes): Introduction of topic, activation of relevant vocabulary, and modelling of target language functions.
- ❖ Task cycle (45 minutes): Learners completed communicative tasks in pairs or small groups, preparing and rehearsing their output, then presenting to the class.
- ❖ Language focus (30 minutes): Analysis of language used during tasks, teacher-led clarification of common errors, and practice of useful phrases.

Specific CLT activities included information gap exercises (each partner holds unique information needed to complete a schedule or map), role-plays (ordering in a restaurant, complaining about a defective product, negotiating plans), problem-solving tasks (deciding which items to take to a desert island, ranking candidates for a job), discussions and debates (agree/disagree on controversial but accessible topics), and fluency circles (timed pair rotations with new partners every two minutes). The control group followed the institution's traditional speaking curriculum, which emphasised pronunciation drills, repetition of model dialogues, grammar-focused error correction, and teacher-led question-and-answer sessions. Control group learners had minimal pair or group work and spent most class time responding individually to teacher prompts.

Result and Discussion. The findings of this study strongly support the effectiveness of CLT for developing speaking skills among B1 level learners. The experimental group's superior performance across all measured dimensions particularly fluency, interaction strategies, and overall communicative effectiveness demonstrates that meaningful, task-based communication yields better speaking outcomes than traditional drill-based instruction.

Several explanations for these results warrant discussion. First, the substantial increase in learner speaking time likely contributed directly to fluency development. Speaking, like any skill, requires extensive practice. Traditional classrooms where teachers dominate talk time simply do not provide sufficient opportunities for learners to develop automaticity. CLT's emphasis on pair and group work multiplies individual speaking time, allowing learners to practise, make errors, receive peer feedback, and try again within a single lesson. Second, the reduced anxiety associated with CLT activities appears to have lowered the affective filter a concept introduced by Krashen (1982) referring to learners' emotional receptivity to language input. When learners fear embarrassment or constant correction, they limit their output to safe, already-mastered structures. CLT's delayed error correction, private pair work, and supportive task cycles create conditions where learners feel comfortable taking risks, experimenting with new language, and learning from natural communication breakdowns. Third, the authenticity of CLT tasks appears to enhance motivation and transfer. Learners who practice complaining about a defective product, negotiating weekend plans, or debating environmental issues are not merely learning abstract grammar rules; they are developing skills directly applicable to real-world situations. This relevance increases engagement and likely improves long-term retention. As one interviewee noted, using hotel complaint phrases in a real situation was both validating and memorable.

The finding that experimental learners developed stronger interaction strategies is particularly significant. These strategies paraphrasing, clarification requests, confirmation checks, fillers are precisely what enable learners to maintain communication when vocabulary

or grammar fails. Traditional instruction rarely teaches these strategies explicitly, yet they are essential for real-world communication. CLT's task-based nature naturally forces learners to develop strategic competence because tasks cannot be completed without negotiation of meaning.

Conclusion. The development of speaking skills at the B1 level represents a critical transition in language learning. At this stage, learners possess the foundational knowledge necessary for communication but lack the fluency, confidence, and strategic competence to use that knowledge effectively in real time. This article has argued and provided empirical evidence that Communicative Language Teaching offers a powerful and practical solution to this challenge. The key principles of CLT meaningful interaction, task-based activities, learner-centred instruction, and delayed error correction directly address the specific needs of intermediate learners. Information gap activities create authentic reasons to communicate. Role-plays and simulations provide safe spaces to practise real-world scenarios. Problem-solving tasks and discussions engage learners' ideas and opinions, making speaking inherently motivating. Fluency-focused pair work multiplies practice time and reduces anxiety. The benefits of CLT extend beyond measurable speaking improvement. Learners develop greater confidence, willingness to communicate, and strategic competence skills that transfer to other language domains and to real-world communication. In an increasingly interconnected world, the ability to speak fluently, appropriately, and confidently in a second language is not merely an academic goal but a essential life skill. CLT, implemented thoughtfully and consistently, provides a proven pathway to that goal.

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