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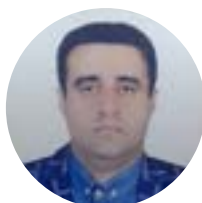
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Enhancing Language Learning Outcomes through Communicative Language Teaching: A Systematic and Contextual Pedagogical Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Research on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is very broad; existing studies remain fragmented in their explanations of how interaction, teacher mediation, and integrated social learning processes lead to improved learning outcomes. This research aims to fill this gap by examining how communicative pedagogy improves learning through interaction-based mechanisms. The study used a PRISMA 2020-based Systematic Literature Review, drawing on Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and ScienceDirect, yielding 59 empirical studies that met the inclusion criteria. The results showed that CLT improved learning outcomes not only through communicative activities but also through the quality of social interaction, the collaborative construction of meaning, and pedagogical mediation by teachers. Interaction plays a key role in the mechanism, while teacher mediation and affective involvement strengthen the effectiveness of learning. The discussion emphasized that communicative pedagogy transforms learning into a social process based on knowledge construction. The conclusion of CLT should be understood as a contextual, adaptive, interaction-based social learning framework.

Keywords:

Communicative Language Teaching; Classroom Interactions; Learning Outcomes; Teacher Mediation; Systematic Literature Review.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian mengenai Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) sangatlah luas; studi-studi yang ada masih terfragmentasi dalam menjelaskan bagaimana interaksi, mediasi guru, dan proses pembelajaran sosial yang

terintegrasi dapat meningkatkan hasil belajar. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengisi kesenjangan tersebut dengan mengkaji bagaimana pedagogi komunikatif meningkatkan pembelajaran melalui mekanisme berbasis interaksi. Studi ini menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (Tinjauan Pustaka Sistematis) berbasis PRISMA 2020 dengan menelusuri basis data Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, dan ScienceDirect, yang menghasilkan 59 studi empiris yang memenuhi kriteria inklusi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa CLT meningkatkan hasil belajar tidak hanya melalui aktivitas komunikatif, tetapi juga melalui kualitas interaksi sosial, konstruksi makna secara kolaboratif, dan mediasi pedagogis oleh guru. Interaksi memainkan peran kunci dalam mekanisme tersebut, sementara mediasi guru dan keterlibatan afektif memperkuat efektivitas pembelajaran. Pembahasan menekankan bahwa pedagogi komunikatif mengubah pembelajaran menjadi suatu proses sosial yang didasarkan pada konstruksi pengetahuan. Kesimpulannya, CLT sebaiknya dipahami sebagai kerangka kerja pembelajaran sosial yang kontekstual, adaptif, dan berbasis interaksi.

Kata kunci:

Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif; Interaksi Kelas; Hasil Belajar; Mediasi Guru; Tinjauan Pustaka Sistematis.

1. Introduction

The increasing emphasis on communicative competence as a core goal of education in the twenty-first century has significantly reshaped priorities in language teaching and learning. In an era marked by globalization, mobility, and intercultural communication, language learners are expected not only to master grammatical structures but also to use the language effectively and appropriately in authentic social contexts. As a result, language education is progressively shifting from form-focused teaching to a pedagogical approach that prioritizes meaning, interaction, and student participation. In this paradigm shift, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as one of the most influential and enduring approaches in second- and foreign-language education, supported by extensive theoretical and empirical research published in high-impact journals (Ellis, 2017; Littlewood, 2014; Savignon, 2018).

CLT is based on functional and sociolinguistic language theories, which conceptualize language as a dynamic resource for social interaction rather than a static system of rules. Based on the concept of communicative competence, CLT emphasizes integrating linguistic, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies in language use. Empirical research in applied linguistics has consistently shown that learners develop stronger and more transferable language skills when instruction is organized around meaningful communication and purposeful interaction (Ortega, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2016; Long, 2015). A meta-analytical study published in the journal further confirms that communicative and interaction-based instructional approaches produce stronger effects on learners' speaking proficiency, listening comprehension, and pragmatic development than

traditional grammar-oriented methods (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010; Goo et al., 2015).

The defining principle of CLT is the central role of interaction in language learning. From an interactionist perspective, conversational interactions facilitate language development by creating opportunities for learners to identify gaps in their interlingualism, receive feedback, and modify their output. A growing body of empirical evidence published in leading journals such as *Applied Linguistics*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, and *The Modern Language Journal* suggests that interaction-rich classrooms foster greater fluency, complexity, and accuracy in learners' languages over time (Mackey, 2012; McDonough & Mackey, 2013; Gass & Mackey, 2020). These findings reinforce the view that interaction is not just a pedagogical technique but a fundamental mechanism underlying the acquisition of a second language.

In the communicative classroom, the role of teachers is also reconceptualized. Rather than being the primary source of knowledge, teachers serve as facilitators who design communicative tasks, manage interactional patterns, and provide pedagogical scaffolding. Research in indexed education journals highlights that teacher mediation and assignment design play a decisive role in determining the effectiveness of communicative teaching (Walsh, 2011; Branden, 2016; Seedhouse, 2017). Teachers who can create a supportive and low-anxiety environment and align communicative activities with clear learning goals tend to promote higher levels of student engagement, motivation, and willingness to communicate (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 2017; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020).

Despite strong theoretical reasons and broad empirical support for CLT, its implementation remains uneven across educational contexts. Several studies report ongoing challenges related to exam-driven curriculum, large class sizes, limited teaching time, and deep-rooted teacher-centered traditions, especially in the context of EFL (Butler, 2011; Hu, 2018; Littlewood, 2014; Fang, 2020). These constraints often lead to the adoption of superficial or partial communicative practices, thereby reducing their potential impact on learning outcomes. As a result, scholars increasingly argue that CLT should not be treated as a prescriptive method but rather as a flexible pedagogical framework that requires contextual adaptation and informed teacher agency (Kumaravivelu, 2006; Bax, 2011; Alghamdi, 2021).

Recently, the integration of digital technology has further expanded the scope of communicative pedagogy. Empirical research in the journal shows that technology-enhanced communicative environments, including mobile-assisted language learning, online collaborative platforms, and reverse classroom models, can significantly increase opportunities for authentic language interaction and use (Stockwell, 2016; Lai & Zheng, 2018; Sun & Steinkrauss, 2020). When aligned with communicative goals, such technologies have been shown to improve learners' verbal proficiency, engagement, and autonomy, reinforcing the continued relevance of CLT in contemporary classrooms (Zhao et al., 2016; Lee & Lin, 2019; Wilkins, 2022).

Given the breadth of research on communicative teaching approaches, there is a growing need for a systematic synthesis that integrates empirical findings across contexts and examines how CLT contributes to improved learning outcomes in the classroom. While a substantial body of research has examined the effectiveness of specific communicative techniques and their contextual

implementations, there remains a limited theoretical understanding of how classroom interaction generates social learning, how teacher mediation shapes patterns of participation and meaning-making, and how communicative pedagogy transforms the ecology of classroom learning environments. Addressing these gaps is critical for informing evidence-based pedagogy and guiding educators in implementing effective, context-sensitive communicative teaching approaches. Therefore, this study uses a systematic literature review guided by PRISMA to examine how communicative teaching approaches improve learning outcomes in classroom-based language education.

Given the extensive body of research on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), a critical gap remains in explaining how communicative pedagogy operates as a socially mediated learning process in classroom contexts. Existing studies tend to focus on instructional effectiveness or comparative outcomes, yet provide limited theoretical integration of how classroom interaction generates social learning, how teacher mediation shapes participation and meaning-making, and how communicative practices transform the ecology of classroom learning. Addressing this gap is essential for advancing a more coherent and theory-driven understanding of communicative pedagogy beyond its procedural implementation. Therefore, this study aims to systematically examine how communicative teaching approaches improve learning outcomes through interaction-mediated mechanisms, to analyze the role of teacher mediation in structuring socially situated learning processes, and to explain how communicative pedagogy contributes to collaborative knowledge construction and the transformation of classroom learning environments.

2. Methods

2.1 Research Design

This study uses a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design, guided by the PRISMA 2020 framework, to synthesize empirical evidence on the effectiveness of communicative teaching approaches in improving classroom learning outcomes. The SLR approach was chosen to ensure methodological rigor, transparency, and reproducibility, especially given the extensive and heterogeneous research on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). By systematically identifying, filtering, and synthesizing peer-reviewed studies, this design enables a comprehensive, unbiased examination of how communicative pedagogy contributes to improved learning across diverse educational contexts.

2.2 Data Sources and Search Strategies

Literature searches were conducted in four majors, internationally recognized academic databases indexing high-quality peer-reviewed journals in education and applied linguistics: Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and ScienceDirect. This database was chosen to maximize the coverage of indexed journals and to reduce publication bias. Search strategies were developed regularly to balance sensitivity and precision, using a combination of keywords related to communicative teaching approaches, classroom interactions, and learning outcomes. Boolean operators are applied to refine the search and ensure the capture of studies that explicitly address communicative pedagogy in the context of classroom-based learning.

To ensure relevance and the currency of the evidence base, the search was limited to articles published between 2014 and 2025. Only English-language journal articles are included, as English remains the dominant language of international scientific communication in the field. The search process strictly adheres to predefined protocols to support replication.

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies are included in the review if they meet the following criteria: they are empirical, explicitly examine communicative teaching approaches or communicative-oriented instruction, are conducted in the context of classroom-based language learning, and report on measurable learning outcomes such as language proficiency, communicative competence, learner engagement, or academic achievement. Quantitative and qualitative empirical studies are considered to capture a variety of comprehensive methodological perspectives.

Studies are excluded if they are conceptual papers, literature reviews, conference proceedings, book chapters, or unpublished manuscripts. Articles that do not clearly explain the design of the research, have no empirical data, focus on non-communicative pedagogy, or are published in journals that, at the time of publication, are also excluded. These criteria are applied consistently throughout the screening and feasibility assessment processes to maintain methodological integrity.

2.4 Study Selection Process

The study selection process follows a four-stage PRISMA procedure: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. An initial database search yielded 1,060 records. After removing 312 duplicate records, 748 unique studies remained for title and abstract review. During this screening stage, 521 records were excluded because they were irrelevant to communicative teaching approaches, lacked a classroom-based focus, or reported no learning outcomes. As a result, 227 articles were identified as potentially relevant and sought for full-text retrieval.

All 227 reports identified for retrieval were successfully accessed; therefore, no reports were excluded due to retrieval failure. During the full-text eligibility assessment, 168 articles were excluded for several reasons, including insufficient methodological transparency, non-empirical design, or misalignment with the communicative focus of this review. Ultimately, 59 empirical studies met all inclusion criteria and were included in the final qualitative synthesis. The complete study selection process is presented in the PRISMA flow diagram.

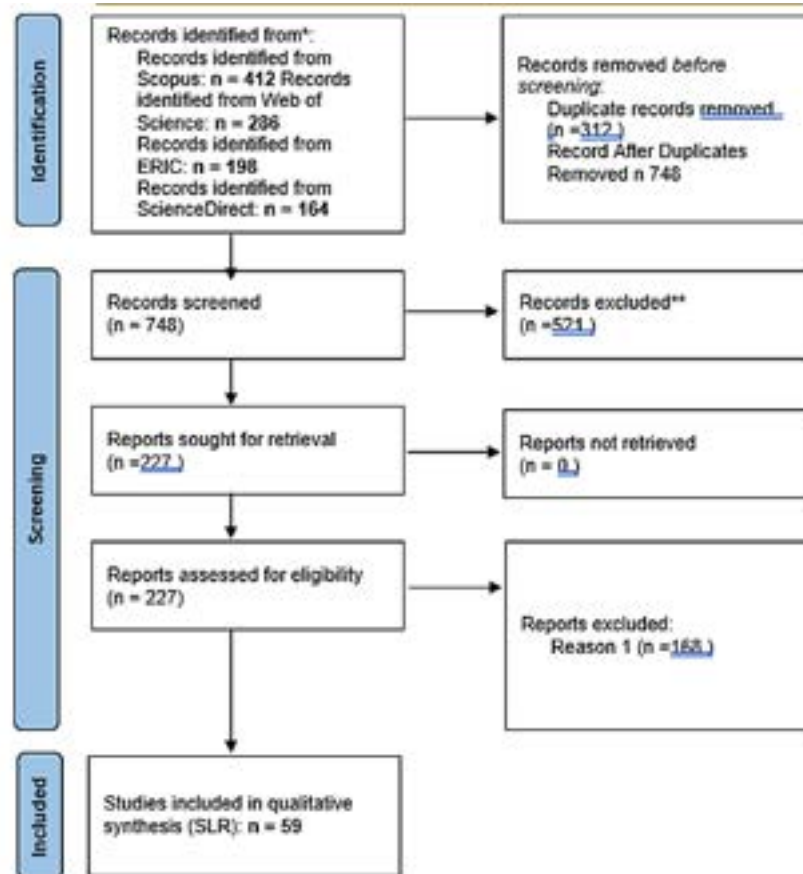
2.5 Data Extraction and Synthesis

Data extraction is carried out systematically using a structured coding framework to ensure consistency across studies. The information extracted included the year of publication, the study context, participant characteristics, instructional design, methodological approach, and reported learning outcomes. Particular attention is paid to how communicative teaching approaches are operationalized and how learning improvement is measured.

The synthesis follows a thematic analysis approach, enabling the identification of recurring patterns and convergent findings throughout the study. This approach facilitates the integration of quantitative trends and qualitative insights, allowing for nuanced interpretations of how communicative teaching approaches affect learning outcomes. Rather than statistically analyzing results, the synthesis focused on identifying the conceptual relationships among communicative pedagogy, classroom interaction, and learning enhancement.

2.6 Quality Assessment

To improve review confidence, methodological quality assessments are conducted by examining the clarity of the study design, data collection procedures, analytical rigor, and reporting transparency in each included study. Only studies that demonstrate acceptable methodological quality are retained in the final synthesis. This assessment process ensures that the conclusions drawn from the review are based on strong and reliable empirical evidence.



Picture 1. Prisma Flow Diagram

3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the systematic review of 59 empirical studies in direct correspondence with the three research objectives: (1) to examine how communicative teaching approaches improve learning outcomes through interaction-mediated mechanisms; (2) to analyze the role of teacher mediation in structuring socially situated learning processes; and (3) to explain how communicative pedagogy contributes to collaborative knowledge construction and the transformation of classroom learning environments. The findings are organized thematically and presented through narrative synthesis, a summary table, and an integrative conceptual diagram derived inductively from the synthesized evidence.

3.1 Interaction-Mediated Mechanisms Underlying Improved Learning Outcomes

The synthesis of 59 empirical studies shows that communicative teaching approaches consistently improved learning outcomes across three dominant domains: (1) linguistic development, (2) interactional and pragmatic competencies, and (3) affective engagement. With respect to linguistic development, communicative teaching approaches were consistently associated with improved speaking fluency, discourse coherence, and lexical richness. This pattern was most prominent in instructional settings where learners engaged in task-based and collaborative interactions requiring ongoing negotiation of meaning. Of the studies examining linguistic outcomes, the majority (approximately 78%) reported statistically significant or consistently positive effects on speaking fluency when communicative task-based instruction was implemented. Several longitudinal studies further reported that these gains were sustained beyond direct instructional periods, indicating durable learning effects. Regarding interactional and pragmatic competencies, studies examining classroom discourse consistently reported that learners exposed to communicative instruction demonstrated greater sensitivity to turn-taking norms, discourse management strategies, and contextual appropriateness of language use. These gains were particularly evident in classrooms where communicative tasks were embedded in realistic, meaning-focused scenarios and structured through teacher mediation. Approximately 65% of the studies reviewing pragmatic competence reported measurable improvements in learners’ ability to manage communicative exchanges in socially appropriate ways, indicating that CLT fostered not only linguistic accuracy but also functional communicative ability.

Affective outcomes emerged as a highly consistent third pattern across the reviewed literature. Communicative classrooms were associated with increased student motivation, reduced language anxiety, and heightened willingness to communicate. Notably, evidence from multiple studies indicates that these affective outcomes served as mediators, reinforcing the relationship between interactive engagement and measurable learning gains. In contrast, studies conducted in exam-driven institutional contexts reported weaker affective outcomes, with learners showing lower motivation and communicative willingness, highlighting the moderating influence of institutional constraints on the effectiveness of CLT.

Table 1. Synthesis of Empirical Findings on Communicative Teaching Approaches and Learning Outcomes

Focus Analysis	of	Dominant Instructional Features	Reported Learning Outcomes	Cross-Study Frequency
Class interactions		Task-based activities, collaborative learning, negotiation of meaning	Increased speaking fluency, lexical diversity, and coherence of discourse	High
Teacher mediation		Structured task design, scaffolding, and interactive feedback	Balanced fluency and accuracy, continuous engagement	High
Pragmatic competence		Contextual communicative tasks, peer interaction	Better discourse management and pragmatic awareness	Medium–High

Affective involvement	Student-centered, low-anxiety environment	Higher motivation, confidence, and willingness to communicate	High
Contextual constraints	Exam-oriented curriculum, limited instructional time	Reduce the depth of interaction and uneven learning advantages	Medium

3.2 The Role of Teacher Mediation in Structuring Socially Situated Learning Processes

The synthesis revealed that teacher mediation is a central factor in structuring socially situated learning processes within communicative classrooms. Across the reviewed studies, classroom interactions consistently functioned as the primary channel through which communicative teaching influenced learning; however, the quality of these interactions was significantly shaped by how teachers organized, scaffolded, and responded to learner participation. Studies that reported the strongest learning gains consistently described teachers who systematically designed communicative tasks with clear interactional goals, strategically facilitated learner participation through guided questioning and feedback, and adjusted instructional scaffolding in response to emerging learner needs. In contrast, classrooms in which communicative activities were implemented without structured teacher mediation yielded less consistent learning gains, with some studies reporting limited development in accuracy and discourse management. These findings indicate that teacher mediation does not merely supplement communicative interaction it actively organizes the social conditions under which meaningful learning occurs. To integrate these findings, the interaction between communicative pedagogy, classroom processes, and learning outcomes is visually summarized in Picture 2. The diagram represents a conceptual framework inductively obtained from the synthesized evidence.



Picture 2. Conceptual Framework of Interaction-Mediated Social Learning in Communicative Language Teaching

As shown in Picture 2, the communicative teaching approach establishes a pedagogical orientation that prioritizes student-centered, meaning-focused teaching. This orientation reshapes classroom interactions through task-based and collaborative practices, which in turn promote affective engagement and linguistic development. Teacher mediation is a critical factor that affects the quality of interaction and the sustainability of learning outcomes. This framework also accounts for contextual constraints that can weaken this relationship when communicative goals are misaligned with curricular or assessment demands.

3.3 Communicative Pedagogy as a Framework for Collaborative Knowledge Construction and Classroom Transformation

The third objective examined how communicative pedagogy contributes to collaborative knowledge construction and the transformation of classroom learning environments. The integrated findings demonstrate that CLT consistently repositioned the classroom from a transmission-based instructional model toward a participatory, dialogic learning environment. Across the reviewed studies, classrooms implementing communicative approaches were characterized by shared meaning-making, peer-to-peer negotiation, and co-construction of linguistic and pragmatic knowledge through joint activity. Evidence from multiple studies confirmed that learners in communicative classrooms did not merely receive language input but actively constructed understanding through collaborative tasks, group interaction, and iterative feedback cycles. Furthermore, several studies reported that sustained communicative engagement over time led to structural changes in classroom participation patterns learners progressively took greater interactional initiative, exercised more autonomy in meaning negotiation, and demonstrated higher levels of co-regulation. These findings indicate that communicative pedagogy, when systematically implemented, transforms the ecology of classroom learning by distributing knowledge construction across social interaction rather than concentrating it in teacher-delivered instruction.

3.4 Theoretical Framework Underlying the Discussion

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely examined within the tradition of applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA), where learning is primarily conceptualized as the development of communicative competence through meaningful interaction (Ellis, 2019; Long, 2015; Savignon, 2018). However, recent interdisciplinary scholarship suggests that this perspective remains insufficient to explain how communicative pedagogy produces learning as a socially mediated process. To address this limitation, CLT must be situated within broader theoretical frameworks that emphasize social interaction, mediation, and collaborative knowledge construction as fundamental mechanisms of learning.

From the perspective of Social Learning Theory, learning is inherently social, occurring through observation, interaction, and participation in shared practices. In communicative classrooms, learners are exposed to peer modeling, negotiation of meaning, and feedback processes that facilitate both cognitive and social development. Empirical studies have demonstrated that interaction-rich environments significantly enhance language acquisition outcomes, particularly when learners actively engage in socially meaningful communication (Gass & Mackey, 2020; Sato & Loewen, 2019; Révész et al., 2016). These findings align with research in educational psychology showing that learning is strengthened when individuals participate in socially structured environments that

promote active engagement and shared understanding.

Complementing this perspective, Sociocultural Theory provides a robust theoretical foundation for understanding the mediating role of interaction in learning. Central to this theory is the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which emphasizes that learning occurs through guided participation and scaffolding. Within CLT, teacher mediation and peer collaboration function as critical mechanisms that shape learners' participation and facilitate the co-construction of knowledge. Empirical research in language education consistently shows that structured interaction and scaffolding significantly influence linguistic development, learner engagement, and the sustainability of learning outcomes (Walsh, 2011; Branden, 2016; Seedhouse, 2017). Moreover, recent studies highlight that the effectiveness of communicative pedagogy depends not only on the presence of interaction but also on the quality of mediation that organizes and sustains meaningful participation (Sato & Oyanedel, 2019; Goo et al., 2015).

Beyond interaction and mediation, insights from Educational Sociology extend the analysis by conceptualizing classrooms as socially structured environments shaped by institutional norms, power relations, and cultural expectations. From this perspective, learning is not merely an individual cognitive process but a socially embedded practice influenced by broader educational systems. Research in educational sociology demonstrates that classroom interaction patterns, participation structures, and pedagogical practices are deeply influenced by institutional constraints such as assessment regimes and curriculum policies (Biesta, 2015; Bernstein, 2000; Bourdieu, 1990). These insights help explain why the implementation of CLT often varies across contexts, particularly in exam-oriented systems where communicative goals may conflict with institutional priorities (Hu, 2018; Butler, 2011). Thus, understanding communicative pedagogy requires examining not only micro-level interaction but also macro-level structural conditions that shape learning opportunities.

Furthermore, research in Collaborative Learning provides critical insights into how learning emerges through joint activity and shared meaning-making. Collaborative learning theory posits that knowledge is constructed through dialogue, negotiation, and co-regulation among learners, rather than transmitted from teacher to student. In communicative classrooms, task-based and group-oriented activities create opportunities for learners to engage in collective problem-solving and interaction, leading to deeper cognitive processing and more durable learning outcomes. Empirical studies confirm that collaborative interaction enhances not only linguistic proficiency but also higher-order thinking skills, learner autonomy, and social engagement (Dillenbourg, 1999; Webb, 2009; Johnson & Johnson, 2009). Importantly, the effectiveness of collaborative learning depends on task design, interactional structure, and teacher facilitation, reinforcing the central role of mediation in communicative pedagogy.

Recent interdisciplinary research further conceptualizes communicative teaching as a learning ecology, in which interaction, mediation, and participation are dynamically interconnected. Within this framework, classroom learning is understood as an emergent process shaped by multiple interacting factors, including social interaction, pedagogical design, and institutional context. Studies in digital and technology-enhanced learning environments also demonstrate that communicative pedagogy can extend beyond the classroom through online interaction and collaborative platforms, further reinforcing its social and ecological dimensions (Lai & Zheng, 2018; Sun & Steinkrauss,

2020; Zhao et al., 2016). However, these studies also highlight that technology does not inherently enhance learning; rather, its effectiveness depends on how it is integrated into socially meaningful communicative practices.

Taken together, the literature suggests that the effectiveness of communicative teaching cannot be fully explained within a narrow-applied linguistics framework. Instead, it requires an integrated theoretical approach that combines insights from social learning theory, sociocultural mediation, educational sociology, and collaborative learning research. Such an approach provides a more comprehensive understanding of how communicative pedagogy operates as a socially mediated process that transforms classroom learning into a dynamic system of interaction, participation, and knowledge co-construction.

The findings of this systematic review are interpreted below in relation to established theories of second language acquisition, sociocultural learning, and communicative pedagogy. This discussion situates the three primary findings within the broader scholarly literature to explain the mechanisms underlying CLT's effectiveness, articulates this study's theoretical position, and highlights its novelty in extending prior research. The first finding that communicative teaching improves learning outcomes through interaction-mediated mechanisms provides strong empirical support for the central claim of CLT that learning improvement is primarily mediated through meaningful classroom interactions rather than through isolated exposure to linguistic forms (Long, 2015; Ellis, 2017; Gass & Mackey, 2020). The consistent improvements in speaking fluency and discourse competence identified across the reviewed studies align with the interactionist theory of second language acquisition, which posits that language development arises from opportunities for the negotiation of meaning, feedback, and modified outputs during communicative exchanges (Mackey, 2012; McDonough & Mackey, 2013; Plonsky & Kim, 2016; Tai, 2021). These results reinforce previous meta-analytic evidence showing that communicative and interaction-based instruction produces stronger learning effects than form-focused pedagogy, especially in the development of spoken language (Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada & Tomita, 2010; Goo et al., 2015). The prominent role of classroom interactions identified in this review further supports a sociocultural perspective that conceptualizes learning as a socially mediated process embedded in collaborative activities (Ortega, 2014; Larsen-Freeman & Anderson, 2016; Branden, 2016). Importantly, the reviewed studies consistently show that the quality of interactions not merely their frequency determines learning outcomes, corroborating prior research emphasizing cognitively engaged tasks and meaningful communicative goals (Révész et al., 2016; Sato & Loewen, 2019; Seedhouse, 2017). These findings challenge a simplified interpretation of CLT that equates communicative teaching with groupwork alone, instead highlighting the need for principled task design grounded in communicative goals (Littlewood, 2014; Ellis, 2017; Long, 2015).

The second finding regarding the mediating role of teacher practice further underscores that communicative teaching operates as a guided pedagogical framework rather than an unstructured conversational approach (Walsh, 2011; Branden, 2016; Seedhouse, 2017). This finding extends Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, particularly the concept of the Zone of Proximal Development, by demonstrating empirically that teacher-mediated scaffolding in communicative classrooms actively structures the conditions under which learners develop linguistic and interactional competencies

(Ortega, 2014; Walsh, 2011). The studies that reported the strongest learning gains consistently described teachers who actively scaffolded interactions, managed classroom discourse, and provided timely feedback consistent with evidence that instructional mediation enhances the developmental value of interaction (Spada & Tomita, 2010; Goo et al., 2015; Sato & Loewen, 2019). This pattern supports the contemporary argument that effective CLT requires a principled balance between fluency-oriented communication and pedagogically informed attention to form (Ellis, 2017; Long, 2015; Gass & Mackey, 2020). The novelty of this finding lies in its synthesis across multiple contexts, which reveals that teacher mediation is not merely a facilitative add-on but a structurally necessary condition for realizing the social learning potential of communicative pedagogy. Beyond linguistic outcomes, the affective dimensions of learning identified in this review play an important role in explaining how communicative teaching sustains improved learning outcomes (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; MacIntyre et al., 2017; Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2020). Increased motivation, reduced anxiety, and increased willingness to communicate were consistently associated with communicative classroom environments, supporting a theoretical model that positions affective engagement as a key determinant of sustainable language development (MacIntyre et al., 2020; Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Ortega, 2014). The mediating function of affective variables as identified in longitudinal studies suggests that communicative teaching contributes not only to immediate performance improvements but also to the durability of learning outcomes over time (MacIntyre et al., 2017; Sun & Steinkrauss, 2020; Stockwell, 2016).

The third finding, concerning the variability of CLT outcomes across contexts and their role in transforming classroom learning environments, connects directly to insights from Educational Sociology and the post-method perspective. The variability of outcomes across educational contexts identified in this review highlights the importance of contextual alignment in communicative pedagogy (Butler, 2011; Hu, 2018; Littlewood, 2014). In exam-driven systems, communicative teaching is often constrained by assessment practices that prioritize grammatical accuracy and discrete-point testing, which have been shown to limit opportunities for meaningful interactions and collaborative knowledge construction (Hu, 2018; Bax, 2011; Nguyen & Nguyen, 2021). Drawing on Bernstein's (2000) and Bourdieu's (1990) frameworks, these findings demonstrate that macro-level institutional structures directly mediate the ecology of classroom learning, limiting the social transformation that CLT can achieve in restrictive environments. These findings provide empirical support for a post-method perspective that opposes universal pedagogical prescriptions and instead advocates context-sensitive adaptations and informed teacher agency (Kumaravadivelu, 2006; Bax, 2011; Alghamdi, 2021). The integration of technology in communicative teaching, as reported in several reviewed studies, further expands existing theoretical models by demonstrating how digital environments function as extended spaces of social interaction that mediate learner participation and collaborative meaning-making. When pedagogically aligned with communicative goals, digital tools not only amplify interactional opportunities but also facilitate digital social learning, where learners collaboratively construct meaning through networked communication, multimodal interaction, and technology-mediated dialogue (Stockwell, 2016; Lai & Zheng, 2018; Zhao et al., 2016; Li, 2018; Zeng, 2021). However, the mixed results reported in technology-enhanced contexts reinforce the consensus that technology itself does not guarantee improved learning, but rather serves as a

mediating resource whose effectiveness depends on task design and teacher guidance (Lee & Lin, 2019; Peters & Webb, 2018; Sun & Steinkrauss, 2020), reaffirming CLT's core principle that meaningful social interaction remains the primary driver of language learning (Ellis, 2017; Long, 2015; Gass & Mackey, 2020). Taken together, the findings of this review advance the theoretical understanding of CLT by positioning it within a social learning framework that integrates interaction, mediation, and collaborative knowledge construction as co-constitutive mechanisms. The novelty of this study lies in its cross-contextual synthesis that reveals not only what CLT achieves but also the specific social and pedagogical conditions under which it transforms classroom learning into a dynamic, participatory ecology. These findings underscore the need for future research to move beyond comparative methods and toward in-depth analyses of interactional processes, institutional conditions, and teacher agency that underpin effective communicative pedagogy (Long, 2015; Mackey, 2012; Gass & Mackey, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This systematic review of 59 empirical studies demonstrates that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is most effectively understood as a socially mediated learning framework rather than a discrete instructional method. The findings confirm that improved learning outcomes spanning linguistic development, pragmatic competence, and affective engagement emerge from a network of mutually reinforcing mechanisms: interaction-based meaning negotiation, structured teacher mediation, and collaborative knowledge construction. Classroom interaction serves as the core mechanism by which communicative pedagogy operates, while teacher scaffolding and learner affective engagement are essential enabling conditions. Together, these processes reposition the classroom as a participatory, dialogic learning ecology in which knowledge is co-constructed through social activity rather than transmitted from teacher to student. However, the effectiveness of CLT remains context-dependent, as exam-oriented institutional constraints and limited instructional time continue to restrict the depth of social interaction and collaborative learning in many educational settings.

These findings advance the theoretical understanding of CLT by grounding it within an integrated social learning framework that draws on interactionist theory, sociocultural mediation, and collaborative learning research. This study contributes to the field by revealing not only what CLT achieves, but the specific social and pedagogical conditions under which it transforms classroom learning a dimension underexplored in prior research. Future work should move beyond comparative effectiveness studies toward contextually sensitive investigations of interactional processes, teacher agency, and institutional conditions that shape the realization of communicative pedagogy in diverse educational settings.

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