



Assessing Communicative Competence: Validity of Tests in CLT-Based English Classrooms Across Formal in West Java

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Abstract

This research examines the validity of classroom tests in formal secondary schools in West Java, Indonesia, which purport to practice Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Although CLT calls for the development of communicative competence encompassing grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components, concerns arise that classroom testing procedures may fail to represent these communicative objectives. Data were gathered from four EFL teachers using a qualitative multiple case study design through document analysis and a semi-structured online questionnaire. Results show that although the participants exhibit firm theoretical grasp of communicative assessment and include performance tasks like interviews, role plays, and video-based speaking tasks, complete alignment with CLT ideals is limited. A number of challenges impede implementation, such as lack of professional development, large class sizes, limited instructional time, and institutional requirements for grammar-dominated tests. This study concludes that despite claimed allegiance to CLT, the validity of tests utilized in these classrooms continues to be inconsistent. It suggests enhancing teacher assessment literacy, instituting prolonged training, and reforming institutional policy to accommodate communicative assessment practices more in accord with CLT.

Keywords: Assessment validity; CLT; Communicative competence; EFL teachers

Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has for a while been recognized as a modern and successful method of English teaching, especially for fostering authentic communication, interaction among learners, and learner-centered teaching. The framework focuses on the development of communicative competence through the incorporation of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies (Canale & Swain, 1980; Bachman, 1990). This

paradigm is a major departure from rote learning and memorization of rules to authentic communication and performance-based language use.

Empirical research has recently shown the advantages of applying CLT in Indonesia. For example, Hasibuan et al. (2021) showed that CLT classroom practices enhanced the fluency and confidence of students. Lumy (2018) revealed that task-based communicative tasks greatly promoted learner motivation, and Trimadona et al. (2024) reported greater student engagement and interaction through pair and group work approaches. These studies confirm that CLT can be extremely effective if properly implemented in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom.

Nonetheless, other research has identified that the implementation of CLT in Indonesian classrooms is superficial or inconsistent. Saragih (2019) discovered that although they professed to implement CLT, the classrooms continued to be teacher-centered with minimal student involvement. Yustina and Hikmah (2020) revealed a mismatch between CLT-based lesson plans and grammar-intensive instructional delivery. Wulandari (2021) noticed that numerous students had difficulty with open-ended communicative tasks because of a lack of scaffolding and modeling. These findings underscore the contextual issues that impede the full operation of CLT and indicate a deficiency of assessment coherence.

This research fills the gap between CLT-based instruction and actual testing practices in formal secondary schools, especially in West Java. Although CLT has increasingly been implemented in lesson planning and pedagogy, the majority of classroom tests are still based on traditional grammar-oriented testing. Such tests frequently overlook communicative interaction, which contradicts the ideas of CLT and lowers the validity of the tests. Validity particularly construct validity is paramount in ensuring classroom tests are a true representation of instructional objectives and communicative language use

From the above analysis, this study is informed by the following research questions: (1) What kinds of tests are utilized by English teachers in West Java's formal CLT classrooms? (2) How well are these tests based on the communicative competence model? (3) To what degree are the classroom tests utilized by English teachers' valid measures of communicative competence? The aim of this research is to investigate the authenticity and validity of English language tests utilized in formal CLT-based classrooms in West Java. The originality of this study is that it investigates assessment validity from the perspective of communicative competence in an Indonesian EFL setting a research area that is still under-investigated amid increased CLT uptake at the instructional level.

Method

This study used a qualitative multiple case study design to investigate the validity of English tests taken in classrooms within the framework of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in West Java formal schools, specifically in Bandung and Depok. Case study research was utilized because it enables the

researcher to explore education phenomena in the real world, i.e., the complicated, context-bound language testing practices (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2018). This design facilitated a close examination of the ways in which English teachers under CLT-based instruction construct, interpret, and experience assessment tools.

Data were gathered in two purposively selected formal junior and senior high schools in Bandung and Depok. The schools were chosen because they self-identified themselves as CLT-based schools with the application of communicative assessment strategies, such as performance-based tasks in English language curricula. Four English teachers participated in the study. The participants were all required to design and administer English class tests across the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The participants were selected on the basis of test design experience and prior knowledge of communicative language assessment techniques. Selection was voluntary, with recruitment through a Google Form distributed across school and professional networks of educators.

To obtain data, two key tools were used: document analysis and an online semi-structured survey. Document analysis was conducted on test materials and classroom-based assessment documents, while the online survey gathered teachers' beliefs, comprehension, and insights regarding communicative assessment. The application of these tools together followed Creswell and Poth's (2018) recommendation of methodological triangulation to improve findings' credibility and trustworthiness. The triangulated approach also allowed for a more detailed explanation of how assessment design aligns or does not align with CLT principles in actual classroom contexts.

The demographic profiles of the four participating teachers were diverse in terms of gender, age, teaching experience, and institutional setting. There were three women and one man; two of them were 20–30 years old, one was 31–40 years old, and one over 40. Their teaching experience was from less than 3 years to over 10 years. Two participants came from the same school in Padalarang, Bandung Barat, and the others from Kelapa Dua and inner Bandung. This diversity of participant background produced rich data about how communicative assessment is envisioned and practiced in different school settings in West Java.

Results

Survey Tool and Theoretical Framework

The research instrument used here was a semi-structured online survey questionnaire employed to gather data from four English teachers in West Java

formal secondary schools. The research instrument was designed to examine the legitimacy of communicative assessment practices in light of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Based on Table 1, the questionnaire was structured into three broad sections.

Section 1 consisted of demographic questions for the purpose of obtaining participant details like age group, gender, years of teaching experience, and school location. These data were required to place respondents' classroom practices and assessment beliefs in context.

Section 2 consisted of open-ended questions addressing teachers' definitions and comprehension of communicative assessment. The items were built on Canale and Swain's (1980) model of communicative competence, which described communicative competence as consisting of grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components.

Section 3 was comprised of Likert-scale items based on Bachman and Palmer's (1996) test usefulness model specifically for the authenticity and construct validity constructs. This section aimed to assess the frequency of authentic use of language tasks and balance of fluency and grammaticality in teachers' testing practices.

Table 1. Research Instrument Design and Source Framework

Section	Item Type	Description	Source Framework
Section 1	Demographic	Age, Gender, Teaching Experience, School Location	Self-developed
Section 2	Open-ended	Definitions of Communicative Assessment, Task Types	Canale & Swain (1980)
Section 3	Likert-scale	Frequency of Real-Life Tasks, Fluency vs Accuracy Focus	Bachman & Palmer (1996)

Knowledge of Communicative Assessment

Findings revealed a strong basis in communicative assessment among the four participant teachers. All respondents in their own understanding conceptualized communicative assessment as a process where contextual use of language and authentic interaction is more important than an emphasis on grammar. Their reports supported the theoretical underpinnings of Canale and Swain's (1980) model, showing that participants were theoretically grounded in the concepts of communicative competence.

Table 2. Teachers' Definitions of Communicative Assessment

Respondent	Definition
R1	"Assessment that measures contextual use of language, not just grammar."
R2	"Assessment to measure ability to communicate in English."
R3	"An assessment designed to evaluate interaction with peers or teachers."
R4	"Oral evaluation focusing on contextual use and accuracy."

Types of Assessment Tasks and Language Aspects

In respect to performance tasks, three of the four teachers used performance-based tests such as role-plays, vlogs, project presentations, and structured discussions very frequently. These are examples of types that align with communicative assessment principles proposed by Bachman and Palmer (1996), namely authenticity and interaction. One of the participants reported persistent use of written grammar-based tests, reflecting limited adherence to communicative assessment principles. In examining areas of language that are being assessed, respondents showed concern for fluency, vocabulary, coherence, and context appropriateness. This is an effort to validate learners' ability to perform linguistically and socially acceptable language functions, as in CLT.

Real-Life Interaction and Task Authenticity

The participants incorporated elements of authentic interaction into their experiments. All the teachers reported that their tests involved student-teacher or student-student interaction. Moreover, three teachers rated the use of authentic tasks in their classrooms as the highest score (5 out of 5), suggesting high commitment to task authenticity. This aligns with Richards' (2006) argument that language learning is most successfully accomplished when located within meaningful, authentic contexts.

Implementation Challenges

Despite such encouraging indicators of theoretical understanding and utilization, the teachers did identify some of the constraints. These included huge numbers in classes, time restrictions, and low motivation on the part of students all of which limited the use of communicative assessment to maximum levels. While one teacher stated that the students previously put in minimum effort in terms of speech activities, another stated difficulty in conducting performance-based tests because of scheduling restrictions and time-consuming nature.

These are manifestations of systemic barriers that impede the full operationalization of the principles of CLT in class assessment, just as was

discovered with previous research (e.g., Saragih, 2019; Masduqi & Prihananto, 2020).

Practicality and Professional Development

Teachers' capacity to present communicative tasks varied. Some used web-based tools (e.g., Google Classroom, WhatsApp, or video assignments) to create performance assessment, particularly in big classes. Nevertheless, logistical complications such as grading time and the preparation of students remained problematic.

Only one teacher was identified to have undergone professional training for communicative assessment. Nevertheless, all participants were highly eager to develop their practice through workshop-like activities, peer learning, and continuous mentoring. This gives evidence of high impact potential through focused professional development programs.

Discussion

Conceptual Understanding vs. Practical Constraints

The study showed that West Java's formal secondary school English teachers possess a very strong theoretical concept of communicative assessment ideas. Based on Canale and Swain's (1980) model, teachers demonstrated an understanding of communicative competence beyond grammatical knowledge to cover sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic skills. However, with their conceptual readiness, practical implementation of communicative assessment is a significant difficulty.

This is largely because of systemic and contextual constraints. Institutional requirements request to apply standard, grammar-focused testing formats, for example tend to force instructors to design tests that conflict with CLT philosophy. Instructional assessment congruence is subsequently lost as class tests experience reduced construct validity. This incongruity may be undermining students' ability to develop and demonstrate authentic communicative competence, subverting the very goals that CLT seeks to pursue.

Task Authenticity and Fluency Emphasis

Among the strengths that were observed in this study was the deliberate use of real-world, authentic communicative tasks such as role-plays, video projects, and oral presentations. These activities not only enhance learner motivation but also mirror the communicative demands of language use in real contexts. Three of the four teachers put more emphasis on fluency and meaning-construction than grammatical accuracy when measuring students' achievement, evidencing a partial adherence to the guidelines of communicative assessment championed by Savignon (2002).

This emphasis on fluency serves to reinforce the notion of communicative

validity a necessary component of effective language testing according to Bachman and Palmer (1996). But actual consistency and extent of application varied, highlighting that such coordination is fleeting and context-dependent. Teachers operate within settings which do or do not support experimentation or unconventional test paradigms, suggesting a need for greater institutional flexibility and teacher autonomy.

Institutional and Systemic Barriers

Echoing previous findings of Saragih (2019) and Masduqi and Prihananto (2020), this study affirms the existence of effective communicative assessment on the basis of more than teacher competence. Systemic support in the form of policies favoring communicative outcomes, school-level literacy of assessment, and access to professional development is necessary to bring about lasting change in classroom assessment practice.

Instructors in the study identified logistical issues such as large class sizes, time pressures, limited access to staff development, and student disengagement as key obstacles. These types of issues indicate that without structural reform and ongoing institutional commitment, even highly effective teachers will struggle to maintain instruction and assessment in alignment within a communicative paradigm. Also, the relatively few opportunities for training in communicative assessment reveal a compelling demand for capacity-building programs, ideally those that are context-specific and practically applicable.

Opportunities for Growth

Despite the obstacles, the study also found a positive learning and development attitude among teachers. All the participants expressed a desire to be trained further, with a preference for interactive and practice-based forms of training like workshops, joint lesson planning, and simulated models of the classroom. This offers an opportunity for policymakers and educational leaders to make an investment in targeted professional development concerning the design of tests, rubric crafting, and task-based assessment supportive of CLT tenets. In addition, the application of online platforms to testing as observed in the experience of some respondents is a promising direction toward increasing practicality, activation, and accessibility in mass classes. But these innovations must be supported by technical training and institutional assistance in order to have maximum effects.

Conclusion

The research concludes that secondary English teachers in West Java's formal secondary schools possess sound theoretical knowledge of communicative

assessment and demonstrate promising practices such as task authenticity and interaction-oriented tests. However, three underlying issues lack of training, time constraints, and test norms at the institutional level prevent full achievement of CLT-oriented assessment.

For enhancing validity in communicative tests, the research recommends:

- 1) Enhancing professional development through practical training and peer mentoring;
- 2) Reducing class sizes and providing sufficient time for authentic assessment; and
- 3) Building teachers' and policymakers' assessment literacy for pedagogy-curriculum-testing alignment.

Future research will expand the sample scope and include students' voices and classroom observations. Employing mixed-method validation procedures such as inter-rater reliability and item analysis will contribute to evidence of communicative test validity and instructional decision-making in EFL environments.

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