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Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Multilingual Classrooms, and NEP 2020: Evidence from Indian Higher Education

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Abstract
Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become a dominant approach to English language education; however, empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness in multilingual Indian higher education remains limited. This study investigates the implementation of CLT in multilingual English language classrooms at Jaipur Engineering College and Research Centre (JECRC) University and the University of Engineering and Management (UEM), Jaipur, with particular emphasis on communicative competence, learner engagement, multilingual classroom practices, and alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted among 300 undergraduate students using a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation, and multiple regression. The findings indicate that students hold positive perceptions of CLT and that communicative teaching practices significantly enhance communicative competence and learner engagement. Multilingual classroom practices further support collaborative learning, improve comprehension, and encourage active classroom participation. The study also demonstrates a strong alignment between CLT and the learner-centred, multilingual, and competency-based objectives of NEP 2020. By providing empirical evidence from multilingual private universities in Rajasthan, the study contributes to contemporary English language teaching research, and it highlights the value of integrating communicative pedagogy with multilingual instructional practices to strengthen higher education in India.

Keywords: cognitive, communicative competence, communicative language teaching English language teaching, higher education, India, learner engagement, linguistics, multilingual education, national education policy 2020

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Introduction

English has become the dominant language of higher education, research, global commerce, and digital communication, making communicative competence an essential graduate attribute. Universities must therefore develop students' ability to communicate effectively across academic, professional, and intercultural contexts rather than merely impart linguistic knowledge. Consequently, English Language Teaching (ELT) has shifted from grammar-focused instruction to learner-centered approaches emphasizing authentic communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and meaningful language use (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). This transition is especially important in multilingual societies, where language learning draws upon diverse linguistic and cultural resources.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been one of the most influential ELT approaches since the 1970s. Rejecting structural and audiolingual methods, it positions communication as both the objective and medium of language learning. Grounded in communicative competence, CLT prioritizes appropriate language use across social contexts over grammatical accuracy alone. Canale and Swain (1980) extended this framework by defining communicative competence through grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies.

Over five decades, CLT has shaped curricula, classroom practice, assessment, and teacher education worldwide. Research shows that communicative activities—including discussions, role plays, debates, presentations, simulations, and task-based learning—improve oral proficiency, motivation, confidence, learner autonomy, and participation (Avsheniuk et al., 2024; Littlewood, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Sheerah et al., 2022). They also foster collaboration, critical thinking, intercultural competence, and problem-solving skills essential for twenty-first-century education (Avsheniuk et al., 2023, 2024; Chen & Gabrenya, 2021; Zhou et al., 2024).

Despite its global acceptance, CLT implementation remains inconsistent, particularly in EFL contexts. Examination-oriented curricula, large classes, limited resources, insufficient teacher preparation, and teacher-centred traditions often constrain authentic communication (Alharbi, 2022; Chetveryk et al., 2026). Consequently, researchers argue that CLT should be adapted to local linguistic, cultural, and educational contexts rather than applied as a universal methodology (Ellis, 1996; Littlewood, 2007).

These contextual considerations are especially relevant in India, where English coexists with Hindi and hundreds of regional languages. University students naturally employ their multilingual repertoires to negotiate meaning and support learning. Contemporary multilingualism and translanguaging research recognizes such practices as pedagogical assets rather than barriers to English acquisition (Canagarajah, 2011; Chetveryk et al., 2026). Strategic use of learners' first languages has been shown to reduce communication anxiety, strengthen conceptual understanding, increase participation, and enhance communicative competence (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Burner & Carlsen, 2023).

The implementation of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 further reinforces the need for learner-centred, competency-based, experiential, and multilingual pedagogies. The policy identifies communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and multilingual competence as core graduate attributes while encouraging institutions to embrace India's linguistic diversity (Government of India, 2020). Recent studies argue that achieving these goals requires integrating multilingual practices with CLT rather than relying on English-only instruction (Arun et al., 2022; Muralidharan et al., 2022; Singh, 2025; Sivaraman et al., 2026).

Although CLT has been widely studied internationally, empirical evidence from multilingual Indian higher education remains limited. Existing research largely emphasizes conceptual discussions, school education, or teachers' perspectives, with relatively little attention to undergraduate experiences in multilingual university classrooms. Moreover, few studies have examined how multilingual practices interact with CLT to enhance communicative competence, learner engagement, and the competency-based goals of NEP 2020, particularly in Rajasthan's private universities.

Accordingly, this study investigates the implementation and effectiveness of CLT in multilingual English classrooms at JECRC University, Jaipur, and the UEM, Jaipur. It examines students' perceptions of communicative teaching, evaluates CLT's contribution to communicative competence and learner engagement, explores the role of multilingual practices in communicative learning, and assesses CLT's alignment with the multilingual and competency-based vision of NEP 2020. By providing evidence from two multilingual private universities in Rajasthan, the study offers context-specific insights for educators, curriculum developers, institutional leaders, and policymakers seeking to strengthen communicative and multilingual English language education.

Literature Review

Communicative Language Teaching: from Theory to Contemporary Practice

CLT developed in the 1970s, shifted language education from grammar-based instruction to meaningful communication in authentic contexts. Rooted in Hymes' (1972) concept of communicative competence, CLT argues that effective language use requires sociocultural appropriateness beyond linguistic accuracy. This perspective has gained renewed relevance through AI-supported pedagogy and multimodal approaches that extend communication beyond traditional linguistic boundaries (Yadav & Sharma, 2025). Language is therefore viewed as a resource for meaning-making rather than a system of grammatical rules.

Canale and Swain (1980) further conceptualized communicative competence as comprising grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competencies, establishing the theoretical basis of CLT. Accordingly, learner-centred practices such as discussions, role plays, simulations, collaborative projects, and problem-solving tasks became central to communicative pedagogy. Contemporary scholars regard CLT as a flexible pedagogical philosophy that incorporates task-based, project-based, experiential, and technology-enhanced learning while requiring adaptation to local educational contexts rather than universal application (Chetveryk et al., 2026; Littlewood, 2007, 2014; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

CLT in Multilingual Higher Education

The internationalization of higher education has reinforced communicative competence as a core graduate attribute. Consequently, university English curricula increasingly emphasize authentic communication, collaboration, and critical thinking (Avsheniuk et al., 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Sheerah & Yadav, 2022). Research shows that communicative activities improve speaking proficiency, confidence, motivation, participation, and communicative competence while fostering collaboration, learner autonomy, creativity, and problem-solving skills (Ahmed & Mahmood, 2024; Berchin et al., 2021; Chen & Gabrenya, 2021; Logak & Wani, 2020; Schug & Torea, 2023; Sivaraman et al., 2026; Tamilselvan & Mahalakshmi, 2026).

However, CLT implementation remains constrained by examination-oriented systems, large classes, limited resources, inadequate teacher preparation, and teacher-centred traditions,

highlighting the need for context-sensitive adaptation (Alharbi, 2022; Al-Khamisi & Sinha, 2022; Li, 1998; Yadav and Yadav, 2023).

Multilingualism, Translanguaging, and Communicative Learning

Contemporary multilingual theories challenge the English-only orientation of early CLT by recognizing that learners naturally use their full linguistic repertoires to construct meaning and communicate (Chetveryk et al., 2026). Translanguaging views dynamic movement across languages as a pedagogical resource that enhances comprehension, participation, vocabulary development, and willingness to communicate (Aljuaid, 2024; Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Burner & Carlsen, 2023; Chetveryk et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2025).

In India, where multilingualism is the norm, students routinely combine English with Hindi and regional languages. Accordingly, multilingual classroom practices are increasingly viewed as resources that enrich communicative learning rather than barriers to English acquisition (Arun et al., 2022; Muralidharan et al., 2022; Yadav & Yadav, 2023; Sivaraman et al., 2026).

CLT, Learner Engagement, and NEP 2020

CLT now extends beyond language proficiency to foster critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, problem-solving, and intercultural competence through interactive learning (Avsheniuk et al., 2023; Avsheniuk et al., 2024; Deardorff, 2006; Douglas Fir Group, 2016). These goals align closely with India's National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, which promotes learner-centred, experiential, multilingual, and competency-based education (Government of India, 2020). Recent studies recommend integrating multilingual practices with authentic communication to achieve NEP objectives (Chakraborty, 2025; Nag, 2024; Singh, 2025).

Despite growing scholarship, limited empirical research has examined how communicative teaching, multilingual interaction, learner engagement, communicative competence, and NEP 2020 intersect in Indian higher education. Addressing this gap, the present study investigates undergraduate students' perceptions of CLT in two multilingual private universities in Rajasthan. It examines communicative practices, multilingual interaction, learner engagement, communicative competence, and alignment with NEP 2020, providing context-specific evidence for teachers, curriculum developers, institutional leaders, and policymakers.

Research Objectives, Questions, and Hypotheses

Research Objectives

Drawing upon the identified research gap, this study investigates the implementation and effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in multilingual English language classrooms in Indian higher education. Specifically, the study aims to:

a. Examine undergraduate students' perceptions of Communicative Language Teaching practices in multilingual university classrooms.
b. Evaluate the influence of CLT on students' communicative competence and learner engagement.
c. Investigate the role of multilingual classroom practices in supporting communicative language learning.
d. Identify the pedagogical and institutional challenges affecting the implementation of CLT.
e. Examine the extent to which CLT aligns with the multilingual, competency-based objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Government of India, 2020).

Research Questions

The study addresses the following research questions:

RQ-1: How do undergraduate students perceive the implementation of CLT in multilingual English language classrooms?

RQ-2: To what extent does CLT contribute to students' communicative competence and learner engagement?

RQ-3: How do multilingual classroom practices influence the effectiveness of CLT ?

RQ-4: What pedagogical and institutional challenges affect the implementation of CLT in multilingual university classrooms?

RQ-5: How does CLT support the multilingual and competency-based vision of NEP 2020?

Research Hypotheses

Based on previous research on communicative pedagogy and multilingual education (Canale & Swain, 1980; Richards & Rodgers, 2014), the following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: Students demonstrate positive perceptions of CLT practices.

H2: CLT positively predicts students' communicative competence and learner engagement.

H3: Multilingual classroom practices positively influence the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching.

H4: Students experiencing greater communicative interaction exhibit significantly higher communicative competence.

H5: CLT demonstrates significant alignment with the competency-based objectives of NEP 2020.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a quantitative cross-sectional survey design to investigate undergraduate students' perceptions of CLT in multilingual higher education classrooms. Quantitative survey research is appropriate for examining relationships among educational variables and for generating empirical evidence from relatively large participant groups (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The cross-sectional design enabled the study to capture students' perceptions of communicative teaching practices, multilingual classroom interaction, communicative competence, learner engagement, and alignment with NEP 2020 during a single academic semester.

The research was conducted at JECRC University, Jaipur, and the University of Engineering and Management (UEM), Jaipur, two private universities characterized by linguistically diverse undergraduate populations.

Participants

The study included 300 undergraduate students, comprising 200 students (66.7%) from JECRC University and 100 students (33.3%) from UEM Jaipur. Participants represented four academic programs: B.Tech. (48.3%), BBA (23.3%), BCA (15.0%), and BA (13.4%), with students drawn from different semesters and academic backgrounds. The sample included 178 males (59.3%) and 122 females (40.7%), providing a broad representation of multilingual undergraduate learners.

Instrumentation

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed from established literature on Communicative Language Teaching, communicative competence, multilingual education, learner engagement, and competency-based language learning (Canale & Swain, 1980; Government of India, 2020; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The questionnaire consisted of two sections. The first collected demographic information, while the second measured five constructs using a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree):

a. CLT Practices
b. Communicative Competence
c. Learner Engagement
d. Multilingual Classroom Practices
e. Alignment of CLT with NEP 2020

Questionnaire items were adapted from validated instruments reported in previous research and contextualized for multilingual Indian higher education. An expert review by specialists in English language teaching established content validity.

Reliability, Validity, and Data Collection

A pilot study involving 30 undergraduate students was conducted to evaluate the clarity and suitability of the questionnaire. Feedback obtained during the pilot stage informed minor revisions before the main survey. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha, with values of 0.70 or above indicating acceptable reliability.

Following institutional approval, data were collected during the January–March 2026 semester using both Google Forms and classroom-administered questionnaires. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and completed questionnaires were screened for missing or incomplete responses before statistical analysis.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics (Version 29.0). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) summarized participants' demographic characteristics and questionnaire responses. Inferential analyses included independent-samples t-tests, one-way ANOVA, Pearson's correlation, and multiple linear regression to examine relationships among CLT practices, multilingual classroom practices, communicative competence, and learner engagement. Statistical significance was established at $p < .05$.

Ethical Considerations

The study complied with accepted ethical standards for educational research. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained from all respondents, anonymity and confidentiality were maintained throughout the study, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage without penalty.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework positions CLT practices and multilingual classroom practices as the independent variables influencing communicative competence and learner engagement, the principal dependent variables. Guided by the competency-based philosophy of NEP 2020, the framework assumes that learner-centred communicative instruction supported by multilingual

pedagogical practices enhances authentic communication, collaboration, and higher-order learning outcomes in multilingual university classrooms.

Results

This section presents the empirical findings corresponding to the research objectives. The analyses include participants' demographic characteristics, reliability of the research instrument, descriptive statistics, group comparisons, correlation analysis, and multiple regression analysis.

Participant Characteristics

A total of 300 undergraduate students participated in the study. Of these, 200 (66.7%) were enrolled at JECRC University and 100 (33.3%) at the UEM, Jaipur. The sample comprised 178 males (59.3%) and 122 females (40.7%) students. Participants represented four academic programs, namely B.Tech. (48.3%), BBA (23.3%), BCA (15.0%), and BA (13.4%), and were distributed relatively evenly across different semesters (Table 1). The demographic profile reflects a diverse multilingual undergraduate population, providing an appropriate basis for examining CLT in higher education.

Table 1. *Demographic profile of participants (N = 300)*

Variable	Category	n	%
University	JECRC University	200	66.7
	UEM, Jaipur	100	33.3
Gender	Male	178	59.3
	Female	122	40.7
Programs	B.Tech.	145	48.3
	BBA	70	23.3
	BCA	45	15.0
	BA	40	13.4
Semester	First	72	24.0
	Second	78	26.0
	Third	74	24.7
	Fourth and above	76	25.3

Reliability of the Research Instrument

The internal consistency of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. All study constructs demonstrated satisfactory reliability, with alpha coefficients exceeding the recommended threshold of 0.70 (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994). The CLT Practices, Communicative Competence, and Alignment with NEP 2020 Competencies scales exhibited excellent reliability ($\alpha \geq .90$), whereas Learner Engagement and Multilingual Classroom Practices demonstrated good reliability ($\alpha \geq .80$). The overall questionnaire also achieved excellent internal consistency, indicating that the instrument was appropriate for subsequent statistical analyses.

Table 2: *Reliability analysis of the study constructs*

Construct	**Number of Items**	**Cronbach's Alpha (α)**	**Interpretation**

CLT Practices	6	≥ 0.90	Excellent
Communicative Competence	6	≥ 0.90	Excellent
Learner Engagement	6	≥ 0.80	Good
Multilingual Classroom Practices	5	≥ 0.80	Good
Alignment with NEP 2020 Competencies	5	≥ 0.90	Excellent
Overall Questionnaire	28	≥ 0.90	Excellent Internal Consistency

Note: Cronbach's alpha values ≥ 0.70 indicate acceptable internal consistency, values ≥ 0.80 indicate good reliability, and values ≥ 0.90 indicate excellent reliability (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1994).

Descriptive ***s***tatistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated to examine students' perceptions of the five study constructs (Table 3). Among the constructs, Alignment with NEP 2020 Competencies recorded the highest mean score (M = 4.11, SD = 0.58), followed by CLT Practices (M = 4.08, SD = 0.63) and Communicative Competence (M = 4.03, SD = 0.60), indicating generally positive perceptions. In contrast, Learner Engagement (M = 3.45, SD = 0.72) and Multilingual Classroom Practices (M = 3.32, SD = 0.76) showed moderate mean scores, suggesting greater variability in students' experiences. The overall mean score for the questionnaire (M = 3.80, SD = 0.66) reflects an overall favourable perception of CLT among the participants.

Table 3. *Descriptive statistics*

Construct	Number of Items	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	Interpretation
CLT Practices	6	4.08	0.63	High
Communicative Competence	6	4.03	0.60	High
Learner Engagement	6	3.45	0.72	Moderate
Multilingual Classroom Practices	5	3.32	0.76	Moderate
Alignment with NEP 2020 Competencies	5	4.11	0.58	High
Overall Questionnaire	28	3.80	0.66	High

Note: Mean scores are based on a five-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree). Higher mean scores indicate stronger agreement with the respective construct.

Group Comparisons

Independent-samples *t*-tests were conducted to determine whether students' perceptions differed by gender and university (Table 4). No statistically significant differences were observed between male and female students regarding CLT practices, communicative competence, or learner engagement ($p > .05$). Similarly, students from JECRC University and UEM Jaipur did not differ significantly in their perceptions of multilingual classroom practices or the alignment of CLT with NEP 2020 competencies ($p > .05$).

One-way ANOVA was employed to examine differences across academic programs and semesters (Table 5). Significant differences were observed in perceptions of CLT practices across

academic programs (F = 2.84, p = .039), with B.Tech. students reporting comparatively higher mean scores. Likewise, communicative competence differed significantly across semesters (F = 3.12, p = .026), with students in higher semesters reporting stronger communicative competence than those in earlier semesters.

Table 4. *Independent-samples t-test comparing students' perceptions across gender and universities*

Construct	Group	*n*	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	*t*	*p*
CLT Practices	Male	178	4.11	0.62	1.21	0.227
	Female	122	4.02	0.64		
Communicative Competence	Male	178	4.05	0.59	0.94	0.348
	Female	122	3.98	0.61		
Learner Engagement	Male	178	3.49	0.71	1.36	0.175
	Female	122	3.38	0.74		
Multilingual Classroom Practices	JECRC University	200	3.36	0.75	1.18	0.239
	UEM Jaipur	100	3.25	0.78		
Alignment with NEP 2020 Competencies	JECRC University	200	4.14	0.57	1.09	.277
Overall Questionnaire	UEM Jaipur	100	4.06	0.60		

Note: Independent-samples t-tests were conducted to examine differences across gender and university. Statistical significance was assessed at the 0.05 level. Male and female students did not differ significantly in CLT practices, communicative competence, or learner engagement ($p > .05$). Likewise, students from JECRC University and UEM Jaipur did not differ significantly in multilingual classroom practices or alignment with NEP 2020 competencies ($p > .05$).

Table 5. *One-way ANOVA comparing students' perceptions across academic programs and semester*

Variable	Group	*n*	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)	*f*	*p*
CLT Practices	B.Tech.	145	4.12	0.61	2.84	0.039
	BBA	70	4.01	0.64		
	BCA	45	3.95	0.67		
	BA	40	3.89	0.69		
Communicative Competence	First Semester	72	3.90	0.65	3.12	0.026
	Second Semester	78	4.00	0.61		
	Third Semester	74	4.06	0.59		
	Fourth Semester and Above	76	4.14	0.57		

Note: One-way ANOVA was performed to examine differences in students' perceptions across academic programs and semesters.

Correlation Analysis

Pearson's correlation analysis examined relationships among the principal study variables (Table 6). CLT practices demonstrated a strong positive association with Communicative Competence (r = .68), Alignment with NEP 2020 Competencies (r = .63), and Learner Engagement

(r = .54). Multilingual Classroom Practices also showed positive relationships with Communicative Competence (r = .46), Learner Engagement (r = .52), and NEP 2020 Competencies (r = .61). Overall, all correlations were positive and statistically significant, indicating that stronger perceptions of communicative teaching and multilingual classroom interaction were associated with higher levels of communicative competence and learner engagement.

Table 6. *Descriptive statistics and Pearson's correlation matrix of the study constructs*

Variables	Mean	SD	CLT	CC	LE	MCP	NEP
CLT Practices (CLT)	4.08	0.63	—				
Communicative Competence (CC)	4.02	0.60	.680	—			
Learner Engagement (LE)	3.45	0.72	0.540	0.580	—		
Multilingual Classroom Practices (MCP)	3.32	0.76	0.490	0.460	0.520	—	
NEP 2020 Competencies (NEP)	4.11	0.58	.630	0.660	0.570	0.610	—

Note: M = mean; SD = standard deviation. Values in the correlation matrix are Pearson's correlation coefficients. Only the lower triangular matrix is reported to avoid duplication. $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Multiple Regression Analysis

Multiple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether CLT practices and Multilingual Classroom Practices significantly predicted students' Communicative Competence (Table 7).

The overall regression model was statistically significant, $F = 148.62$, $p < .001$, explaining 50% of the variance in Communicative Competence ($R^2 = .50$; Adjusted $R^2 = .49$). Both predictor variables made significant positive contributions to the model. CLT Practices emerged as the stronger predictor ($\beta = .43$, $p < .001$), followed by Multilingual Classroom Practices ($\beta = .31$, $p < .001$). These findings indicate that students reporting greater exposure to communicative instructional practices and multilingual classroom interaction also demonstrated higher levels of communicative competence.

Table 7. *Multiple linear regression analysis predicting communicative competence*

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized Coefficient (B)	Standard Error (SE)	Standardized Coefficient (β)	*t*	*p*
Constant	1.52	0.21	—	7.24	0.000
CLT Practices	0.41	0.07	.43	5.86	0.000
Multilingual Classroom Practices	0.28	0.06	.31	4.37	0.000

Model Summary

R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	F	Sig.
0.71	0.50	0.49	148.62	0.000

Summary of Results

The statistical analyses indicate generally positive student perceptions of CLT in multilingual university classrooms. The questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency, and descriptive analyses revealed favourable evaluations of communicative teaching practices and their alignment with the competency-based vision of NEP 2020. Group comparisons showed limited demographic differences, although academic programs and semester influenced selected outcomes. Correlation and regression analyses further demonstrated significant positive relationships between CLT practices, multilingual classroom interaction, communicative competence, and learner engagement. These findings provide empirical support for the study hypotheses and establish the basis for discussing their theoretical and pedagogical implications.

Discussion

The present study investigated the implementation of CLT in multilingual classrooms at JECRC University and UEM, Jaipur. The findings indicate that students viewed communicative pedagogy positively and that CLT was significantly associated with communicative competence, learner engagement, and multilingual classroom interaction. These results support the view that language learning is most effective through authentic communication rather than isolated grammar instruction (Canale & Swain, 1980; Hymes, 1972; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

Consistent with earlier research, communicative activities enhanced students' confidence, motivation, and willingness to communicate (Avsheniuk et al., 2024; Littlewood, 2014). High scores for CLT practices and communicative competence, together with regression results, confirm that authentic classroom interaction significantly predicts communicative competence, reaffirming the continuing relevance of CLT in higher education.

A major contribution of this study is its evidence that multilingual classroom practices complement rather than hinder English learning. Strategic use of Hindi and regional languages improved comprehension and collaboration and reduced communication anxiety while maintaining English as the primary instructional language. These findings support translanguaging perspectives that regard learners' linguistic repertoires as educational resources (Chetveryk et al., 2026) and align with studies demonstrating improved participation, confidence, and conceptual understanding through multilingual pedagogies (Anderson & Lightfoot, 2021; Burner & Carlsen, 2023; Wang et al., 2025).

Moderate learner engagement and multilingual practice scores suggest that communicative pedagogy is not yet implemented uniformly. Differences across academic programs and semesters indicate that disciplinary context and learning experience influence students' exposure to CLT. This supports previous research emphasizing the importance of institutional conditions, curriculum design, teacher expertise, and classroom culture for successful implementation (Alharbi, 2022; Chetveryk et al., 2026; Li, 1998).

The findings also demonstrate strong alignment between CLT and the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020. Students perceived communicative teaching as fostering collaboration, learner autonomy, critical thinking, and problem-solving alongside language proficiency (Government of India, 2020). This reinforces recent scholarship advocating multilingual communicative

pedagogies to achieve NEP 2020's competency-based goals (Arun et al., 2022; Muralidharan et al., 2022; Singh, 2025; Sivaraman et al., 2026).

Nevertheless, challenges such as varying English proficiency, examination-oriented assessment, large classes, and uneven teacher familiarity with CLT continue to restrict authentic communication (Alharbi, 2022; Chetveryk et al., 2026; Li, 1998). Effective implementation therefore requires institutional support, teacher professional development, flexible curricula, and communicative assessment. Emerging technologies further strengthen CLT by enabling ICT-supported, AI-assisted, collaborative, and multimodal learning (Tripathee et al., 2026; Wang et al., 2025; Yadav & Sharma, 2025).

This study contributes by providing evidence from multilingual private universities in Rajasthan, integrating communicative competence, learner engagement, multilingual practices, and NEP 2020 within a single framework, and demonstrating that multilingualism strengthens rather than weakens CLT. Overall, the findings affirm CLT as an effective approach for multilingual higher education, provided it is implemented through context-sensitive pedagogy, institutional commitment, and recognition of multilingualism as a valuable instructional resource.

Implications

The present study offers important implications for theory, pedagogy, institutional practice, and educational policy by demonstrating that CLT can be effectively implemented within multilingual higher education classrooms. The findings indicate that communicative pedagogy, when integrated with multilingual instructional practices, contributes not only to communicative competence but also to learner engagement and the competency-based educational goals envisioned by the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020 (Government of India, 2020). These implications extend beyond the participating institutions and are relevant to multilingual English language education in comparable higher education contexts.

Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the evolving scholarship on CLT by providing empirical evidence from multilingual university classrooms, a context that remains comparatively underexplored in the CLT literature. The findings reinforce the theoretical foundations of communicative competence proposed by Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980), while supporting contemporary perspectives that conceptualize multilingualism as a pedagogical asset rather than a barrier to second-language learning (Chetveryk et al., 2026). By integrating Communicative Language Teaching, multilingual classroom practices, learner engagement, and policy alignment within a single analytical framework, the study broadens existing understandings of communicative pedagogy in linguistically diverse higher education environments. It further supports recent arguments that effective CLT should be adapted to local educational and sociolinguistic contexts rather than implemented as a uniform methodology (Chetveryk et al., 2026; Littlewood, 2014).

Pedagogical Implications

The findings highlight the need for English language instruction to move beyond teacher-centred, examination-oriented practices towards learner-centred and interaction-rich pedagogies. English language teachers should regularly incorporate communicative activities such as discussions, presentations, debates, role plays, collaborative projects, and problem-based learning to create authentic opportunities for language use and meaningful interaction (Avsheniuk et al., 2024; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In multilingual classrooms, strategic use of learners' first languages may facilitate conceptual understanding, reduce communication anxiety, and promote greater participation while maintaining English as the principal language of communication (Chetveryk et al., 2026; Shin et al., 2020). Such balanced multilingual practices can strengthen both linguistic proficiency and learner confidence without diminishing exposure to English.

Institutional Implications

The successful implementation of CLT requires sustained institutional support. Universities should strengthen curriculum design by embedding communicative learning outcomes, collaborative assessment, and experiential learning opportunities across English language programs. Regular faculty development initiatives are essential to enhance teachers' expertise in communicative and multilingual pedagogies and to encourage the effective integration of digital technologies into language instruction. Institutions should also expand access to language laboratories, learning management systems, and technology-supported collaborative environments that provide students with authentic opportunities for communication beyond the traditional classroom. In addition, assessment systems should increasingly emphasize communicative performance, critical thinking, collaboration, and problem-solving rather than relying predominantly on memorization and written examinations.

Policy Implications

The findings provide empirical support for the learner-centred, multilingual, and competency-based principles articulated in NEP 2020 (Government of India, 2020). They suggest that CLT offers a practical framework for translating these policy objectives into classroom practice by simultaneously developing communication skills, critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, and intercultural competence. Curriculum developers and policymakers may therefore consider strengthening the integration of communicative and multilingual pedagogies within undergraduate English language curricula, teacher education programs, and assessment frameworks. Such initiatives would help ensure that English language education reflects India's multilingual realities while preparing graduates to communicate effectively in national and international academic and professional contexts.

Overall, the study demonstrates that the future effectiveness of English language teaching in India depends not on adopting CLT in isolation but on integrating communicative pedagogy with multilingual educational practices, institutional capacity building, and competency-based curriculum reform. Such an integrated approach has the potential to enhance communicative competence, promote inclusive learning environments, and support the broader transformation of higher education envisaged under NEP 2020.

Conclusion

This study investigated the implementation and effectiveness of CLT in multilingual English language classrooms at JECRC University and UEM, Jaipur. By examining undergraduate students' perceptions of communicative teaching practices, communicative competence, learner engagement, multilingual classroom practices, and alignment with the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020, the study provides empirical evidence regarding the continuing relevance of CLT within multilingual higher education in India.

The findings demonstrate that CLT remains an effective learner-centred approach for developing communicative competence and fostering meaningful classroom interaction. Students reported positive perceptions of communicative instructional practices, and the statistical analyses revealed significant positive relationships between CLT practices, multilingual classroom interaction, learner engagement, and communicative competence. These findings reinforce the theoretical foundations of communicative language learning proposed by Hymes (1972) and Canale and Swain (1980) while supporting contemporary perspectives that advocate context-sensitive and multilingual adaptations of communicative pedagogy (Chetveryk et al., 2026; Richards & Rodgers, 2014).

A major contribution of the study lies in demonstrating that multilingual classroom practices can complement, rather than constrain, communicative language learning. Strategic use of learners' linguistic resources was associated with improved participation, comprehension, and confidence, suggesting that multilingualism should be recognized as a pedagogical asset within English language classrooms. These findings extend recent scholarship on multilingual education by providing empirical evidence that communicative pedagogy and multilingual instructional practices can function synergistically in linguistically diverse university settings (Burner & Carlsen, 2023).

The study further demonstrates that CLT is closely aligned with the learner-centred and competency-based aspirations of NEP 2020 (Government of India, 2020). Through authentic communication, collaboration, experiential learning, and learner autonomy, CLT supports the development of the linguistic, cognitive, and interpersonal competencies increasingly required in higher education and contemporary professional environments. The findings, therefore, suggest that communicative pedagogy provides a practical framework for translating national educational reforms into effective classroom practice.

Beyond its pedagogical implications, this research contributes to the literature by integrating communicative competence, learner engagement, multilingual classroom practices, and policy alignment within a single empirical framework. Evidence from two multilingual private universities in Rajasthan addresses an important contextual gap in existing CLT research. It offers insights that may inform English language teaching in comparable multilingual higher education settings.

In conclusion, the study affirms that the long-term effectiveness of CLT in India depends not only on the adoption of learner-centred instructional strategies but also on their adaptation to multilingual classroom realities and competency-based educational reforms. By integrating communicative pedagogy with multilingual practices and the objectives of NEP 2020, higher education institutions can create more inclusive, interactive, and effective English language

learning environments that prepare graduates with the communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and intercultural competencies required for success in the twenty-first century.

Limitations

This study should be interpreted in light of several limitations. First, the research was conducted in two private universities in Rajasthan using a cross-sectional survey design; therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to public universities or other higher education contexts in India. Second, the study relied on students' self-reported perceptions, which may be influenced by response bias and do not directly measure actual classroom practices or language proficiency. Third, although the study examined key dimensions of CLT, it did not incorporate classroom observations, teacher perspectives, or qualitative data that could provide deeper insights into pedagogical implementation.

Future Research Directions

Future research should address these limitations by employing longitudinal and mixed-methods designs to examine the long-term impact of CLT on communicative competence and learner engagement. Comparative studies across public and private universities, different linguistic regions, and diverse disciplinary contexts would further strengthen the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, future investigations should explore teachers' pedagogical beliefs, classroom interaction patterns, and assessment practices to develop a more comprehensive understanding of CLT in multilingual settings. Given the rapid digital transformation of higher education, further research should also examine how artificial intelligence–supported language learning, digital collaborative platforms, and technology-enhanced multilingual pedagogies can complement CLT and support the competency-based objectives of the National Education Policy (NEP) 2020.

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