

Communicative Language Teaching: Improving EFL Students' Speaking Skills in an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School Context

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the effect of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach on English foreign language students' speaking skills at an Indonesian Islamic boarding school. This study is framed within a quasi-experimental design using a pre-test and post-test for both groups to answer the main research question. The participants were 80 students from two classes, one class was recruited to participate as the experimental group, and the other was the control group. The experimental group was taught using CLT activities such as interviewing, role-playing, discussion, games, and problem-solving, while the control group was taught using the traditional approach. The research finding indicated that the experimental group achieved higher scores than the control group. This finding implied that students who were taught using the CLT approach got better speaking achievement than those taught conventionally. Ultimately, this study offers practical suggestions for pedagogy.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, English Foreign Language Teaching, Islamic Boarding School.

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most critical skills in English is speaking (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). Furthermore, Gilakjani & Sabouri (2016) speaking has great significance in daily human interaction. People from different countries utilize English as a mediocre interaction and communication. Similarly, Zhang & Liu (2018) state that English has been a worldwide international language for a long time. Thus, speaking skill is always deemed the most important of the various English competencies (Boonkit, 2010).

English speaking ability is essential for EFL learners. Speaking may be the most valuable skills and motivating, especially to the students when expressing some things in foreign languages. This statement is in line with the statement of Berowa et al., (2018) that students felt happiness and positive self-image when they could exchange thought with other people in English. Speaking ability is a crucial communication skill since it demonstrates that the speaker has linguistic understanding and makes learning other skills easier (Tabpawan, 2020). Thus, in the learning context, speaking ability is the prioritized target in English learning since its function is the basis of communication (Parmawati, 2018).

Unluckily, English speaking has been the most significant obstacle for many students in the EFL context (Zhang & Liu, 2018). This problem can be affected by the lack of the opportunities for students in expressing themselves and to communicate to other people in English (Coskun, 2016; Terhune, 2016), the students' anxiety (Subasi, 2010), inadequate teachers' preparation and teachers' centred methods (Fareh, 2010).

There have been various ways used by educators to empower students to communicate in English, such as using the analytical team's technique (Parmawati, 2018), using podcasts (Bustari *et al.*, 2017), using cooperative storytelling (Sharma, 2018), using argumentation and debate activities (Hasibuan & Manurung, 2020; Wulandari & Ena, 2018), using suggestopedia method (Rahayu, 2018) and cross border collaboration project (Suryani *et al.*, 2020). However, those previous studies mentioned above had not discussed the use of English like in real communication. Students, particularly in the communicative language teaching approach, must be encouraged to communicate in English using natural communication (Ho, 2020; Leong & Ahmadi, 2017).

Although plenty of studies have discussed CLT, a few studies, particularly in junior high school at Indonesian Islamic Boarding School contexts, analyze the effectiveness of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach on EFL students' speaking skills. One of the few published studies is a study by Efrizal, (2012). He attempted to investigate the students' speaking achievement using CLT at one of the Islamic Boarding Schools in Bengkulu, Indonesia. However, this study was carried out a long time ago and should be reinvestigated in a similar context.

Therefore, this present study is aimed to explore further the gaps mentioned by investigating the effect of communicative language teaching in cultivating EFL students' speaking skills in the Islamic boarding school contexts. According to Larsen-Freeman (2000), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the most pertinent and direct teaching approach in developing learners' English-speaking skills. This study's significance is to give a high contribution to the students' communicative competences, particularly in the Islamic Boarding School contexts. Then the research questions of this research paper are: "Is there an effect of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on EFL students' speaking skills in an Indonesian Islamic boarding school context and is there any the difference effect of CLT and conventional approaches in improving EFL students' speaking skills in an Indonesian Islamic boarding school context?"

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Communicative Language Teaching

Multiple researchers claim that students' speaking competence will not be improved due to the continued implementation of traditional classroom activities (Bouton & Garth, 1983; Esmail *et al.*, 2015). Students, in the traditional classroom setting, have accustomed to taking notes during the teacher's lectures, only talk if they are invited to speak and rely on the teacher's direct information (Li, 1998). Thus, a change in the way of teaching is deemed as reasonable and appropriate, and there must be an improvement in teaching approach through communicative language teaching, which allows the students to explore their ideas and language competence (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999).

In the view of Richards & Rodgers (2014), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) prioritizes three important learning principles:

1. The *communicative principle*, which allows students to use real communication in classroom activities.
2. The *task principle* fosters students to use the language in meaningful tasks.
3. The *meaningfulness principle*, which ensures the language used by the learners, should be meaningful.

Similarly, CLT's well-known activities comprise brainstorming, information gap, role plays, think-pair-share, interviews, problem-solving tasks, dialogue, group discussion, jigsaws, games, speech, competitions, and so forth (Brown, 2000; Larsen-Freeman, 2000; Richards, 2005). Thus, language learners will learn in better results by using all their senses to touch, hear, smell, see, move, examine, or test things. The students should have these opportunities during learning in the communicative language classroom (Colker 2007 in Toro et al., 2019).

Futhermore, Brown & Principles (2001) offers six interrelated natural characteristics of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), as shown in figure 1.

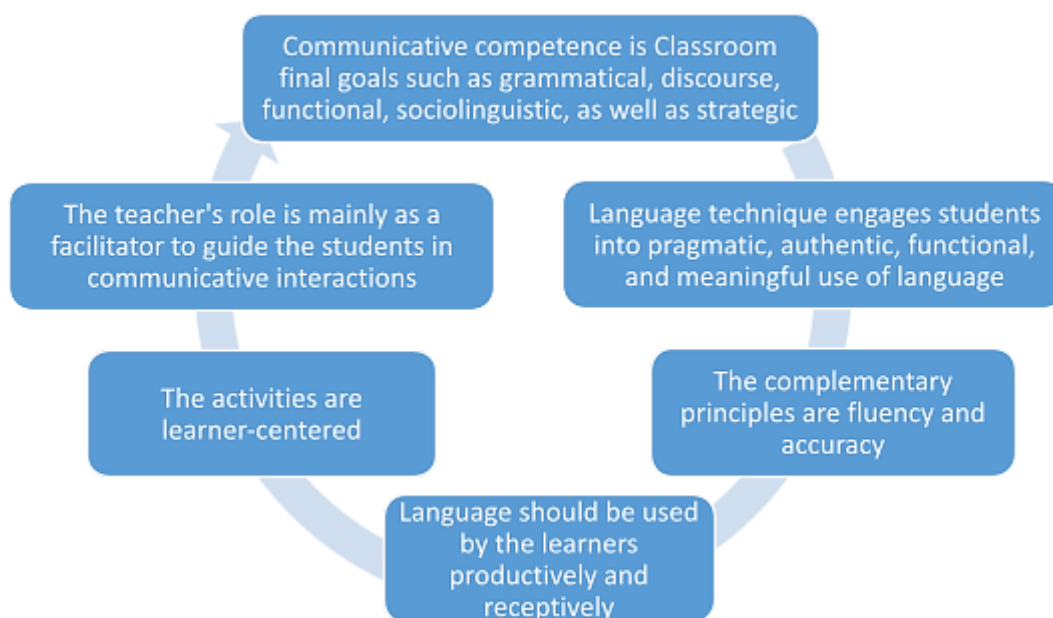


Figure 1. Brown's interrelated natural characteristics of CLT (2001).

Communicative language teaching promotes effective proficiency in a certain language for the knowledge of language and the strategies of the language (Bachman & Palmer, 1996). The knowledge of language consists of organizational knowledge (grammatical and textual knowledge) and pragmatic knowledge (functional and sociolinguistic knowledge), while language strategies include recognizing and repairing miscommunication. Figure 2 is the illustration of Bachman & Palmer's model, (1996) adopted from (Srikaew et al., 2015).

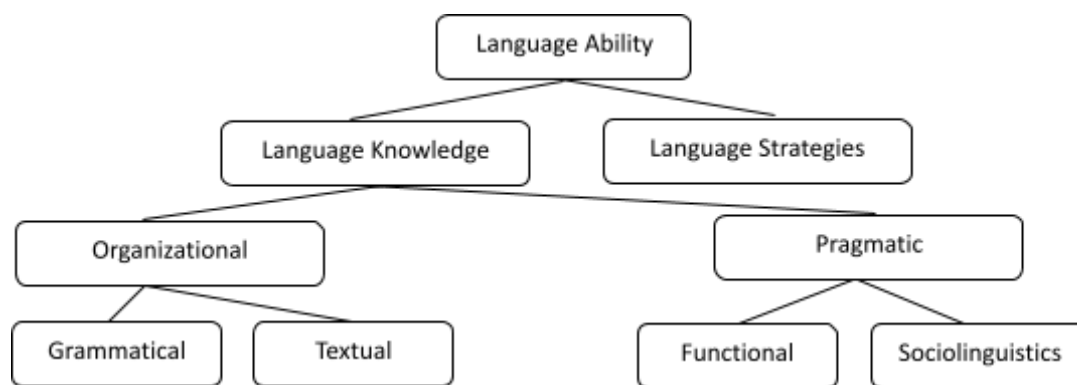


Figure 2. Bachman & Palmer's language proficiency model (1996).

2.2 Islamic Boarding School

Islamic boarding school, also called *Pesantren*, is an Indonesian indigenous educational institution that generally obliges the students to stay at dorms provided by the schools and oblige them to speak foreign languages such as English and Arabic with consequences. Indonesian Islamic boarding schools are acknowledged as educational institutions in which the students are staying in the dormitory (lodge) to study Islamic religion and general sciences, including foreign languages, and apply them in their lives with proper morality (Departemen Agama, 2005 in Efrizal, 2012). However, in many places, Indonesian and Arabic are still the dominant language used. Besides, Haedari et al., (2004) concede that in Islamic boarding schools, students coming from different regions and similar religion will stay at small houses or dormitories to study holy book Al-Qur'an as well as Islamic teachings.

2.3 Previous Studies

Several studies have been conducted throughout time and place to improve the students' speaking skills, which become the current issues nowadays.

Owen & Razali (2018) performed a study to find out whether the implementation of communicative language activities, particularly information gap and language games, affects Malaysian secondary school learners' oral ability. Various information gaps and classroom language game activities based on CLT concepts were applied for about 15-20 minutes. They found that students' speaking competence highly improved after the implementation of classroom communicative language activities.

AL-Garni & Almuhammadi, (2019) discussed CLT activities on English foreign language students' speaking skills at the University of Jeddah. Their research finding shows that CLT practices' implementation has positive implications for improving students' speaking competencies. Thus they suggest the teachers apply the CLT method in teaching speaking at the university level continuously.

Toro et al., (2019) discuss using the approach of communicative language teaching (CLT) to improve students' oral competence at a public elementary school in the southern part of Ecuador. They reported that teachers' strategies such as modelling, repetition, pair and group work were not sufficient to develop students' communicative competence, then it is necessary to incorporate more communicative approaches to enhance their active participation in English oral learning activities.

Ho (2020) investigated the application of CLT on undergraduate students' communicative competence in an English Tourism classroom in a Taiwan college. He found that students' progress in English communicative competences was significant in both paper-based tests and oral-based tests.

In the Indonesian context, several studies have been carried out. For example, Saputra (2015) attempted to investigate the changes in college students' speaking skills by implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The researcher used a classroom action research method with Kemmis and Taggart Model and four cycles. He found that CLT had a meaningful positive effect of improving students' speaking skills.

Next, Mulyanah et al. (2018) examined CLT's effect on students' speaking skills. Their research sample was secondary school students in Tangerang, Indonesia. Their research findings show that CLT can improve learner's speaking skills.

Also, Efrizal, (2012) carried out a study to find out the students' speaking improvement by applying the CLT method at Mts Ja-alhaq, Sentot Ali Basa Islamic Boarding School of Bengkulu, Indonesia. He found that using the CLT method can improve students' speaking achievement.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

The current research is conducted in quasi-experimental design, and the data were collected by using pre-test and post-test. There were two groups of students, namely the control class and the experimental class. The intervention to the experimental group was carried out for three weeks after the pre-test. Finally, after the intervention, both groups were given pre and post-tests to investigate whether there was a significant improvement in students' speaking skills.

3.1 Participant

The current study is specific to the first-grade students at the junior high school of Islamic Boarding School in Tanjung Morawa. The participants consisted of 80 students from two parallel classes, and their ages ranged from 12 to 13 years old. The participants were chosen using a convenience sample method since those who were chosen had availability at the time of the experiment and expressed a willingness to participate in the current investigation. Aside from that, they have rudimentary English knowledge and the capacity to communicate in English.

3.2 Procedures

The authenticity of this study was ensured by adhering to the following procedures. In the beginning, the researchers notified the headmaster of the school about the study, and this study was approved through an approval letter three days later. Then, those students were told that their involvement in the study was purely voluntary, and they were allowed to draw if they wanted any time. Furthermore, the researchers told the participants that their pre and pro-tests' grades would not affect their English subjects' academic scores. Next, the researchers required students to do the speaking tests (a dialogue and an oral speech) seriously in front of the class, and their speaking performances were analyzed by two independent raters to produce reliability scores. Students' speaking achievements were assessed using SOLOM (Student Oral Language Observation Matrix), which comprises the speaking competence aspects; comprehension, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar dan fluency on the five-point scale of each. Previously, the students were told that their speaking performance would be recorded and agreed on that. Finally, students were informed that their identities were confidential and used only for the study purpose.

3.3 The Intervention

The experimental group was taught by the researchers for about two hours in every speaking meeting for three weeks. The activities such as interviewing, role-playing, discussion and problem-solving, and games were used in the teaching-learning activities adapted from (Brown, 2000; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). However, the traditional way (teacher-centred) was applied by the English teacher in the control group.

3.4 Technique of Analysis

In order to answer the study question, descriptive statistics such as the mean and standard deviation were used to demonstrate the difference between the pre- and post-test scores for the experimental and control groups, as well as the difference between the two groups. Afterwards, a normality test was carried out to determine whether or not the data had distributed normally. If the data were not normally distributed, the non-parametric statistic test (Wilcoxon test) would be used to assess the data instead of the paired sample t-test.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In answering the research question, the highest score, the lowest score, standard deviation, and mean analysis are presented to show the difference between pre-test and post-test scores in the control and experimental classes. The findings of the study are presented in the following table.

Table 1 The Students' Speaking Scores in the Experimental and Control Classes

N		Minimum	Maximum	Sum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)	40	53	80	2527	63.18	7.118
Post-Test Experiment (CLT)	40	80	96	3425	85.62	4.378
Pre-Test Control (Conventional)	40	53	83	2531	63.28	6.998
Post-Test Control (Conventional)	40	60	86	2828	70.70	6.962
Valid N (listwise)	40					

Based on the output of descriptive statistics above, the mean score of pre-test in the experimental class was 63,18 and post-test was 85,62. Conversely, the mean score of pre-test in the control class was 63,28, and post-test was 70,70. Before calculating the independent t-test, the test of normality was done. The distribution result the normality test can be seen as follows.

Table 2 The Distribution of Normality Test

Group		Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
		Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Students' Speaking Performance	Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)	.172	40	.004	.932	40	.019
	Post-Test Experiment (CLT)	.176	40	.003	.912	40	.004
	Pre-Test Control (Conventional)	.205	40	.000	.905	40	.003
	Post-Test Control (Conventional)	.240	40	.000	.914	40	.005

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Based on the output of the Shapiro-Wilk test in table 2, it can be seen that both classes had a significant value (sig.) < 0,05. This means that the research data was not distributed normally. Then, the non-parametric statistic test (Wilcoxon test) was used to analyze the data as an alternative of paired sample t-test. The result of the calculation can be seen as follows.

Table 3 Descriptive Statistics of Experimental and Control Class Scores for Pre-Test and Post-Test

		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Post-Test Experiment (CLT) - Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)	Negative Ranks	0 ^a	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	40 ^b	20.50	820.00
	Ties	0 ^c		
	Total	40		
Post-Test Control (Conventional) - Pre-Test Control (Conventional)	Negative Ranks	0 ^d	.00	.00
	Positive Ranks	37 ^e	19.00	703.00
	Ties	3 ^f		
	Total	40		

- a. Post-Test Experiment (CLT) < Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)
- b. Post-Test Experiment (CLT) > Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)
- c. Post-Test Experiment (CLT) = Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)
- d. Post-Test Control (Conventional) < Pre-Test Control (Conventional)
- e. Post-Test Control (Conventional) > Pre-Test Control (Conventional)
- f. Post-Test Control (Conventional) = Pre-Test Control (Conventional)

From the data, the post-test in the experimental class was higher than the pre-test with the different mean score of 20,50. This means that the Ha was accepted. The result of the Wilcoxon test of pre-test and post-test calculation in both classes is presented in table 4 to justify the conclusion. Table 4 shows the Asymp.Sig. (2-tailed) in the experimental class was 0,000. Because of the Asymp.Sig.< 0,05, then the hypothesis is accepted. This means there is an effect of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on EFL students' speaking competence in Islamic boarding school context. Furthermore, there are 40 students experienced increasing scores from the pre-test to post-test in the experimental class, while there are 37 students increased their scores in the control class. This means that there are more students experienced increasing scores in the experimental class than in the control class.

Table 4 The Result of Wilcoson Test^a

	Post-Test Experiment (CLT) - Pre-Test Experiment (CLT)	Post-Test Control (Conventional) - Pre-Test Control (Conventional)
Z	-5.531 ^b	-5.359 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000

a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test

b. Based on negative ranks.

In order to find the answer of the research question about the difference effect of CLT and conventional method in improving students' speaking skills, the Mann Whitney U test is used to analyze the data in the non-parametric statistic (Pallant, 2011). The statistic description and the result can be seen as follows.

Table 5 The Description of Group Statistics

	Class	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Students' Speaking Performance	Experiment Class (CLT)	40	58.73	2349.00
	Control Class (Conventional)	40	22.28	891.00
	Total	80		

Table 6 The Result of Mann-Whitney U Test^a

Students' Speaking Performance	
Mann-Whitney U	71.000
Wilcoxon W	891.000
Z	-7.086
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

a. Grouping Variable: Group

Based on the output of data statistics in tables 5 and 6, the average score in the experimental class was higher (58,73) than the control group (22,28). In addition, Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed) was 0,000, which is less than $< 0,05$. Then this can be concluded that H_a was accepted and H_o was rejected. Therefore, there is a significant different result between CLT methods and conventional method, which means that Communicative Language Teaching approach significantly improved EFL students' speaking skills rather than using conventional teaching approach in an Indonesian Islamic boarding school context.

5. DISCUSSION

The current study's finding shows that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) significantly affects the students' English speaking skills. This finding is in line with the research conducted by AL-Garni & Almuhammadi (2019) and Ho (2020), which found that CLT practices improved students' English speaking competence. Likewise, the research of Efrizal (2012) concluded students' speaking achievements at Mts. Ja-alhaq, Islamic Boarding School of Bengkulu can be improved by applying the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method. Therefore, all

previous researchers suggested teachers and lecturers alike to implement CLT to teach speaking in the classroom.

The significant improvement in students' speaking skills can be achieved by implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). This is probably because the students were exposed to authentic interactional communications such as giving someone directions, asking someone's opinion, helping people in need, finding solutions for someone's problem, entertaining others, and all forms of communication that concentrate on language use. Learning in class speaking should provide rehearsal opportunities to speak and discuss topics found in real-life situations (Harmer, 2007). Since the classroom is the students' community, students in CLT activities learn through sharing and collaboration. Useful classroom tasks encourage the students to negotiate the language meaning, expand their English lexical resources, to comprehend the language use, as well as take part in meaningful interactions (Richards, 2005).

Furthermore, in the CLT approach, students are pushed through various communicative classroom activities such as interviewing, role-playing, games, discussion, and problem-solving. Learners seem to enjoy classroom activities because they can maximally participate in various forms of communicative interactional activities and practice their oral English skills fully. Students' learning should be facilitated through a variety of sorts of contact in the classroom (Hoque et al., 2021). In addition, Hwang et al., (2016) reported that more interesting, meaningful, and interactive learning activities should always be initiated to improve EFL students' speaking skills.

Last but not least, students were given more opportunities to express their English without afraid of making mistakes in the first place. Numerous researchers emphasized that EFL students need more chances to practise English in their classroom (see Farooq, 2013; Ghahremani-Ghajar & Mirhosseini, 2005; Riasati, 2012). Furthermore, Harmer, (2001) states that CLT focuses on learners' oral skills without focusing on grammar during the learning process, distinguished from the non-CLT approach. This presumably could also motivate students to speak even they do not have ample understanding of grammar and vocabulary. Although this opinion is not part of the current study finding, Efrizal (2012) and Saputra (2015) reveal CLT motivates students to speak English and minimizes their speaking problems such as low motivation, lack of lexical resources, feeling shy, or getting rigid to speak English.

6. CONCLUSION

This research concluded that the alternative hypothesis (H_a) was accepted, and the null hypothesis (H_o) was rejected. This suggests that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) significantly affects students' speaking skills at an Indonesian Islamic Boarding School. Even though this study has been successfully conducted, the current study acknowledges some limitations for the next consideration. Firstly, the finding of this study is not sufficient to generalize the effect of CLT to all Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools since the population of this study was only limited to one Indonesian Islamic Boarding School with a small size of participants involved; therefore, it is necessary to incorporate more Indonesian Islamic Boarding Schools from different regions for the next study. Secondly, the intervention duration in the control group was too short of achieving the maximal scores for all students. Therefore, the next researcher is expected to extend the intervention duration to more than one and half hours for a whole semester to get a better result of the study. It's suggested that teachers implement the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach to teach speaking skills to their students in their classrooms. Furthermore, teachers should be provided with more pieces of training to increase their understanding of CLT so that they can implement the approach successfully in their teaching activities.

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