

# Communicative Language Teaching (CLT): A Strategy to Enhance Students' Speaking Skills and Motivation

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### Abstract

Speaking is one of the foundational components of language proficiency, requiring learners to produce language spontaneously with fluency and accuracy, while motivation plays a key role in sustaining learners' engagement and willingness to communicate. In English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms, both speaking ability and motivation remain common challenges. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes interaction and authentic language use, can help students to develop both aspects by involving learners in real-life communicative tasks such as role plays. This study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of CLT in improving the speaking skills and learning motivation of seventh graders at SMPN 3 Kota Madiun. To provide a comparative measure, the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM), a traditional, drill-based method, was used with a control group. Employing a quasi-experimental design, students were divided into experimental and control groups. Data were gathered through speaking performance tests and motivation questionnaires, and then were analyzed using SPSS 25 with the Mann-Whitney U test, Independent Sample t-test, and N-Gain. The results demonstrated that CLT significantly enhanced both students' speaking abilities ( $U = 259.000$ ;  $p = 0.002$ ) and motivation ( $p = 0.000$ ) compared to ALM, with a moderate N-Gain effectiveness (56–75%) for the CLT group and minimal improvement (<40%) in the ALM group. These findings confirm CLT as a more effective and engaging instructional method in EFL classrooms.

**Keywords:** CLT; speaking skills; students' motivation.

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### Abstrak

Berbicara merupakan salah satu komponen dasar dari kemahiran berbahasa, yang mengharuskan pembelajar untuk menghasilkan bahasa secara spontan dengan kefasihan dan akurasi, sementara motivasi memainkan peran kunci dalam mempertahankan keterlibatan dan kemauan pembelajar untuk berkomunikasi. Di kelas Bahasa Inggris sebagai Bahasa Asing (EFL), kemampuan berbicara dan motivasi tetap menjadi tantangan umum. Pengajaran Bahasa Komunikatif (CLT), yang menekankan interaksi dan penggunaan bahasa yang autentik, dapat membantu siswa untuk mengembangkan kedua aspek tersebut dengan melibatkan pembelajar dalam tugas-tugas komunikatif kehidupan nyata seperti permainan peran. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui efektivitas CLT dalam meningkatkan keterampilan berbicara dan motivasi belajar siswa kelas tujuh di SMPN 3 Kota Madiun. Untuk memberikan ukuran komparatif, Metode Audio-Lingual (ALM), metode tradisional berbasis latihan, digunakan dengan kelompok kontrol. Dengan menggunakan desain kuasi-eksperimental, siswa dibagi menjadi kelompok eksperimen (CLT) dan kontrol (ALM). Data dikumpulkan melalui tes kinerja berbicara dan kuesioner motivasi, dianalisis menggunakan SPSS 25 dengan uji Mann-Whitney U, uji t Sampel Independen, dan N-Gain. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa CLT secara signifikan meningkatkan kemampuan berbicara siswa ( $U = 259.000$ ;  $p = 0,002$ ) dan motivasi ( $p = 0,000$ ) dibandingkan dengan ALM, dengan efektivitas N-Gain sedang (56–75%) untuk kelompok CLT dan peningkatan minimal (<40%) pada kelompok ALM. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa CLT merupakan metode pengajaran yang lebih efektif dan menarik di kelas EFL.

**Kata Kunci:** CLT, kemampuan berbicara, motivasi siswa

## I. INTRODUCTION

Speaking is widely acknowledged as one of the most vital and challenging language skills to master, especially in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts like Indonesia. It involves the real-time production of language and requires learners to organize their thoughts and deliver them fluently, accurately, and appropriately based on the context and purpose of communication [1, p. 271]. Speaking proficiency not only demands mastery of vocabulary and grammar, but also the psychological readiness to express oneself, which is often hindered by fear, anxiety, and lack of confidence. In classroom settings, particularly among junior high school students, it is common to find learners who hesitate to speak due to low proficiency or the fear of making mistakes, which results in limited oral participation and minimal communicative interaction.

Another crucial factor that heavily influences learners' speaking ability is motivation. Motivation determines how much effort learners are willing to invest in the language learning process, how persistent they are in facing challenges, and how willing they are to engage in spontaneous communication. According to Dörnyei, motivation in

language learning is influenced by the learner's desire, effort, and attitudes toward the language and its use [2, p. 63]. When students are highly motivated, they are more likely to take risks, participate actively, and persist in learning, even when the tasks are demanding. Gardner further emphasizes that learners who believe in the value of the language and its relevance to their lives are more engaged and confident in using it [3, p. 22]. However, motivation alone is insufficient; the learning environment and the teaching method applied must foster a sense of purpose, autonomy, and engagement.

In this regard, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has emerged as a widely recommended instructional method. CLT shifts the focus of language instruction from the mere learning of grammatical structures to the development of communicative competence, that is, the ability to use the language effectively and appropriately in real-life contexts [4, p. 25]. According to Nunan, CLT provides learners with a platform to develop both linguistic and pragmatic competence through authentic language use and interactive activities [5, p. 24].

The key characteristics of CLT include a focus on real-life communication tasks, prioritization of fluency over accuracy, integration of the four skills (speaking, listening, reading, writing), learner-centered activities, and the use of authentic materials [5, p. 118]. In a CLT classroom, teachers act as facilitators rather than as the sole source of knowledge. Students engage in role plays, jigsaw activities, problem-solving tasks, simulations, and group discussions that simulate actual communicative situations [5, p. 279]. These activities foster not only the ability to express oneself in English but also enhance critical thinking, collaboration, and social interaction.

CLT also aligns with constructivist principles, where students actively construct knowledge through interaction and experience rather than passive reception [6, p. 12]. CLT has been found to be especially effective in improving students' speaking skills and motivation. It creates a learning environment that reduces the fear of making mistakes and encourages students to focus on conveying meaning rather than speaking perfectly. Richards argues that this learner-centered approach increases student involvement and provides them with greater opportunities for communicative practice, which in turn enhances fluency and builds speaking confidence [7, p. 2]. From a motivational perspective, CLT supports self-determination theory, which highlights the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness in sustaining intrinsic motivation. By allowing students to make choices, collaborate with peers, and engage in relevant communicative tasks, CLT meets these psychological needs, resulting in more motivated and engaged learners.

Furthermore, Harmer identifies several advantages of CLT, including its relevance to real-life communication, its ability to increase learner motivation, its support for the development of social and interactive skills, and its positive influence on classroom dynamics [8, pp. 69–72], [9, p. 10]. Students who feel that what they are learning can be applied outside of the classroom are more likely to value the process and engage fully in it. The emphasis on interaction also leads to a more enjoyable and less stressful learning environment, where students are free to take linguistic risks without fear of being judged.

Despite its strengths, CLT is not without limitations. Critics argue that it may overlook grammatical accuracy and present challenges in classroom management, particularly in large or mixed-proficiency classes [8, p. 72]. Additionally, learners with low basic proficiency may struggle to participate meaningfully in communicative tasks. However, such limitations can be addressed through appropriate scaffolding, blending with structure-based techniques when needed, and careful task design that considers learners' levels.

In this study, CLT is examined in comparison with the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). ALM, grounded in behaviorist theory, emphasizes repetition, memorization, and pattern drills. It promotes accuracy and pronunciation through habit formation and teacher led instruction [4, p. 66]. While ALM can be effective for establishing grammatical structures and reinforcing basic sentence patterns, it lacks the interactive and communicative components that are essential for developing speaking fluency and motivation in modern EFL classrooms [10, p. 45]. Nevertheless, ALM remains relevant in research as a comparative model due to its continued use in many Indonesian schools [11, p. 25].

This study investigates the effectiveness of CLT in improving both speaking skills and learning motivation among seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Kota Madiun. The use of ALM in the control group provides a meaningful basis for comparison in understanding how a communicative approach differs from a behaviorist one in terms of language learning outcomes. Using a quasi-experimental design, this research utilizes speaking performance tests and motivation questionnaires to measure changes in both skill and attitude. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing literature on communicative methods and provide practical implications for teachers aiming to enhance students' communicative competence and motivation in EFL settings.

## II. METHOD

This study employed a quantitative research approach with a quasi-experimental design involving two classes: one experimental group taught using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and one control group taught using the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). The purpose of this design was to determine whether the CLT method significantly influenced students' speaking skills and motivation compared to the traditional ALM method. This

approach aligns with Creswell's view that quasi-experiments are suitable for evaluating interventions when random assignment is not possible [12, p. 223].

The population in this study consisted of all seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Kota Madiun, totaling 182 students distributed across six classes (VII A to VII F). The sample was selected using purposive sampling, focusing on two intact classes that had comparable academic levels and were available for treatment. Class VII A (31 students) was assigned as the experimental group, while class VII F (31 students) served as the control group. According to Creswell, purposive sampling is acceptable in quasi-experimental research where the selection is based on characteristics relevant to the research objectives [12, p. 222]. This sampling technique was chosen to ensure that the participants possessed similar baseline abilities and learning backgrounds, allowing for a more reliable comparison of treatment outcomes.

Table 1. The Purposive Sample Classification

No	Class	The Number of Students	Classification		
			Class Characteristics	Sample Relevance	Efficiency
1	VII A	31	✓	✓	✓
2	VII B	31	-	✓	-
3	VII C	29	✓	-	-
4	VII D	30	✓	-	✓
5	VII E	30	-	-	-
6	VII F	31	✓	✓	✓

Data were collected using two primary instruments: a speaking performance test and a motivation questionnaire. The speaking test was developed to assess students' ability in accuracy, pronunciation, vocabulary, and fluency, and was administered before and after the treatment. To ensure objectivity, students' speaking performances were rated independently by two raters. The inter-rater reliability was calculated using the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC) in IBM SPSS 25, which showed a high level of consistency across both raters in pre-test and post-test assessments [13, p. 159], [14, p. 4]. The motivation questionnaire consisted of 10 items designed to measure intrinsic and extrinsic motivation using a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from "strongly disagree" (1) to "strongly agree" (5). This format is widely used in educational motivation studies for its simplicity and clarity [15, p. 27]. The validity of the questionnaire was established through content validation by expert judgment and construct validity using Pearson's correlation analysis. Items with an r-count value higher than the r-table were considered valid [16, p. 211]. In this research, all items in the experimental class and eight in the control class met the criteria. The questionnaire also showed high reliability, as measured using Cronbach's Alpha, with a value of 0.886 for the experimental class and 0.770 for the control class, indicating strong internal consistency [17].

The collected data were analyzed using IBM SPSS 25. A normality test using the Shapiro-Wilk method was conducted to determine whether the data followed a normal distribution. The results showed that not all post-test scores were normally distributed, particularly in the control group. Therefore, the speaking test data were analyzed using the Mann-Whitney U test, a non-parametric alternative to the t-test [18]. Meanwhile, the motivational data which were normally distributed were analyzed using the Independent Samples t-test to compare the mean motivation scores between the two groups. Additionally, N-Gain analysis was used to measure the effectiveness of the treatment by calculating the relative improvement in students' scores from pre-test to post-test. According to Meltzer, N-Gain is useful for determining the practical significance of interventions in educational research [19, p. 1259].

### III. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

#### a. The Effect of CLT on Students' Speaking Skills

The researchers implemented Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the experimental class. In contrast, the control group used the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM) in the teaching and learning process. Before implementing the treatment, a pre-test was conducted. Then, after the treatment, a post-test was conducted. The following is the result of the tests.

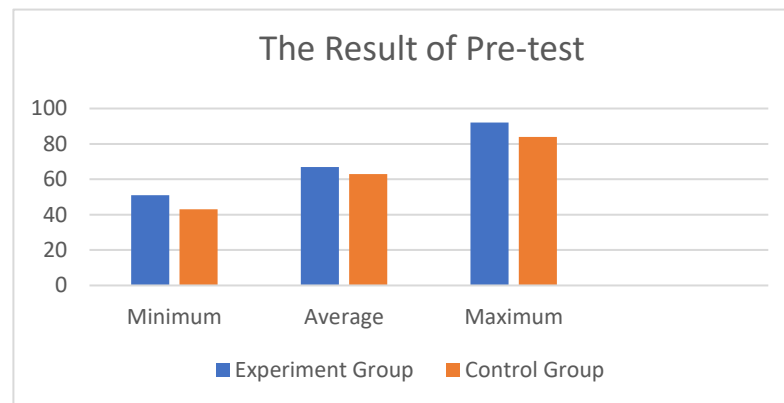


Figure 1. Comparison of Score Pre-Test

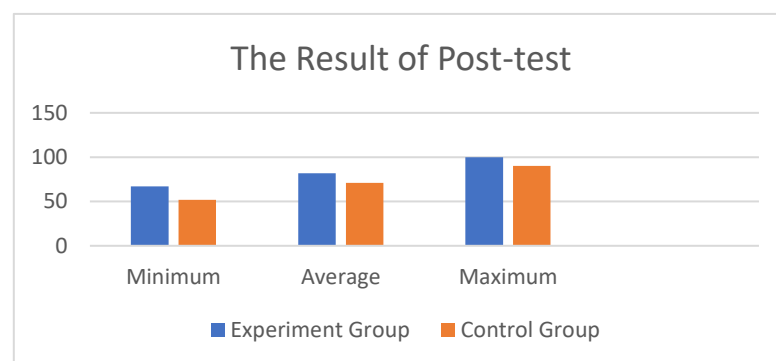


Figure 2. Comparison of Score Post-Test

Based on the two bar charts titled "Comparison of Score Pre-Test" and "Comparison of Score Post-Test", it can be explained that there is a significant difference in learning outcomes between the experimental and control classes. In the pre-test chart (Figure 1), the experimental class had a minimum score of 50, an average score of 66, and a maximum score of 89. Meanwhile, the control class had a minimum score of 43, an average score of 60, and a maximum score of 84. These results indicate that before the treatment, the experimental and control classes had relatively similar speaking skill levels, although the experimental class performed slightly better overall.

However, in the post-test chart (Figure 2), the improvement in the experimental class becomes more apparent. The minimum score increased to 67, the average rose to 88, and the maximum score reached 100. In contrast, the control class showed only a slight improvement, with a minimum score of 50, an average score of 73, and a maximum score of 90. These results demonstrate that the experimental class, which was taught using the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, experienced a more significant improvement in speaking skills compared to the control class.

Table 2. Value of Ranks Pre-Test and Post-Test scores

Ranks				
	Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Mean_PreTest	VII A Experimental	31	33.89	1050.50
	VII F Control	31	29.11	902.50
	Total	62		
Mean_PostTest	VII A Experimental	31	38.65	1198.00
	VII F Control	31	24.35	755.00
	Total	62		

Table 3. Mann Whitney U-test Pre-Test and Post-Test scores

Test Statistics <sup>a</sup>		
	Mean_PreTest	Mean_PostTest
Mann-Whitney U	406.500	259.000
Wilcoxon W	902.500	755.000
Z	-1.042	-3.119
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.297	.002
a. Grouping Variable: Group		

Based on the results of the pre-test and post-test, students in class VII A who were taught using CLT showed substantial progress in their speaking performance. The post-test scores increased both in terms of fluency and accuracy, supported by the role-play and interactive techniques embedded in the CLT method. As reported in the Mann Whitney U Test analysis, the post-test results revealed a U value of 259.000 and a significance (Asymp. Sig. 2-tailed) of 0.002, which is well below the threshold of 0.05, indicating a statistically significant difference between the experimental and control groups after the intervention. Furthermore, the mean rank of the experimental group rose from 33.89 to 38.65, while the control group's rank fell, emphasizing the practical benefit of CLT in the development of communicative competence. These results align with the theory that CLT fosters real-life interaction, enabling students to build fluency, confidence, and contextual awareness [5, p. 279].

Table 4. N-Gain Score of Experimental Class

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
N_Gain_Expe	31	.5922
Valid N (listwise)	31	

Table 5. N-Gain Score of Control Class

Descriptive Statistics		
	N	Mean
N_Gain_Control	31	.3746
Valid N (listwise)	31	

Supporting this, the N-Gain analysis showed an increase of 0.5922 (59.22%) in the experimental class, which falls into the "moderately effective" category, in contrast to only 0.3746 (37.46%) in the control class, which is categorized as "less effective". These quantitative improvements were reinforced by qualitative classroom observations, where students in the CLT class appeared more willing to speak, more active in peer interaction, and demonstrated better pronunciation and vocabulary control. The findings confirm that CLT, with its focus on interactive and student-centered learning, is not only pedagogically sound but also highly applicable in EFL junior high school contexts.

#### b. The Effect of CLT on Students' Motivation

In addition to improving speaking skills, CLT also had a significant impact on students' motivation to learn English. The motivation questionnaire, administered to both experimental and control groups after the treatment, demonstrated clear differences in the students' motivational levels. The descriptive statistics showed that the mean motivation score in the experimental class was 30.58, compared to 20.39 in the control class. This indicates that students who were taught using CLT felt more engaged, confident, and encouraged to participate in English learning.

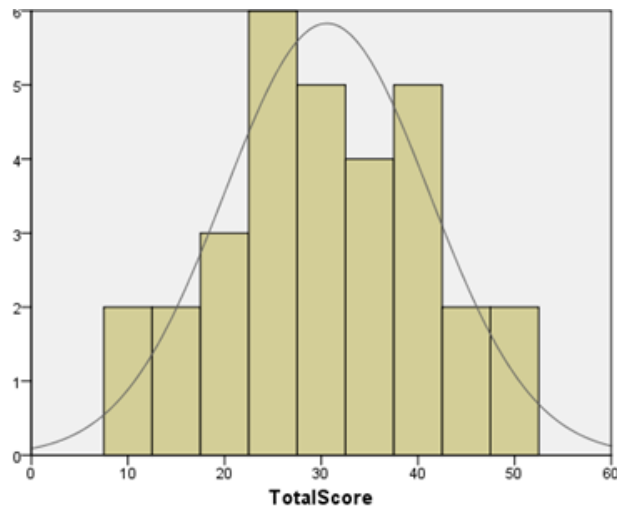


Figure 3. Histogram of Student Motivation Questionnaire Experiment

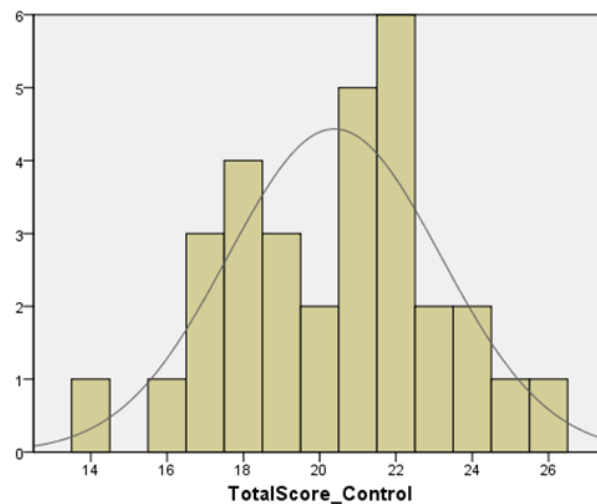


Figure 4. Histogram of Student Motivation Questionnaire Control

The histograms in Figures 3 and 4 illustrate the distribution of total motivation scores for students in the experimental and the control groups, respectively. In Figure 3, after the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method, the experimental class shows an approximately normal distribution with a slight asymmetry, where most students scored between 20 and 40, peaking around 30 to 35. This aligns with the mean motivation score of 30.58 and a standard deviation of 10.604, indicating a wide dispersion and suggesting individual differences in motivation levels. In contrast, Figure 4, which represents the control with Audio Lingual Method (ALM), displays a narrower score distribution concentrated between 18 and 26, with the highest frequency between 20 and 22. The mean score for this group was lower at 20.39, and the standard deviation was smaller at 2.789, reflecting more uniform motivation levels. Comparing both histograms, the experimental class demonstrated higher and more varied motivation scores, implying that the CLT increased students' motivation but with differing levels of effectiveness across individuals, whereas the control group showed consistently lower motivation.

Table 6. Group Statistics of Student Motivation Questionnaire

Group Statistics					
	TypeStudentsClass	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
TotalScore_Moti vation_Experime ntal_Control	Experimental	31	30.58	10.604	1.905
	Control	31	20.39	2.789	.501

Table 7. Independent Sample t-Test of Student Motivation Questionnaire

		Independent Samples Test								
		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
TotalScore_ Motivation_E xperimental_ Control	Equal variances assumed	31.249	.000	5.176	60	.000	10.194	1.969	6.254	14.133
	Equal variances not assumed			5.176	34.131	.000	10.194	1.969	6.192	14.195

The Independent Sample t-Test results confirmed the significance of this difference, with a t value of 5.176 and a Sig. (2-tailed) of 0.000, confirming that CLT had a statistically significant effect on student motivation. Additionally, the high standard deviation (10.604) in the experimental group suggests a wide range of motivational responses, with many students showing extremely high motivation, likely influenced by the interactive, contextual, and personalized activities inherent in CLT. This supports the argument made by Dörnyei that motivation in language learning is shaped by meaningful engagement, autonomy, and the perceived relevance of the tasks [2]. The results are also in line with the L2 Motivational Self System theory, where learners' ideal selves are activated when they see themselves successfully using the language in realistic settings [15]. Through role-plays, CLT created such conditions, leading to higher levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. In contrast, students in the control group taught using ALM, a method dominated by repetition and pattern drills, reported lower motivation and less enthusiasm, as evidenced by their limited participation and narrower motivation score range. These results reinforce the view that CLT not only promotes linguistic competence but also creates a psychologically supportive and motivating learning environment.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

Based on the results of this study demonstrate that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is effective in improving the speaking skills of seventh-grade students at SMPN 3 Kota Madiun. Students who were taught using CLT showed a significant improvement in their speaking performance compared to those taught using the Audio-Lingual Method (ALM). This is evident from the increase in their post-test scores, the higher mean rank in the experimental group, and the effectiveness level based on N-Gain analysis. In classroom observations, students in the CLT group appeared more confident, more willing to speak, and more actively involved in learning activities. These improvements are attributed to the nature of CLT, which emphasizes communication, interaction, and student participation. The findings confirm that speaking skills can be significantly enhanced when learners are given opportunities to practice language meaningfully and engage in activities that reflect real-life communication.

In addition to improving speaking performance, CLT also had a strong positive impact on students' learning motivation. The motivation scores of students in the experimental group increased significantly after the treatment. Students responded well to the CLT approach, which provided a dynamic, enjoyable, and supportive learning environment. Activities such as role-plays allowed students to express themselves freely and collaborate with peers, leading to greater interest and enthusiasm in learning English. In contrast, students taught using ALM showed lower motivation and more limited engagement. Based on these findings, it is recommended that English teachers apply CLT more frequently in the classroom, especially when aiming to improve both students' speaking skills and their motivation to learn. Further research may explore the application of CLT in other language skills and across different levels of education to confirm its broader effectiveness.



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