Using Communicative Language Teaching Method in Teaching English to Senior High School Students in Karo Regency

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ABSTRACT

One persistent challenge in English language teaching (ELT) at senior high schools in Karo Regency, Indonesia, is teachers' limited access to and familiarity with communicative teaching methods. Professional training that equips teachers with communicative approaches therefore represents a promising strategy to address this issue. This study aims to examine the advantages of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English instruction at the senior high school level in Karo Regency. Employing a descriptive research design, the study involved English teachers who had previously received training in the CLT method. The data were collected through classroom observations and semi-structured interviews and were analyzed descriptively. The findings indicate five major advantages of CLT implementation: (1) fostering more active classroom interaction, (2) reducing students' boredom, (3) minimizing students' shyness in speaking English, (4) creating a more enjoyable and engaging learning atmosphere, and (5) improving students' speaking fluency. These results demonstrate that the use of CLT effectively supports teachers in achieving the primary objective of ELT, namely the development of students' communicative competence. The study underscores the importance of continuous teacher training in communicative methodologies to enhance the quality of English language instruction in regional educational contexts.

Keyword: Communicative Language Teaching, English Communicative Competence, ELT at Senior High Schools, ELT Method, Quality Education

1. Introduction

English is a foreign language taught as a compulsory subject in all senior high schools in Indonesia, including those in Karo Regency, North Sumatra Province. The primary objective of English instruction at the senior high school level is to develop students' communicative competence through engagement with a variety of multimodal texts (Kharimah et al., 2023; Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2023). However, this predetermined instructional objective has not been fully achieved and has given rise to several challenges faced by English teachers in senior high schools in Karo Regency.

The first challenge relates to the teaching methods commonly employed in English classrooms. Many teachers continue to rely on conventional, teacher-centered approaches that primarily emphasize the mastery of grammatical rules and vocabulary items. In such approaches, learning activities are often dominated by explanation, drilling, and written exercises, while students are given limited opportunities to actively use

English for meaningful communication. As a result, students tend to develop passive knowledge of the language rather than practical communicative skills. Although they may be familiar with grammatical forms and isolated vocabulary items, they often struggle to express ideas fluently and appropriately in real communicative situations. Consequently, students' overall communicative competence in English remains underdeveloped.

The second challenge concerns teachers' limited access to current and innovative approaches to English language teaching. A considerable number of teachers have few opportunities to participate in professional development programs, workshops, or training sessions that focus on effective and contemporary English teaching methodologies. This limited exposure restricts teachers' awareness of recent pedagogical developments, such as learner-centered instruction, task-based learning, and communicative approaches. As a result, many teachers continue to use traditional methods that they are already familiar with, despite their limited effectiveness in developing students' communicative skills. The lack of sustained professional development thus hinders teachers' ability to update their instructional practices and to respond to the evolving demands of English language education.

The third challenge is associated with teachers' technological competence. In the era of globalization and rapid advancements in information and communication technology, the demands of English language teaching have undergone significant transformation. English teachers are increasingly expected to integrate digital tools, online resources, and multimedia materials into their instructional practices, as well as to possess adequate digital literacy skills. Technology not only provides access to authentic learning materials but also supports interactive and collaborative learning environments. Moreover, English functions as a key language across various domains, including business (Roinah, 2022; Utami & Febriansyah, 2021), technology (Faridi, 2009), science (Englander, 2014; Hidayah, 2021; Kusuma, 2018), and tourism (Damayanti, 2019). Therefore, it is essential for students to develop strong speaking and communicative abilities in English in order to compete effectively in the global workforce and to respond to future professional and societal demands. This situation further highlights the importance of equipping teachers with both pedagogical and technological competencies to support meaningful English language learning.

One viable solution to the challenges outlined above is the provision of professional training that introduces English teachers to innovative teaching methods responsive to technological advancement, particularly the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method. A substantial body of previous research has demonstrated the positive effects of CLT implementation on students' ability to communicate effectively in English (Ahmed & Abdalrahaman, 2017; Budiarso, 2019; Mulyanah et al., 2018; Widagdo, 2018). Accordingly, the training program is designed to equip senior high school English teachers in Karo Regency with new pedagogical insights and practical skills, enabling them to adopt more effective, learner-centered, and contextually relevant approaches to English language instruction. The CLT approach places a strong emphasis on the development of students' communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 2001) through interactive, creative, and enjoyable learning activities.

Within the CLT training, English teachers in Karo Regency are guided to design teaching materials that are engaging and capable of stimulating students' interest and active participation in English learning. In addition, teachers are trained to create a supportive and conducive learning environment that facilitates the development of students' speaking and communicative skills. The effectiveness of this approach is grounded in five key characteristics of CLT implementation, namely: (1) appropriateness, which refers to the use of language that suits its communicative context in terms of formality and interactional situations; (2) message focus, which emphasizes understanding and conveying meaning rather than merely producing correct forms; (3) psycholinguistic processing, involving the activation of learners' cognitive and psychological processes in language acquisition; (4) risk-taking, which encourages learners to employ various communication strategies and to learn from errors without fear of negative evaluation; and (5) free practice, which allows learners to integrate and apply different language skills in meaningful communicative tasks (Johnson & Johnson, 1998).

Despite the growing body of research on CLT, most previous studies have primarily focused on its effectiveness in controlled classroom settings or on student outcomes, such as speaking proficiency and motivation. Relatively little attention has been paid to how CLT is implemented by teachers who have undergone professional training, particularly in regional contexts with limited access to continuous professional development, such as Karo Regency. Moreover, empirical evidence documenting teachers' experiences and perceived advantages of CLT implementation in real classroom settings remains scarce. This gap highlights the need for descriptive, context-sensitive research that explores how CLT functions in practice and what specific benefits it offers to both teachers and students in under-researched educational contexts.

In response to this research gap, the present study aims to identify the advantages of implementing the CLT method in teaching English to senior high school students in Karo Regency. Through the adoption of the CLT

approach, English teachers are expected to conduct English language instruction that is more effective, contextual, and enjoyable. Furthermore, the implementation of CLT is anticipated to enhance students' communicative competence in English, thereby better preparing them to meet the demands of global competition and future professional challenges.

2. Method

This study employed a descriptive research design to examine the advantages of implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in English instruction at senior high schools in Karo Regency. The data were obtained through systematic observations of classroom practices in which the CLT method was applied. The participants consisted of 12 English teachers from senior high schools in Karo Regency who had previously participated in a CLT training program organized by the community service team of Universitas Sumatera Utara, Medan, Indonesia.

The training was conducted over a period of two months and focused on introducing the theoretical foundations and practical application of the CLT approach. Following the training, the participating teachers were required to implement the CLT method in their respective schools during regular English lessons. This implementation phase enabled the researchers to observe how CLT principles were applied in authentic classroom contexts.

The data were collected using two main techniques: classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. The observations were conducted to document teaching strategies, classroom interaction patterns, and student engagement during CLT-based instruction. Meanwhile, the interviews were used to obtain in-depth information regarding teachers' perceptions, experiences, and reflections on the implementation of the CLT method. All collected data were analyzed descriptively to identify recurring patterns and to reveal the perceived advantages of using the CLT method in teaching English at the senior high school level in Karo Regency.

3. Results and Discussion

The results of the data analysis indicate that the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in English instruction at senior high schools in Karo Regency offers several significant advantages for students. These advantages were identified based on systematic classroom observations and in-depth interviews with participating teachers. Overall, the findings demonstrate that CLT contributes positively to the learning process by fostering student engagement, reducing negative learning emotions, and improving students' communicative abilities in English.

First, the findings reveal that the students become significantly more active participants in the learning process when the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method is applied. CLT promotes a student-centered learning orientation in which students assume a more dominant and participatory role in classroom activities, while teachers function primarily as facilitators and learning guides. Instead of delivering instructional content through lengthy, teacher-centered explanations, teachers design and implement a variety of communicative tasks that require students to interact with one another, negotiate meaning, and use English purposefully in meaningful contexts. As a result, students are encouraged to take greater responsibility for their own learning and to engage more actively in classroom discourse.

The results of the observation indicate that the teachers frequently employ interactive techniques such as games, role plays, and puzzles to increase students' involvement in classroom tasks. These activities create opportunities for the students to use English in a more natural and spontaneous manner. During the implementation of these tasks, the teachers closely monitor the students' performance, provide guidance when necessary, and respond to the students' questions, which are mostly related to limitations in vocabulary knowledge. In several instances, the students combine English with their mother tongue (Bahasa Indonesia) as a compensatory strategy when they encounter lexical gaps. However, such code-mixing is not interpreted as a deficiency; rather, it is viewed as a natural and productive part of the language learning process, as it reflects students' willingness to communicate and to convey meaning despite limited linguistic resources. These observational findings are further supported by the results of the interview, which reveal that the teachers perceive the CLT method as highly effective in encouraging students' active participation and sustained engagement throughout the learning process.

An active classroom environment represents an ideal condition for effective learning, particularly in language education. The present findings are consistent with previous studies demonstrating that active learning significantly enhances student engagement (Adedokum et al., 2017; Baepler et al., 2016; Prince, 2004) and contributes to the development of student-centered learning environments (Odum et al., 2021). Active classrooms ensure that students are not merely passive recipients of information but are actively involved in constructing knowledge through interaction, collaboration, and experiential learning. Furthermore,

instructional techniques such as games, role plays, and puzzles have been widely recognized as effective strategies for promoting active learning atmospheres (Sofyan et al., 2016; Suryani & Rosa, 2014), as these techniques encourage collaboration, problem-solving, and meaningful communication. Collectively, these findings underscore the pedagogical value of CLT in fostering active classroom interaction and supporting the development of students' communicative competence.

Second, the findings indicate that the use of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method significantly reduces students' boredom in learning English. Conventional teaching approaches, in which teachers dominate classroom activities and rely heavily on repetitive and monotonous instructional techniques, often result in limited student involvement and passive learning. Under such conditions, students are more likely to experience boredom, which in turn leads to disengagement and a lack of interest in the learning process. This boredom frequently manifests in off-task behavior, such as talking to peers about unrelated topics or engaging in other non-academic activities, thereby creating a noisy classroom atmosphere that is less conducive to effective learning.

In contrast, the implementation of CLT introduces a wide range of varied, interactive, and communicative activities that help sustain students' attention and motivation. Classroom observations reveal that students display greater enthusiasm when participating in CLT-based activities, actively respond to teachers' instructions, and demonstrate positive attitudes toward learning English. Students appear more willing to participate in tasks and to use English during classroom interactions, indicating a higher level of engagement. Moreover, the teacher's ability to reduce student boredom through CLT-based instruction also reflects effective classroom management, as students remain focused, cooperative, and actively involved throughout the lesson. This finding supports previous research identifying boredom as a negative academic emotion that can seriously undermine teaching effectiveness and disrupt the overall learning process (Zawodniak & Kruk, 2019).

The results of the interview further confirm that students' increased enthusiasm for learning English is closely associated with the core characteristics of the CLT method. CLT places strong emphasis on collaboration, not only between teachers and students but also among students themselves through pair work and group activities. As a result, successful CLT implementation requires teachers to creatively design learning tasks that promote interaction, cooperation, and mutual support among learners. Teachers acknowledge that when collaborative elements are absent, the implementation of CLT becomes less effective, as interaction is central to communicative language learning. These insights highlight the importance of collaborative learning in maintaining students' interest and reducing boredom, while simultaneously fostering meaningful communication in the English classroom.

Third, the findings indicate that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method plays an important role in helping students overcome their shyness in speaking English. Shyness is widely recognized as a common psychological barrier among learners of English as a foreign language (EFL), particularly in activities that require oral communication. Numerous previous studies have documented that shyness can significantly inhibit students' willingness to speak and actively participate in classroom interactions (Dalem, 2017; Namaghi et al., 2015). Dalem (2017), for example, identified shyness as a major obstacle to students' classroom participation, especially in speaking-focused lessons, while Namaghi et al. (2015) reported a negative correlation between levels of shyness and speaking performance among Iranian EFL learners.

In addition, shy learners often display behaviors such as hesitation when responding to questions, providing very brief or minimal answers, avoiding eye contact, and preferring to remain silent during classroom discussions (Oflaz, 2019). These behaviors limit their opportunities to practice speaking and, consequently, hinder the development of communicative competence. In the present study, however, the interactive and supportive nature of CLT-based activities creates a low-anxiety learning environment that reduces students' fear of making mistakes. Through pair work, group discussions, and role-play activities, students are encouraged to focus on meaning rather than linguistic accuracy, which allows them to take risks and express their ideas in English more freely without fear of negative evaluation from teachers or peers.

As a result of this supportive learning atmosphere, students gradually develop greater self-confidence and show increased willingness to participate in oral communication. Observational and interview data indicate that students who were previously reluctant to speak become more comfortable using English during classroom activities. This finding suggests that CLT not only facilitates linguistic development but also addresses affective factors, such as shyness and anxiety, which are crucial for successful language learning.

Fourth, the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method is found to create a fun and enjoyable learning atmosphere in the English classroom. The results of the classroom observations reveal that students appear happy, relaxed, and more emotionally engaged during English lessons conducted using CLT. The variety of interactive activities designed by teachers—such as games, role plays, and

communicative tasks—make the learning process feel similar to playing, thereby reducing the psychological pressure often associated with learning a foreign language. As a result, students are more willing to participate and remain actively involved throughout the lesson. Notably, none of the students display signs of boredom, anxiety, or discomfort during the learning process, indicating that CLT successfully creates a positive and supportive classroom environment.

This enjoyable learning environment is largely due to the teachers' selection of learning topics that are closely related to the students' real-life experiences, interests, and social contexts. Furthermore, the use of everyday vocabulary rather than highly technical or abstract terms helps the students better understand and apply the language in meaningful ways. As a result, the students no longer perceive English as an abstract, difficult, or intimidating subject; instead, they view it as a practical and useful tool for everyday communication. This shift in perception contributes to increased motivation and sustained engagement in English learning.

These findings are consistent with previous research findings emphasizing that CLT materials and learning topics should be closely connected to learners' social and cultural environments as well as their daily language use (Ahmed & Abdalrahaman, 2017; Johnson & Johnson, 1998). However, while creating an enjoyable learning atmosphere is important, teachers must also ensure that CLT-based activities remain aligned with the target competencies specified in the curriculum. Johnson and Johnson (1998) argue that effective CLT implementation should prioritize language appropriateness by considering contextual factors such as formality, communicative purpose, and conversational settings. By maintaining this balance between enjoyment and instructional goals, CLT can facilitate meaningful and purposeful communication while still meeting curricular requirements.

Fifth, the findings demonstrate that the students show noticeable improvement in their fluency in speaking English as a direct result of CLT implementation. The fundamental goal of language learning is not merely the accumulation of linguistic knowledge but the ability to communicate effectively and meaningfully in the target language. Unlike conventional instructional approaches that place primary emphasis on grammatical accuracy and vocabulary memorization, the CLT method prioritizes meaningful language use through continuous communicative practice. In CLT-based classrooms, students are encouraged to actively use the vocabulary and expressions they have learned to convey ideas, opinions, and information, even when their language production is not entirely grammatically accurate.

The results of the classroom observations indicate that the students speak more fluently and with greater confidence during communicative activities. They demonstrate a reduced fear of making grammatical mistakes and are more willing to initiate conversations, respond to questions, and participate in discussions. This reduced anxiety creates a supportive learning environment in which the students feel safe to experiment with language and to learn from their errors. As a result, increased confidence gradually leads to improvement in students' overall English proficiency, particularly in terms of oral fluency. Previous studies have identified fear of making mistakes as a major factor that hinders speaking fluency among EFL learners (Andas & Rutniatyanti, 2020; Sultana & Jamin, 2021). The present findings suggest that the CLT approach effectively addresses this issue by minimizing learners' anxiety and promoting a more communicative and supportive classroom atmosphere.

These findings corroborate earlier research reporting that the implementation of CLT significantly enhances students' speaking fluency (Ahmed & Abdalrahaman, 2017; Budiarso, 2019; Mulyanah et al., 2018; Widagdo, 2018). Collectively, the results demonstrate that the use of the CLT method enables teachers to achieve the primary objective of English language learning as stipulated in the national curriculum, namely the development of students' communicative competence (Kharimah et al., 2023; Rohimajaya & Hamer, 2023). Ultimately, the success of English language instruction is reflected not only in students' knowledge of grammatical rules but, more importantly, in their ability to communicate fluently, confidently, and meaningfully in English across various contexts.

Moreover, the results of the interview reveal that the teachers' successful implementation of the CLT method is closely related to their improved ability to utilize online learning resources. The teachers report that many of the games, role plays, and puzzles used in their lessons were adapted from various online platforms. However, they also emphasize the necessity of modifying these materials to suit the local cultural and educational context of Karo Regency, as not all online resources are directly applicable. Teachers acknowledge that their previously limited teaching resources stemmed from a lack of knowledge and access to relevant digital materials. This finding highlights the important role of technological advancement in supporting the development of effective teaching materials and underscores the need for continuous professional development to ensure that teachers' pedagogical and technological competencies evolve in line with ongoing technological changes.

4. Conclusions

The findings of this study confirm the advantages of implementing the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in English instruction at senior high schools in Karo Regency. Most importantly, the use of CLT enables teachers to achieve the primary objective of English language teaching at the senior high school level, namely the development of students' communicative competence. In addition, the CLT method emphasizes meaningful interaction and collaboration among teachers and students, which contributes to the creation of an active, engaging, and enjoyable learning atmosphere. Through student-centered activities such as games, role plays, and communicative tasks, CLT encourages learners to participate actively and to use English in authentic contexts.

It should be noted, however, that this study employed a descriptive research design that aimed to capture and describe the phenomenon of CLT implementation in a specific educational context. Consequently, the findings cannot be generalized to other settings or assumed to be directly applicable to different regions or educational environments. Nevertheless, the results provide valuable insights and can serve as a reference for educators and researchers who are interested in exploring the use of CLT in English language teaching, particularly in contexts with similar characteristics.

Given the methodological limitations of this study, future research is recommended to examine the implementation of the CLT method using more rigorous empirical approaches. Experimental or quasi-experimental designs are suggested in order to statistically measure the effects and effectiveness of CLT on students' language skills, especially speaking competence. Furthermore, as this study was conducted exclusively in Karo Regency—an area with distinct cultural and educational characteristics—future studies may replicate this research in other regions of North Sumatra or in different parts of Indonesia to allow for comparative analysis. Finally, further research is also encouraged at different educational levels, such as primary schools, junior high schools, or higher education institutions, to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the applicability and impact of the CLT method across diverse learning contexts.

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