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The Role of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in Teaching English to Indonesian Elementary School Students within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*

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Abstract

English instruction in Indonesian elementary schools continues to face challenges, including limited resources, teacher proficiency gaps, and a reliance on traditional methods. Although Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) presents a promising alternative with its focus on student-centered, interactive learning, its effectiveness in supporting the objectives of the Kurikulum Merdeka requires further investigation. This study investigates the impact of CLT on the instruction of English to primary school children in Indonesia, specifically within the context of the Kurikulum Merdeka. This study employs a qualitative methodology to analyze recent journal articles and investigate how CLT facilitates students' exposure to authentic communication, encourages active engagement, boosts their motivation, and enhances their overall language competency. The results demonstrate that implementing CLT has a significant positive impact on students, as it enhances the relevance and engagement of their learning, aligning with the aims of the Kurikulum Merdeka. The study suggests that to improve English language teaching in Indonesia, it is important to apply the recommendations for broader adoption, integration into the curriculum, development of resources, ongoing evaluation, community involvement, and technology integration.

INTRODUCTION

While English education in Indonesia is recognized as one of the prioritized competencies for global, academic, and professional advancement, it continually faces a complex mix of educational policies, ideologies, and sociocultural and religious values within the nation's dynamic sociolinguistic context (Zein, 2020). Considering that English is still viewed as a foreign language in Indonesia yet the global demand for English proficiency keeps increasing, educators are encouraged to explore innovative and tailored teaching strategies to enhance both the quality and effectiveness of

language skill development (Ridwan et al., 2024). Effective teaching techniques are essential for every language to be learned and taught. English teachers can apply various instructional techniques to make their classes more enjoyable and meaningful (Losi & Nasution, 2022), for example boosting HOTs by storytelling (Lidiporu & Sumarni, 2022) or conducting collaborative editing tasks (Haloho & Lasito, 2023). Learning a language entails concentrating on communication skills in addition to linguistic development because it emphasizes communication itself; the teaching process depends heavily on the communicative method (Krashen, 1982, as cited in Dos Santos, 2020). To address these challenges and meet the evolving demands of English proficiency, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) offers a promising approach that aligns with both the pedagogical requirements and the sociocultural values of Indonesia's diverse educational context.

In her study, Moharana (2021) concluded that CLT emphasizes facilitating communication by teaching students to understand concepts such as time, sequence, quantity, location, and frequency, as well as performing tasks like making requests, denying, offering, and complaining. Similarly, Hien (2021) characterizes CLT as a progressive method that encourages learners to utilize both linguistic and general knowledge to tackle practical tasks applicable to everyday situations, including conversing, negotiating, persuading, and decision-making, thereby enhancing English proficiency and confidence in communication. Dos Santos (2020) asserts that since CLT places equal emphasis on learning through language and learning to use it, one of its primary objectives is to help students become more proficient in the target language. Furthermore, CLT's underlying learning theory is reflected in three fundamental practices highlighted by Moharana (2021): 1) the communication principle, stating that authentic communication activities foster learning; 2) the task principle, suggesting that using language to accomplish meaningful tasks enhances learning; and 3) the meaningfulness principle, maintaining that language use facilitates learning. These CLT principles provide essential conditions for effective second language acquisition for real-life use.

CLT offers significant advantages in both language development and the cultivation of essential soft skills. By emphasizing authentic communication, CLT allows learners to improve their linguistic abilities in real-world contexts, thereby enhancing their overall communicative competence (Qasserras, 2023; Dos Santos, 2020; Toro et al., 2019). In the context of classrooms in Indonesia, Fadilah (2018) emphasized the necessity of utilizing CLT as it plays a crucial role in improving students' ability to communicate effectively. The approach also actively involves students in communication tasks, which not only boosts the speaking skills of extroverted learners but also provides opportunities for introverted students to participate and develop confidence (Nggawu & Thao, 2023). Furthermore, CLT fosters a learner-centered environment where students are encouraged to take responsibility for their own learning, thereby promoting greater autonomy (Qasserras, 2023). Additionally, CLT helps increase students' cultural awareness, while simultaneously nurturing critical thinking and problem-solving skills (Qasserras, 2023). Through these activities, learners not only enhance their linguistic proficiency but also develop their sociocultural and pragmatic competence (Chen et al., 2024).

However, challenges persist in its implementation, particularly in Asian contexts, due to conceptual misunderstandings and contextual mismatches (Bai, 2024). In China, for instance, factors such as students' and teachers' English proficiency levels, inadequate teaching facilities, large class sizes, examination-oriented systems, textbook limitations, and teachers' understanding of CLT principles hinder its effective adoption (Chen et al., 2024). Additionally, while strategies like modeling, repetition, and collaborative activities are commonly employed, they may not sufficiently

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promote active classroom participation (Toro et al., 2019). Critics also point out that CLT may lack explicit grammar and vocabulary instruction, insufficiently prepare students for formal writing and standardized exams, and may not adequately address individual learner differences, often emphasizing fluency over accuracy (Qasserras, 2023). In summary, while CLT offers numerous benefits in enhancing language proficiency and critical thinking, its successful implementation requires teachers to resolve various challenges to align theoretical principles with practical application. As Rizqi (2020) conducted a comprehensive evaluation of the challenges faced by Indonesian teachers toward the application of CLT, he suggested professional training to develop the teachers teaching competence.

As a new suggested approach to classroom instruction, The *Kurikulum Merdeka* empowers students with the freedom to choose their learning methods (Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, 2020). Yanti (2024) highlights that this curriculum promotes independent and active learning, aiming to cultivate competent, innovative, and adaptable individuals to 21st-century advancements. It offers flexibility for students and enables educators to tailor high-quality learning experiences to suit students' needs and environments. The *Kurikulum Merdeka* prepares students for real-world challenges by emphasizing essential soft skills such as critical thinking, creativity, and communication (Yanti, 2024). As this curriculum was introduced recently, educators have to adapt and adjust teaching strategies, including those for teaching English, to align with its objectives. As a classroom instruction that focuses on real-life communication and student-centered activities, CLT aligns seamlessly with the goals of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Dos Santos (2020) stated that CLT encourages teachers and students to source teaching materials from their immediate surroundings and communities, facilitating effective communication through interactive learning tasks. Moreover, a variety of interactive language exercises that may hold students' attention can also be utilized by the CLT technique to boost students' ability to communicate and listen (Losi & Nasution, 2022).

The existing research significantly advances our understanding of CLT in the Indonesian context. However, there remains a notable gap in the literature concerning the specific implementation of CLT within the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. Although there is a clear alignment between the principles of CLT and the objectives of *Kurikulum Merdeka*, empirical studies evaluating the role of CLT within this new educational framework are scarce, particularly in the context of elementary schools. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on English language instruction for primary school students in Indonesia, specifically within the context of the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. The research will focus on evaluating how the implementation of CLT influences various aspects of students' language learning, including its potential to introduce real-life communication, foster a student-centered learning environment, and enhance students' active participation and engagement.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research design, focusing on library research to explore the integration of CLT within the *Kurikulum Merdeka* for teaching English to Indonesian elementary school students. The data collection process involves gathering relevant journal articles from online academic databases, with a particular emphasis on those published within the last five years to ensure the most current insights. Once the data is compiled, it undergoes a thorough analysis to identify the roles of CLT and evaluate its potential benefits in enhancing students' English proficiency,

particularly in communication. The analysis will focus on how CLT aligns with the principles of the *Kurikulum Merdeka* and its effectiveness in promoting real-life communication skills among elementary school learners. The findings of this study aim to provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers, offering evidence-based recommendations to improve English language instruction standards at the elementary level. Data analysis will include thematic coding and content analysis to draw connections between CLT practices and the outcomes outlined in the *Kurikulum Merdeka*.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Introducing Students to Authentic Communication

CLT is a language teaching approach that teaches grammar vocabulary and the functions of words and phrases in real-life contexts (Qasserras, 2023). According to Nggawu & Thao (2023), CLT helps students become more active by engaging through conversations, giving their ideas, and raising their language proficiency and accuracy by helping to provide a setting that values honest and meaningful communication. Furthermore, CLT also emphasizes the value of communicative input and its outcomes through real-world materials and student-to-student interactions. Hien (2021) mentioned that this approach can also help the development of many competencies, such as discourse, sociolinguistic, strategic, grammatical, organizational, and pragmatic abilities.

Authentic materials are essential to the approach itself when it is used. Students will find the learning experience more relevant and interesting because these materials are meant to represent actual situations and contexts. This approach uses activities such as role-playing, debates, discussions, and storytelling to familiarize students with the type of communication that occurs in the real world. Because students are encouraged to apply what they've learned in class to a real-world context, these activities help them transition from theory to practice. There is also a focus on helping students improve their communication skills using authentic materials in the CLT approach. As a result of being pushed to use their language skills in authentic situations, students become more prepared to communicate effectively in different settings (Qasserras, 2023). If students practice in realistic settings, they will be more equipped to implement what they learn in class in real-life contexts.

Regarding its implementation in Indonesia, Istiantika et al. (2023) looked into how CLT was used to teach students in elementary schools. Their findings show that CLT provides a relevant framework for Indonesian students' language learning by including content related to social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. They found that CLT was functional for making language learning more interesting and relevant for students. Moreover, the study proved that incorporating real-world context into learning proves CLT is a practical approach for teaching authentic communication to elementary-level students.

B. Promoting Student-Centered Learning

When the *Kurikulum Merdeka* began to be implemented, education in Indonesia shifted toward a more comprehensive way. CLT as an approach promotes problem-solving skills and critical and creative thinking, along with increased engagement in students' learning (Daga, 2021; Fazilla et al., 2023; Dian et al., 2023; Rokayah et al., 2023). As it moves from a teacher-centered to a student-centered classroom, CLT thus aligns with the *Kurikulum Merdeka* paradigm (Istiantika et al., 2023). In the CLT approach, students are given opportunities to take an active role in their learning. Engaging

in practical English-language activities (e.g., role plays and group discussions) helps students build a sense of responsibility for their learning outcomes. Harmer (2015) emphasizes that these engaging activities can help students improve their critical thinking and problem-solving skills since they require them to think on their feet and find solutions throughout the exercises. The focus on communication and collaboration in CLT also fosters a supportive classroom environment that can encourage students to express themselves and learn from their mistakes, which is essential in language learning. Regardless of students' proficiency level, the CLT approach ensures that all students can participate and benefit from the lessons through differentiated instruction and additional support (Brown & Abeywickrama, 2019).

Adopting a student-centered approach motivates teachers to interact more with students (Eisenring & Margana, 2019). However, teachers are more likely to participate as facilitators to monitor student progress rather than merely providing correct language models. In CLT, teachers will push students to express everything in their minds and participate actively in the learning process (Reski, 2020). With all that, Indonesian teachers consider CLT to make classroom teaching more enjoyable and effective. They also appreciate the *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s flexibility, which allows the adaptation of CLT to suit classroom needs (Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, 2020).

While there are many advantages to implementing the *Kurikulum Merdeka*, there are also difficulties with its widespread implementation in Indonesia. Rahmatillah (2021) observed in her community service activities (PKM) in Balikpapan, Indonesia, that students actively participated in discussions and exercises, indicating that the shift toward student-centered learning in CLT is worth implementing. However, she noted that English is still considered a local content subject (muatan lokal), limiting its integration into the broader curriculum. This implies that the *Kurikulum Merdeka* is likely not yet in use in that city, which further suggests that its adoption is not yet consistent across Indonesia. Rahmatillah then suggested that English should be included as a national content subject (muatan nasional), emphasizing the importance of early English education for preparing students to adapt to the globalization and technological era.

C. Enhancing Students' Motivation and Engagement in Learning English

The implementation of CLT is known to be fun and engaging for students as it creates communicative nuance in the classroom. Basir et al. (2021) stated that CLT helps students maintain their interest in learning English. Implementing CLT in English classes makes it easier for students to have discussions that allow them to easily express themselves and motivate them to reach their learning goals (Carnando & Nurlaily, 2020). Activities like interactive discussions and practical speaking assignments within the CLT framework can get students more involved and motivated to learn more (Carnando & Nurlaily, 2020).

Through this approach, teachers can create a learning environment that promotes a sense of closeness and comfort among students. According to Istiantika et al. (2023), teachers and students can develop a stronger bond through engaging in enjoyable and interactive activities like singing, joking, and storytelling. One activity that they are using is the guessing game to enhance students' motivation. Istiantika et al. (2023) found that students were more likely to think critically and correctly using this CLT-based game as a post-lesson assessment tool. Moreover, the game also helps students in improving their memory and English vocabulary retention. It also helps students build their self-confidence as they strive to give correct answers quickly to win the privilege of leaving the

class earlier than the others. Not only does it motivate students to think critically, but the game also helps students to become more active in class.

This study also supported a prior study by Rahmatillah (2021) which investigated the effectiveness of CLT in fostering elementary and junior high school students' enthusiasm for learning English. The result shows that students were eager to participate and less fearful of making mistakes during the implementation of activities based on the CLT. This is because CLT focuses on practicing communication rather than merely taking notes. Both studies show that CLT helps support students' motivation in the classroom. Even though English is not their mother tongue, CLT-based activities that are being demonstrated to Indonesian elementary students do not put any burden on them to learn it. On the contrary, these students are getting motivated and engaged with the method implemented in their learning. They become more confident and not afraid to speak up, whether their answer is true or false.

D. Fostering Students' Language Proficiency

A commonly used teaching strategy for English is CLT, which is well-known for strengthening students' proficiency in communicating in a range of settings. CLT aims to cultivate students' language proficiency in authentic contexts, significantly impacting their accuracy and fluency while equipping them with essential vocabulary, language structures, and communication strategies (Asrul & Dahlan, 2022; Istiantika et al., 2023). To promote comprehensive communicative competence, this method emphasizes the comprehensive growth of language abilities by integrating speaking, reading, listening, and writing, along with nonverbal interactions (Losi & Nasution, 2022).

Active participation by students is one of the main concepts for CLT. Students are more actively involved and interested in learning when participating in CLT-based activities (Losi & Nasution, 2022). Not only that, these activities also encourage students to engage more in practicing English continuously (Priasih, 2024). Furthermore, Istiantika et al. (2023) noted that CLT is a dynamic method that improves the learners' general communicative skills because of its focus on social interaction and active learning engagement.

There have been several beneficial outcomes from implementing CLT in Indonesian elementary classrooms. CLT activities such as role-play simulations, playing cards, picture narrating, and group work can improve students' speaking skills by providing authentic situations while promoting ongoing practice (Ilmudinulloh et al., 2022; Istiantika et al., 2023). It is also possible for students to improve their language skills more generally and become more active learners when CLT makes learning more fun (Istiantika et al., 2023).

English skills include listening, speaking, reading, and writing. However, many people prioritize improving their speaking abilities because they can use it to communicate with foreigners (Akmal, 2020). Even so, CLT emphasizes holistic development by continuously and cooperatively improving these skills in students' language proficiency and interactions (Istiantika et al., 2023).

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The results of this study highlight how important Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is to Indonesian primary school students' English instruction under the *Kurikulum Merdeka*. CLT's emphasis on honest communication, student-centered learning, and interactive participation fits perfectly with *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s objectives of encouraging students' critical thinking, creativity,

and flexibility. By creating a relevant and practical learning environment, CLT not only improves students' communication skills but also inspires and involves them, improving the learning process's effectiveness and enjoyment.

Significant advantages of using CLT have been shown to include the introduction of real communication, the advancement of student-centered learning, higher student enthusiasm and involvement, and the comprehensive improvement of language competence. The *Kurikulum Merdeka*'s goals of equipping pupils for real-world problems and promoting lifelong learning abilities are especially applicable to these targets. CLT improves students' language learning experience even if it is challenging to integrate it properly into Indonesia's many educational contexts.

It is advised that the Indonesian Ministry of Education and Culture extend the use of CLT in more schools, especially primary schools. Ensuring the efficient implementation and modification of the CLT strategy requires offering teachers extensive training and professional development opportunities. Furthermore, English ought to be moved inside the *Kurikulum Merdeka* from a local content subject (muatan lokal) to a national content subject (muatan nasional). This integration will provide a more methodical and uniform approach to English language instruction in keeping with national educational objectives.

Making and disseminating CLT-based instructional materials and resources that reflect the Indonesian setting will increase students' interest in and relevance of learning. For this reason, genuine resources that speak to the social and cultural backgrounds of the pupils are essential. Moreover, continuous study to track the efficacy of CLT in different educational contexts and its influence on students' language proficiency will help pinpoint areas for development and best practices, guaranteeing that CLT approaches adapt to the evolving demands of both teachers and students.

Additionally, it is crucial to promote the community's and parents' active participation in the educational process. Parents who want to support their children's language learning journey and grasp the advantages of CLT can attend workshops and educational sessions. Finally, using technology to improve CLT exercises can give students more chances to practice English in interesting and creative ways, enhancing regular classroom exercises. By applying these suggestions, teachers and decision-makers in Indonesia may improve the standard of English language instruction even further and guarantee that students have the skills they need to succeed in a world going more and more global.

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