

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on ELT Students' Reading comprehension: A Pre-experimental Study

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ABSTRACT

Reading was often considered as a passive skill, while in fact, reading requires the learners to actively read and understand the text by relating to their former knowledge. This pre-experimental study aimed to measure how effective Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on students' reading comprehension of of ELT department. TOEFL Reading Comprehension test was used as the instrument to collect the data from the pre-test and post-test score. The resulted of the non-parametric test of Wilcoxon test showed that there was no improvement after the CLT approach was implemented (the p-value is higher than 0.05 indicating that there was no significant effect). Some factors might determine the effectiveness include the student's readiness in understanding English, and the inappropriate approach to teach reading skill that requires more on accuracy rather than fluency.

1. Introduction

Reading has a special place in the English Language Teaching (ELT) department. Reading skill is taught for four semesters and is introduced simultaneously. One of the reading courses is Reading Comprehension. Reading is a complex activity that incorporates both sense and intellect. Its goal is to help readers understand written materials. Comprehension can be explained as the process of interpreting related text, which is known as comprehension. It requires not just thinking and reasoning but also vocabulary, or word knowledge Reading skill is also called receptive skill, yet in the process of understanding the written text, the readers actively interpret the meaning by connecting the new knowledge with their prior knowledge. Reading is a complex cognitive process that involves decoding characters in order to comprehend the text (Nazarov & Ismatulleeva, 2022). In this study, the ELT department students who have a good comprehension of English reading skills have the benefit of gaining more vocabulary as well as new knowledge derived from the targeted language (English).

Reading can be boring when students are asked to read and answer the questions repetitively. Meanwhile, reading is essential for academic achievement, the emergence of extracurricular interests, leisure time enjoyment, and social and personal growth (Dechant; Emerald, 1991).

Teaching reading needs to be engaging and interactive to make the students active in the class. To make the students love and enjoy Reading Comprehension course, teacher needs to apply a varied method in the classroom. One of the method that promotes the variations in the reading class is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The goals of language instruction, the ways in which students acquire a language, the types of learning activities that take place in the classroom, and the responsibilities that both teachers and students perform in the classroom are all outlined in the principles of communicative language teaching (Richards, 2006). Generally, CLT emphasis on its goal where students are encouraged to be communicative during the process of learning. Therefore, a class that applies this method will be students-centered. In teaching reading, teacher can apply CLT to avoid boredom during reading a written text.

In this study, the writer tries to examine the effect of CLT method on students' reading skill, especially during the Reading Comprehension course. This study emerges when the writer recognized that most of the students receive low scores in reading comprehension test in TOEFL with score average 31. Applying CLT in this classroom is also needed to make impress the new students of ELT department, who took this course in their first semester, to love and enjoy reading activity. Thus, it is expected that reading courses can help them to make their reading habit grow.

1.1 Reading Comprehension and CLT

The idea that reading is not a passive skill anymore and one of the advantages of CLT is to make the students engaged and interested in the class, the researcher tries to connect CLT and reading comprehension. There is a lot of research focusing on CLT and reading skills. Most of them show that CLT helps learners to enhance their reading skill. A classroom action research study concludes that CLT helps the secondary students to improve their reading as well as their interest in reading (Rahmati, 2022). CLT makes significant improvement on public college students reading comprehension skills (A Memon, N Akhtar, 2022). Students at the higher secondary level also enhance their reading skills better after implementing CLT (Akhtar, 2014). CLT contributes to learners' macro-skills and micro-skills of reading comprehension in the intensive reading course (Setiyorini et al., 2022). Homeschool students at the secondary level also show improvement after the implementation of CLT in reading. They also show enthusiasm and a positive attitude in the reading class (Lai; Hon Kai, 2021).

This research proposes to fill the gap in the previous research by implementing CLT in ELT students in Indonesia. ELT students are encouraged to comprehend reading texts in English as a part of mastering a second language that will be useful in their future job as a teacher. This research is conducted in one semester to see the effectiveness of CLT.

English skills used to be divided into passive and active skills. Speaking and writing are considered active abilities, but listening and reading are considered passive skills. However, these debatable terms have changed the way we group the English skills into passive and active since passive skills require cognitive activeness to understand the meaning. Consequently, the term message-sending representation is the collaborative nature of meaning-making, and the terms that best represent the collaborative nature are 'interpretation,' 'expression,' and 'negotiation' of meaning (J., 1990). Reading and listening are not passive skills anymore. Learners need to be active to understand the reading text and people's utterances. In the context as a reader, we do not passively read the book, but we also extract the meaning from the book by connecting the prior knowledge to the new knowledge.

Reading is a sophisticated cognitive and perceptual activity that requires two interconnected processes: word recognition and comprehension. Word recognition is the process of identifying the correspondence between written symbols and spoken words. The process of comprehension

involves interpreting words, phrases, and related content (Pang et al., 2003). Reading comprehension is a dynamic, ongoing, and constructive cognitive process (Woolley, 2011). Read with comprehension means that the readers generate and construct the meaning by relating their prior knowledge, memories of experiences and the written text (Wittrock, 2013). People who read might look relaxed and silent, yet the cognitive process is going on. They engage their reading activity by traveling to the knowledge and experiences that they get previously. Thus, the term passive skill for reading is not appropriate anymore. Reading is deriving meaning by constructing the ideas from the written text by relating it to the prior knowledge to recognize the words and comprehend the meaning of the text.

British and American academics developed communicative language teaching at the start of the 1970s to encourage the teaching of practical communicative skills in second language learning (Dörnyei, 2009). Modern language instruction that emphasizes teaching languages holistically through meaningful communication and interaction is known as communicative language teaching (CLT) (Loumbourdi; Lana, 2018). The goal of language instruction, according to CLT, is to achieve "communicative competence", and it also aims to create methods for teaching the four language abilities: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. The CLT approach is widely recognized for enabling language learners to communicate themselves and their opinions through cooperative tasks carried out during class (Alamri, 2018). CLT is a method that explains to students that the primary objective of learning a foreign language is communication. The importance of less structured and more creative language exercises was highlighted by the CLT technique, which was focused on the learner's involvement experience in meaningful L2 interaction in (often simulated) communicative contexts. Thus, games, problem-solving exercises, and unscripted situational role-plays took the place of learning scripted dialogues, and pattern drilling was either dropped entirely or swapped out for "communicative drills" (Dörnyei, 2009).

There are three advantages of CLT in the classroom. Firstly, CLT tends to be student-centered and situation-oriented language teaching. It engages the students with learning activity that relates with real-life situation when they learn a new language. Secondly, CLT allows the interaction between students and teacher. Teacher acts not only as an educator but also a facilitator. Thirdly, CLT usually increases the interest of the students in learning a new language. This is because they do not sit and learn about the grammar, they do not just receive. Students are encouraged to be active and to relate the language learning with real-life situations (Sasstos, 2020).

2. Methods

This research belongs to quantitative research that uses a pre-experimental design with descriptive explanations. This pre-experimental design is specified by using one group pretest-posttest design. This design was selected by considering many factors, one of which was the limited time and place to divide the class into two groups. In addition, this pre-experimental design aims to see students' progress after applying the CLT strategy and see whether there is significant development in reading skills.

The population was the students of ELT department in a private university at Situbondo, East Java, Indonesia. Purposive sampling technique was used to decide the samples in this study by considering the class that had taken Reading Comprehension course at the time when the study was being conducted. Thus, an ELT class of the 2024/2025 academic year was chosen to participate in this study. Among 20 students, 18 students followed both pre-test and post-test. Consequently, 18 students were used as the sample of this study.

This one group pretest-posttest design was conducted in three stages as illustrated below (Gall, Meredith D., Gall, Joyce P., & Borg, n.d.):



Fig 1. About the Test

The paper-based of TOEFL Reading Diagnostic Pre-test and Post-test developed by Phillips (Phillips, 2001) was used to collect pre-test and post-test score. There are two data in this study, data on pre-test scores and post-test scores with a multiple choice type of 50 questions. This test was done in 55 minutes so that students on average work on one question in one minute. Data in the form of TOEFL pre-test scores were obtained at the beginning of the semester when students had not received the application of CLT in Reading Comprehension courses. Data in the form of TOEFL post-test scores were obtained at the end of the meeting when there were 12 face-to-face meetings.

A statistical analyses is needed in this one group pretest-posttest design study to reject or to accept the null hypotheses. Since the aim of this study was to measure the effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching approach toward students' reading comprehension, therefore the null and the alternative hypothesis is defined as follows.

H0 = There is no effect of Communicative Language Teaching approach toward students' reading comprehension.

H1 = There is an effect of Communicative Language Teaching approach toward students' reading comprehension.

The decision to accept or to reject the null hypothesis were based on the result in the following section below.

3. Result

There were 3 steps before drawing the research conclusion namely descriptive statistics, normality test and parametric/non-parametric test.

3.1 Descriptive Statistics

The data was collected in form of pre-test and post-test scores of 18 samples. The graph below shows the students' score in Reading Comprehension test in TOEFL.

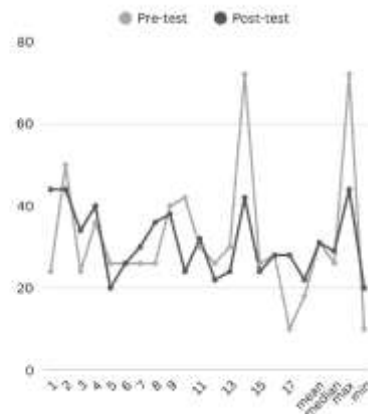


Fig 2. Graph the distribution of pre-test and post-test score

Based on the table above, the average score in the pre-test is 31.11111 and the post-test is 31. The average score decreased from the post-test to the pre-test. This means that there is no improvement after the treatment given. If the average score is visualized in a graph, it can be displayed as follows:

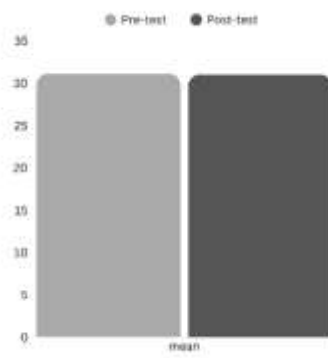


Fig 3. Graph The average score of pre-test and post-test score, before and after given the treatment

3.2 Normality Test

To draw further conclusions, a statistical analysis is required to reject or to accept the null hypothesis. Therefore, then, the data were analysed using SPSS 25. The first step to be done was analysing the data normality by inputting the pre-test and post-test scores. The result of normality test can be shown as follows:

Table 1. Test of normality

Tests of Normality						
	Kolmogorov-Smirnov ^a			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pretest	.255	18	.003	.830	18	.004
Posttest	.146	18	.200*	.920	18	.131

The sample size of this study was 18, thus, Shapiro-Wilk test's was used to determine the normality. If the p-value is greater than 0.05, it means that the data is normally distributed. In the table above, it was found that the pretest data showed a significance value of less than 0.05 ($p = 0.004$), so it can be concluded that the pretest data is not normally distributed. As for the post-test data, the significance value is greater than 0.05 ($p = 0.131$), which indicates that the posttest data is normally distributed. Thus, further statistical analysis needs to consider this difference in distribution in the selection of an appropriate test method using the non-parametric test.

3.3 Non-parametric Test

The appropriate non-parametric test method to accept or to reject null hypothesis in this study was the Wilcoxon signed-test. The result is shown in the table below.

Table 2. Wilcoxon test

	Posttest - Pretest
Z	-.104 ^b
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.917
a. Wilcoxon Signed Ranks Test	
b. Based on negative ranks.	

Based on the results of the Wilcoxon test conducted to compare post-test and pre-test scores, a p-value of 0.917 ($p > 0.05$) was obtained. The p-value of 0.917 is higher than 0.05. This value indicates that there is no statistically significant difference between the post-test and pre-test scores. In addition, the median difference value of -0.104 indicates a very small change and tends to decrease, but the change is not significant. This value is related to the decrease of the average score in the post-test (average score is 31) and pre-test (average score is 31.1111). Thus, it can be concluded that the treatment/intervention provided did not have a significant effect on improving the outcomes measured in this study sample.

4. Discussion

This study aimed to measure how effective the Communicative Language Teaching approach toward students' reading comprehension. Based on the Wilcoxon test, the result showed that there is no statistically significant difference between the post-test and pre-test scores. This means that the null hypothesis is accepted, and it can be concluded that there is no significant effect of the CLT toward students' reading comprehension. The median difference value of -0.104 and the decrease average of pre-test (31) and post-test (31.1111) indicates that there is no improvement after the treatment was being applied. This analysis result shows that the use of CLT approach to improve students' reading comprehension is not effective, specifically for ELT department students.

Although it does not show improvement, this result is important as it shows that the effectiveness of CLT cannot be generalized to all learning contexts. Some previous studies showed that CLT can help to improve students' reading comprehension in secondary level (Rahmati, 2022) as well as in tertiary level (Chaudhury & Karim, 2014). Unlike the previous two studies which showed an improvement after the implementation of CLT, this study did not find significant improvements. This difference could be due to the different context of the learners and the not entirely similar implementation methods. There are several possible causes, such as the limited duration of the intervention, the lack of teacher training in implementing the strategy, or student characteristics that affect engagement in learning.

The CLT approach was implemented in one semester and the samples were the freshmen of ELT department in the second semester who just learned to adapt in the college life. This can be one of factors that affect their reading comprehension as well as their acceptance in the CLT approach that focuses on students-centered learning activities. In addition, the students also have just accomplished several courses that related to ELT and English. This means that their former knowledge in English is still lacking, meanwhile, the reading test in TOEFL requires complex understanding. Some previous studies have concluded several factors that influence reading comprehension in TOEFL test. They are vocabulary, slow reading, and lack of strategy (Friska, 2022). Another study also emphasized some factors that can be difficult in TOEFL reading test namely determining the main idea, supporting detail, vocabulary, reference and inference (Dahlan, 2021). Moreover, students who major in EFL also face difficulty in TOEFL reading comprehension test including vocabulary, duration and lack of understanding of the instruction (Wahyuningsih et al., 2024) as well as accuracy in reading (Isma Gustin, 2023). Therefore, to be able to do the reading comprehension test, each individual must possess rich vocabularies, the ability to understand the instruction, and some techniques to master by practicing doing the test.

Although different from some previous studies that show the positive and significant use of CLT, these results make an important contribution in understanding the limitations of using the CLT approach as well as opening up opportunities for future exploration of alternative approaches. Reading comprehension in TOEFL test require practice and drill to finish questions in limited time. Meanwhile, the implementation of CLT focuses on learner's communicative needs and less emphasis on grammar (Suemith, 1994). This is such a contradictory with a finding that accuracy is one of difficulties in TOEFL reading comprehension test (Isma Gustin, 2023). Thus, CLT might be better implemented to English skill that focuses on two ways communication such as speaking or listening skill.

5. Conclusion

In this study, CLT does not aid students to comprehend reading text especially in TOEFL reading comprehension test due to some factors such as learners' characteristics who need more experience and exposure in learning second language and the fact that CLT cannot aid the students to understand reading accuracy. However, the implementation of CLT can be powerful when the aim of this approach is to emphasize the communication skill rather than to drill students with reading exercises.

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