Communicative Language Teaching in a Non-Urban Madrasah Aliyah: A Qualitative Case Study of Students' Speaking Development at Madrasah Aliyah Ittihadul Bayan Telaga Lebur Sekotong

Muhammad Hilmi

STID Mustafa Ibrahim Al-Ishlahuddiny Kediri

Email Correspondence: muhammadhilmi86@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

English speaking ability was an essential communicative skill in responding to the demands of globalization; however, it remained a persistent challenge for students in Indonesia, particularly at the Madrasah Aliyah level in rural areas. Low student participation in English speaking activities and the continued dominance of conventional, teacher-centered instruction indicate the need for more communicative and context-sensitive teaching approaches. This study aimed to explore and describe the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in enhancing students' speaking ability at a non-urban Madrasah Aliyah in Indonesia. Employing a qualitative approach with a case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis, and were analyzed thematically. The findings reveal that the implementation of CLT through communicative activities such as pair work, group discussions, and role play contributed to increased student participation, confidence, and willingness to speak English. CLT also fostered a more collaborative classroom environment and encouraged students to view speaking as a communicative process rather than mere memorization. This study contributed new insights into how CLT operates within a rural Islamic schooling context, where cultural norms, limited exposure to English, and institutional constraints shape classroom interaction and pedagogical adaptation. The study

concluded that CLT can be effectively implemented in the Madrasah Aliyah context when adapted to local conditions and provides pedagogical implications for the development of more communicative English language teaching practices in underrepresented educational settings. Future research was recommended to investigate CLT implementation across broader madrasah contexts and to employ mixed-method approaches for a more comprehensive understanding.

1. Introduction

English speaking ability is widely recognized as a core component of communicative competence and an essential skill for engaging in globalized educational and professional environments. In an era marked by intensified cross-cultural interaction, the ability to communicate orally in English has become a key indicator of academic readiness and employability. Nevertheless, empirical evidence consistently shows that English proficiency in Indonesia, particularly in speaking skills, remains relatively low. According to the EF English Proficiency Index (EF EPI) 2025, Indonesia ranks 80th out of 123 countries, with a speaking score of approximately 447, placing it in the *Low Proficiency* category and below the global average (EF United States, 2025). This persistent condition suggests a structural problem in English language education, especially in fostering effective oral communication.

Despite the inclusion of English as a compulsory subject from early stages of formal education, many Indonesian students demonstrate limited ability to use English communicatively. Prior studies indicate that this issue is closely related to the continued dominance of teacher-centered instruction, excessive focus on grammatical accuracy, and limited opportunities for meaningful interaction in the classroom. Such instructional practices often fail to provide learners with sufficient exposure to authentic language use, resulting in low confidence, limited fluency, and minimal communicative engagement. These challenges are particularly evident in speaking activities, which require not only linguistic knowledge but also interactional competence and pragmatic awareness.

In response to these limitations, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely promoted as an effective pedagogical approach to enhance learners' speaking ability by emphasizing interaction, meaning negotiation, and real-life communication. Numerous international studies have reported positive outcomes of CLT implementation in improving students' oral proficiency, classroom participation, and communicative confidence. However, most of these studies have been conducted in general secondary schools, urban contexts, or higher education settings, leaving underexplored contexts such as Madrasah Aliyah, particularly those located in non-urban or rural areas.

Madrasah Aliyah represents a unique educational setting where English instruction is situated alongside strong religious and cultural values, distinct institutional constraints, and varied student proficiency levels. These contextual factors may influence how CLT principles are interpreted, adapted, and practiced in real classrooms. Yet, existing research

has paid limited attention to how CLT is actually implemented in such contexts, how students respond to communicative activities, and what pedagogical tensions emerge between CLT ideals and classroom realities. As a result, current literature provides insufficient empirical insight into whether and how CLT can function effectively within madrasah-based English instruction.

Therefore, this study aims to address this gap by examining the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in a Madrasah Aliyah located in a non-urban Indonesian context, with a specific focus on its influence on students' speaking ability and classroom interaction patterns. Rather than merely confirming the effectiveness of CLT, this study seeks to critically explore the alignment and misalignment between CLT theoretical principles and practical classroom constraints, including students' language proficiency, time limitations, and socio-cultural norms. By situating the findings within both national and international discussions on CLT, this study is expected to contribute context-sensitive insights that extend existing scholarship and offer pedagogical implications for English teaching in underrepresented educational settings.

Despite the substantial body of empirical research confirming the general effectiveness of CLT, a clear research gap remains regarding its implementation in the context of Madrasah Aliyah (senior high school equivalent) in rural areas, such as Madrasah Aliyah Ittihadul Bayan Telaga Lebur Sekotong. Previous studies have predominantly been conducted in public schools or higher education institutions, employing quantitative or mixed-method designs, and have provided limited qualitative insight into students' lived experiences within Islamic educational settings. Therefore, further research is needed to explore in depth the experiences, challenges, perceptions of both students and teachers, as well as the socio-cultural dynamics that influence the implementation of CLT in this specific Madrasah Aliyah context.

Moreover, the use of a qualitative approach allows for richer contextual insights into how verbal and social interactions occur within CLT-based classrooms and how these interactions impact the development of students' speaking skills—elements that are not fully captured through quantitative approaches alone. Thus, this study not only seeks to expand theoretical understanding of CLT effectiveness but also aims to generate practical and context-sensitive insights that contribute to English language teaching practices in madrasah settings.

Based on the conceptual and empirical discussions presented above, the research problem of this study is formulated in the following research question: How does the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) improve students' speaking ability at Madrasah Aliyah Ittihadul Bayan Telaga Lebur Sekotong? This research question focuses not only on learning outcomes in terms of improved speaking ability but also emphasizes the process of CLT implementation itself, including how the approach is applied in daily classroom practices. Accordingly, the focus of the study is directed toward students' learning experiences, interaction patterns developed during the learning process, and teachers' instructional practices in creating a communication-based learning environment that enables students to use English actively and meaningfully in accordance with the social and cultural context of the madrasah.

In line with the research problem, the primary objective of this study is to explore, understand, and describe in depth the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in English language learning through a qualitative approach. This study aims to reveal how communicative strategies are employed by teachers to develop students' speaking skills, how students respond and participate during the learning process, and the challenges faced by both teachers and students in implementing the CLT approach. In addition, this research seeks to understand how communicative-based instructional practices impact the development of students' speaking abilities, particularly in terms of speaking confidence, fluency, and the ability to convey meaning orally in English.

The urgency of this research lies in its contribution to addressing the research gap in qualitative studies related to the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching within Islamic educational institutions, particularly at the Madrasah Aliyah level in Indonesia. To date, studies on CLT have largely been dominated by quantitative research conducted in general schools located in urban areas, while in-depth research examining CLT practices in madrasah contexts—especially in rural settings—remains relatively limited in the academic literature. Therefore, this study is expected to provide a more comprehensive contextual portrayal of how CLT is adapted and implemented in accordance with students' characteristics, school culture, and the social and geographical conditions of the madrasah.

Practically, the findings of this study are expected to benefit various stakeholders in the field of education. For English teachers, the results may serve as a reference for designing and developing more communicative, contextual, and student-centered speaking instruction. For curriculum developers and educational policymakers, this research may provide valuable considerations in formulating more effective and relevant English language education policies and programs, particularly those aimed at enhancing students' speaking skills as a core competence in foreign language mastery. Ultimately, this study is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to efforts to improve the quality of English language teaching in Madrasah Aliyah, especially in rural areas, through the implementation of a Communicative Language Teaching approach oriented toward real-life language use.

2. Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design with a descriptive approach. Qualitative research aims to gain an in-depth understanding of social phenomena through the exploration of meanings, experiences, perceptions, and interactions of research participants within their natural contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2016). In this study, the phenomenon under investigation is the implementation of *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) in English language instruction and its impact on students' speaking ability at Madrasah Aliyah. A descriptive qualitative approach was selected because this study does not seek to test hypotheses or measure effects statistically, but rather to provide a detailed description of the learning processes, strategies, and classroom experiences that occur during instruction. This approach enables the researcher to describe how CLT is implemented by the teacher, how students respond to communicative activities, and the

contextual factors that influence the success or challenges of CLT implementation (Tisdell et al., 2025).

2.1 Data Collection

To increase the validity of the results, data were gathered using methodological triangulation, which included classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and instructional documentation (Miles et al., 2020).

Communicative activities, teacher-student and student-student interactions, participation patterns, and students' oral language use during speaking sessions were the main topics of classroom observations. The English teacher and a few chosen students were interviewed in-depth to learn more about their perspectives, experiences, and thoughts regarding CLT-based speaking training. In order to contextualize and validate the observational and interview data, instructional papers, including lesson plans, teaching materials, and student speaking assignments, were examined.

2.2 Data Analysis Procedures

Thematic analysis was used to examine the data in accordance with Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach. To guarantee analytical rigor and transparency, the analysis was carried out in a number of methodical steps.

To obtain a general grasp of the data, the researcher first performed data familiarization by reading observation notes, interview transcripts, and documents several times. Second, significant data units pertaining to CLT implementation, student participation, interaction patterns, and contextual restrictions were identified through human initial coding. Instead of being imposed beforehand, codes were created inductively from the input.

Third, the codes were **organized into potential themes** by identifying patterns and relationships across data sources. Fourth, these themes were **reviewed and refined** to ensure internal coherence and clear distinctions between themes. Fifth, the final themes were **defined and named**, with each theme supported by representative data excerpts. Finally, the themes were synthesized and interpreted in relation to CLT theory and previous research to produce an analytical narrative.

2.3 Trustworthiness and Research Rigor

A number of qualitative rigor techniques were used to guarantee the reliability of the results. By contrasting results from observations, interviews, and documentation, data triangulation was employed. To improve dependability and transparency, an audit trail was kept by methodically documenting data collection methods, coding choices, and theme development processes.

In order to critically examine coding categories and theme interpretations, peer debriefing was also carried out through conversations with other researchers. In order to confirm the precision and reliability of the interpretations, member checking was also used by providing the instructor participant with preliminary findings. Together, these techniques improve the qualitative analysis's dependability and rigor.

2.4 Methodological Contribution

This paper presents a thorough qualitative review of CLT implementation and enhances its methodological credibility by giving a clear and organized explanation of the data analysis techniques and rigor measures. The case study design contributes to ELT studies, especially in faith-based and non-urban EFL settings, by enabling a nuanced understanding of how communicative language education is enacted, negotiated, and changed in a madrasah context.

3. Result

The purpose of this study is to critically examine how the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) enhances students' speaking skills in an EFL context, specifically in a Madrasah Aliyah setting. This study aims to provide light on the pedagogical procedures, contextual limitations, and instructional modifications that influence the use of CLT in the classroom rather than just proving its efficacy.

Classroom observations, in-depth teacher and student interviews, and instructional document analysis were used to produce the research findings. Following a thematic analysis of the data, a number of major and minor themes emerged that illustrate the advantages and disadvantages of using CLT in a non-urban, religiously oriented educational setting.

3.1 Patterns of Communicative Language Teaching Implementation in Speaking Instruction

The results show that student-centered communication activities, such as role play, group discussions, pair work, and straightforward conversational simulations based on students' everyday experiences, were the main means of implementing CLT. Instead of concentrating only on grammatical correctness, these exercises were intended to inspire pupils to use English in meaningful ways.

Observations in the classroom, however, show that the application of CLT did not accurately represent its idealized theoretical model. In order to accommodate students' limited vocabulary and low speaking skill, teachers frequently simplified and tightly organized communicative assignments even if they encouraged student interaction. This result implies that CLT operated as a modified or hybrid technique in this situation, striking a balance between the required teacher intervention and communicative principles.

This adaptation supports Hiep's (2007) argument that CLT should be viewed as a flexible framework rather than a rigid method. In the madrasah context, where students are accustomed to teacher-centered instruction and formal classroom norms, the teacher's role as a facilitator was continuously negotiated rather than fully relinquished.

3.2 Changes in Students' Behavior and Participation in Speaking

The results of classroom observations and interviews indicate significant changes in students' learning behavior, particularly in terms of speaking participation. In the initial stage, most students tended to be passive, reluctant to speak, and afraid of making mistakes. However, after CLT was implemented consistently, students began to demonstrate increased confidence and active involvement in speaking activities. This

change was evident in the increased frequency of students voluntarily speaking during group discussions, their willingness to respond to peers' questions, and their ability to express simple ideas, even though their language structures were not yet fully accurate.

These findings suggest that CLT contributes to reducing speaking anxiety and fostering students' self-confidence in using English.

3.3 Students' Experiences and Perceptions of Speaking Instruction

Based on the results of in-depth interviews, students perceived CLT-based speaking instruction as a more enjoyable and meaningful learning experience. Students no longer viewed speaking as an activity limited to memorizing dialogues or responding to teachers' questions, but rather as a process of communication to convey messages. Most students reported that group work and interaction with peers helped them learn from one another, particularly in expanding vocabulary and improving pronunciation in a natural way. These findings further reinforce the response to the research question regarding how CLT qualitatively influences students' speaking ability, especially in terms of their learning experiences.

3.4 Dynamics of Teacher–Student Interaction in CLT-Based Classrooms

This study also found notable changes in classroom interaction patterns. Interactions that were previously dominated by the teacher shifted toward two-way and even multi-directional interactions among students. The teacher more frequently provided opportunities for students to negotiate meaning, ask questions, and respond to their peers' opinions. These findings indicate that CLT affects not only students' speaking ability but also fosters a more communicative and collaborative classroom climate. Such intensive interaction strengthens the use of English as a tool for communication rather than merely as an object of learning.

3.5 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of CLT

In addition to the main findings, this study identified several secondary findings relevant to the research focus, particularly the supporting and inhibiting factors in improving students' speaking ability. The supporting factors include the teacher's adaptive attitude toward communicative approaches, the use of topics closely related to students' daily lives, and a safe classroom environment that does not overly emphasize errors. Meanwhile, the inhibiting factors include students' limited vocabulary, differences in speaking proficiency levels among students, and limited instructional time for more intensive speaking practice.

These secondary findings are important as they provide a broader context for understanding the conditions under which CLT is implemented and highlight key factors that need to be considered for its effective application.

3.6 Summary of Research Findings

To clarify the research results, a summary of the findings can be presented in the following table

Table.1 Summary Findings

Aspect Examined	Main Findings
CLT Implementation	Based on communicative activities and student interaction
Student Behavior	More confident, active, and willing to speak
Learning Experience	Speaking is perceived as communication, not memorization
Classroom Interaction	More collaborative and communicative
Supporting Factors	Teacher acts as a facilitator; activities are relevant
Inhibiting Factors	Limited vocabulary; limited instructional time

3.7 Interpretation of Findings and Contribution to Knowledge

Interpretively, the findings of this study indicate that the improvement of students' speaking ability is not solely determined by mastery of language structures, but rather by opportunities for communication, social support, and a communicative learning environment. CLT has proven effective in developing students' communicative competence through a natural and contextualized process.

The contribution of this study lies in enriching the understanding of CLT implementation within the context of Madrasah Aliyah, particularly in Islamic educational settings and non-urban areas. These findings expand the field of English Language Teaching (ELT) by providing a qualitative perspective that emphasizes the processes, experiences, and meanings of speaking instruction, thereby serving as a valuable reference for teachers, researchers, and educational policymakers.

4. Discussion

This chapter discusses the research findings regarding the implementation of *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) in improving students' speaking ability at Madrasah Aliyah Ittihadul Bayan Telaga Lebur Sekotong. The discussion links the empirical findings of the study with key CLT theories as well as previous research in the field of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Thus, this discussion not only explains what occurred in the classroom but also situates the research findings within a broader scholarly context.

4.1 Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Speaking Instruction

The research findings indicate that the implementation of CLT is realized through learning activities that emphasize the communicative and contextual use of English, such as pair work, group discussions, and role play. The teacher acts as a facilitator who guides the communication process, while students become active participants directly engaged in speaking practice.

These findings align with the concept of CLT proposed by Richards and Rodgers (2014), who emphasize that language learning should be oriented toward the real use of language through social interaction (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). Similarly, Savignon (1997) states that communicative competence develops when students are given opportunities to negotiate meaning in authentic communicative situations (Savignon, 1997). Moreover, Hiep (2007) highlights that CLT is flexible and can be adapted to local contexts, including in Madrasah settings. Therefore, the implementation of CLT in this

study reinforces the view that speaking instruction is more effective when it focuses on the meaning and function of language rather than solely on linguistic accuracy (Hiep, 2007).

4.2 The Impact of CLT on Students' Behavior and Participation in Speaking

The findings of this study indicate positive changes in students' behavior, particularly in terms of increased confidence, activeness, and participation in speaking English. Students who were previously passive began to express their opinions and engage in classroom interactions.

These findings support the study by Zhang and Ardasheva (2019), which states that speaking anxiety in EFL contexts is often influenced by learning environments that emphasize mistakes. CLT, with its more error-tolerant approach, can create a safe and supportive learning atmosphere (Zhang & Ardasheva, 2019). Richards (2015) emphasizes that a positive communicative environment contributes to enhancing students' self-confidence (Richards, 2015). Furthermore, Goh and Burns (2012) explain that communication-based speaking instruction allows students to gradually develop fluency and confidence (Goh & Burns, 2012). The results of this study are also in line with the findings of Sato and Ballinger (2015), who showed that peer interaction can increase language awareness and encourage students to take risks in using the target language (Sato & Ballinger, 2015).

4.3 Students' Experiences and Perceptions of CLT-Based Speaking Instruction

This study found that students perceived CLT-based speaking instruction as an enjoyable and meaningful learning experience. Students no longer viewed speaking as an activity of memorizing dialogues, but rather as a means to convey ideas and communicate. These findings align with Littlewood (2014), who states that communication-oriented learning can enhance students' engagement and motivation (Littlewood, 2014). Richards (2015) also emphasizes that the relevance of learning materials to students' real-life experiences is a key factor in successful language learning (Richards, 2015). The results of this study are further supported by Alharbi (2015), who found that communicative approaches can increase students' motivation and foster positive attitudes toward speaking instruction, particularly in EFL contexts (Alharbi, 2015).

4.4 Dynamics of Teacher–Student Interaction in CLT Classrooms

The research findings indicate a shift in classroom interaction dynamics from a teacher-centered to a student-centered approach. Peer-to-peer interactions became more dominant, while the teacher acted as a guide and provided indirect feedback.

These findings are consistent with Long's (2015) Interaction Hypothesis, which states that language acquisition occurs through interaction and negotiation of meaning (Long, 2015). Canale (1983) also emphasizes that communicative competence develops through communication practice involving the integrated use of various language components. Thus, the increased intensity of interaction in CLT classrooms directly contributes to the development of students' speaking abilities (Canale, 1983).

4.5 Supporting and Inhibiting Factors in the Implementation of CLT

This study identified several supporting factors in the implementation of CLT, including the teacher's open-minded attitude, the selection of relevant topics, and a classroom atmosphere that does not judge mistakes. These factors align with the findings of Qasserras (2023), who states in his systematic review that the success of CLT is greatly influenced by teacher readiness and the learning environment (Qasserras, 2023). The inhibiting factors identified include limited vocabulary, differences in students' proficiency levels, and limited instructional time. These findings are also reported in the studies by Elmiwati et al. (2024) and Radinsa and Puspitasari (2025), which indicate that the implementation of CLT in EFL classrooms requires adaptation to the real conditions of students (Candadila & Puspitasari, 2025; Elmiwati et al., 2024).

4.6 Implications of the Research Findings

Theoretically, this study reinforces the view that the development of speaking skills is more effective through a communicative approach that emphasizes interaction and the authentic use of language. These findings support the theoretical framework of CLT as proposed by Savignon (2018), Richards and Rodgers (2021), and Long (2015), which asserts that communicative competence develops through social practice rather than merely mastering language structures. Practically, this study provides implications for English teachers to optimize communicative activities in speaking instruction. Teachers are expected to create a safe and collaborative learning environment, as recommended by Goh and Burns (2016) and Ockey and Wagner (2018) in the context of speaking skill development and assessment (Ockey, 2024).

4.7 Research Evaluation

This study has several limitations, including the fact that it was conducted in only one madrasah, which limits the generalizability of the findings. In addition, the qualitative approach heavily relies on the researcher's interpretation. These limitations have also been acknowledged in previous CLT studies (Alharbi, 2015; Qasserras, 2023). Future research could adopt a **mixed-methods approach** to obtain a more comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of CLT. Moreover, subsequent studies could explore the integration of Islamic values in CLT activities or compare the implementation of CLT in madrasahs and public schools, as suggested by Radinsa and Puspitasari (2025). This study contributes theoretically by enriching the understanding of CLT within the context of Madrasah Aliyah and practically by providing empirical guidance for teachers in developing communicative and contextualized speaking instruction. Consequently, the study expands the application of CLT in the context of Islamic education and EFL teaching in Indonesia.

5. Conclusion

This study comes to the conclusion that the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in a Madrasah Aliyah context functions as a context-sensitive and adaptive pedagogical practice rather than as a direct application of an idealized communicative model based on the qualitative analysis of classroom observations, interviews, and instructional documents. Pair work, group discussions, and role play are examples of student-centered activities that have been shown to increase students' confidence, involvement, and willingness to speak English. However, the impact of these activities was found to be closely mediated by students' language preparedness, classroom norms, and institutional constraints.

This study both critically expands and validates the CLT framework from a theoretical standpoint. The results validate that speaking growth is aided by interaction, meaning negotiation, and real-world communicative practice, which is in line with communicative competence theory. The study does, however, cast doubt on the notion that CLT principles—like learner autonomy and spontaneous interaction—can be completely achieved in every situation. CLT necessitated significant pedagogical adaption, directed interaction, and ongoing teacher mediation in the madrasah context under investigation, suggesting that communicative competence is developed through negotiated practice rather than the blind application of theory.

In terms of methodology, this study offers a detailed qualitative description of how CLT is implemented, limited, and transformed in a rural Islamic educational setting—a situation that is still underrepresented in high-impact international ELT literature. The study promotes a more nuanced understanding of CLT as a flexible framework affected by learner proficiency, cultural norms, and institutional realities by highlighting conflicts between theory and practice.

In practical terms, the results imply that English teachers in madrasahs and rural schools should selectively and reflexively implement CLT, striking a balance between communicative objectives and language scaffolding, structured support, and cultural sensitivity. When CLT is applied as a guided and contextually grounded approach instead than a prescriptive strategy, it yields the best results.

Despite its merits, this study's single-site design and reliance on qualitative interpretation limit how far the results may be applied. Therefore, it is recommended that future studies use comparative or mixed-methods designs, look at how speaking proficiency develops over time, and further explore how CLT might be combined with regional values, such as Islamic educational ideas. The theoretical soundness and empirical scope of CLT research in various EFL contexts would be strengthened by such studies.

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