IMPROVING STUDENTS' SPEAKING ABILITY USING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)

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Abstract: This paper explores the implementation of **Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)** to enhance the English speaking proficiency of students in an Islamic boarding school (pesantren) context, specifically at MTs Ja-alhaq, Bengkulu. Despite intensive language programs, students often struggle with oral communication due to traditional, monotonous teaching methods. The study argues that by shifting the focus from grammatical accuracy to **communicative competence** and meaningful interaction, CLT can transform existing rigid routines—such as morning vocabulary and speech training—into engaging, student-centered activities. The findings suggest that integrating CLT-based tasks like information-gap activities and role-plays significantly improves students' fluency, confidence, and motivation in a bilingual environment.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Speaking Ability, Islamic Boarding School, Communicative Competence, EFL (English as a Foreign Language).

In the contemporary global era, English-speaking ability has become a vital skill for meaningful interaction, since English is widely used as a medium of communication across countries, cultures, and social contexts. As an international language, English facilitates communication among people who come from different linguistic backgrounds, enabling smoother interaction in education, business, technology, and daily life. In Indonesia, English is taught in both

religious and non-religious educational institutions, including Islamic boarding schools (pesantren), where students are expected to acquire not only religious knowledge but also proficiency in foreign languages. In such contexts, speaking plays a central role because it allows learners to express ideas, share thoughts, and convey messages orally in real-time interaction. According to Gert and Hans (2008), speaking is essentially speech or utterances intended to be recognized by both speaker and listener, while Brown and Yule (1999) emphasize that speaking depends on the complexity of the message, sometimes making it difficult for speakers to clarify exactly what they wish to say. Rebecca (2006) further notes that speaking is the first mode in which children acquire language, is deeply embedded in everyday language activity, and serves as a major driver of language change and contact, making it critical for understanding bilingualism and multilingual interaction. Given these theoretical foundations, it is essential that students who have learned English intensively be able to interact orally in English, yet in many Islamic boarding schools, such as Mts Ja-alhaq in Sentot Ali Basa, Bengkulu, most students still seldom use English in their daily conversations. Instead, they tend to rely on Arabic or Indonesian as their main media of communication, largely because of the traditional, monotonous teaching methods employed in English classrooms, which lack innovation and fail to create an engaging English-speaking atmosphere.

Against this backdrop, the present paper explores how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) can be implemented to improve students' English speaking ability in an Islamic boarding-school context. The CLT approach is grounded in the view of language as communication, and its primary goal is to develop learners' communicative competence rather than merely their grammatical accuracy. Richard and Rodger (1999) define communicative competence as the ability to use language appropriately in different social contexts, encompassing grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence (knowledge of appropriate

language use), and strategic competence (skills for managing communication breakdowns). CLT shifts the focus from isolated grammar drills to meaningful interaction, emphasizing how language functions in real-life situations rather than how it is formally constructed. In CLT, students are encouraged to use language forms appropriately across a variety of contexts and purposes, while the teacher assumes multiple roles such as facilitator, motivator, assessor, and corrector rather than acting solely as a lecturer. Harmer (1998) underlines that CLT stresses the importance of learners' exposure to authentic language use and offers them ample opportunities to practice speaking, listening, and negotiating meaning, which are essential for developing fluency and confidence. From this perspective, CLT not only aims at improving grammatical accuracy but also seeks to cultivate learners' ability to communicate effectively, spontaneously, and comfortably in everyday situations.

In the learning process, CLT-based activities are designed to promote real oral communication and help students master the components of communicative competence. Students are expected to communicate with one another, exchange information, and solve tasks collaboratively, while the teacher supports them by creating an interesting and motivating classroom environment to prevent students from feeling bored or disengaged. Harmer (1998) distinguishes communicative activities from non-communicative ones by highlighting that the former focus on meaningful interaction using a variety of language forms, whereas the latter tend to center on grammatical form and sentence construction. In a CLT classroom, learners often engage in pair work, group discussions, problem-solving tasks, and information-gap activities, all of which require them to negotiate meaning and produce language for a genuine communicative purpose. This contrasts sharply with traditional methods that emphasize rote memorization and controlled exercises, which may build grammatical knowledge but rarely foster spontaneous speaking. By shifting the emphasis from accuracy to fluency in the early stages of

learning, CLT allows students to experiment with language, make mistakes, and gradually refine their performance through repeated use and feedback, thereby developing both confidence and competence. In an Islamic boarding-school setting, such as those described in Indonesia, CLT can be integrated with existing language-development programs to strengthen students' speaking ability. Islamic boarding schools are educational institutions where students usually reside in dormitories and receive instruction in both classical Islamic texts and general scientific knowledge, including foreign languages, with the aim of mastering religious sciences alongside practical life skills and moral guidance. In these institutions, various informal English-learning activities are already implemented beyond the formal classroom, including morning vocabulary drills, language-movement programs, weekly morning conversations, self-development clubs (such as discussion, speech, storytelling, and news-reading clubs), vocabulary memorization, language-deepening sessions, language-repairing procedures, speech training, bilingual contests, bilingual fun games, the use of amplifiers for announcements and language practice, and award systems to motivate language discipline. These activities aim to create an English-speaking environment and help students use English in daily life, but they often remain procedurally rigid and insufficiently interactive. When CLT principles are applied, these existing programs can be transformed into more communicative tasks—for example, turning morning vocabulary into information-gap games or role-plays, converting morning conversations into guided discussions and debates, and reorganizing speech-training and bilingual-contest activities into communicative tasks that require negotiation, problem-solving, or collaborative decision-making. Core CLT principles for improving speaking performance include prioritizing fluency over accuracy, promoting student-centered learning, and employing authentic materials and tasks. In CLT, the primary goal is that learners can convey their message effectively, even if they occasionally make grammatical mistakes, which are treated as natural and even beneficial for language development.

Teachers are encouraged to avoid immediate correction during speaking activities, instead allowing students to express themselves freely and then providing selective, contextual feedback afterward. The classroom dynamic shifts from teacher-centered lecturing to student-centered interaction, so that students do most of the talking through pair work, group discussions, and performance-based tasks. At the same time, CLT encourages the use of authentic materials such as newspapers, videos, podcasts, and social media texts, which expose learners to real-world language, cultural nuances, idiomatic expressions, and varied registers. Research on CLT in Indonesian secondary and tertiary institutions has consistently shown that students who engage in CLT-based activities demonstrate significant improvements in fluency, pronunciation, coherence, vocabulary use, and confidence, especially when tasks are meaningful, learner-oriented, and closely tied to their daily experiences and interests. These findings suggest that a similar approach can be applied in Islamic boarding schools to motivate students to speak English more frequently and willingly in both classroom and non-classroom settings.

Several types of CLT-based activities have proven effective for enhancing speaking performance. Information-gap activities, in which each student has unique information required to complete a task, compel learners to ask questions, clarify details, and exchange information in real time, thereby fostering genuine interaction. Role-plays and simulations allow students to practice dialogues in realistic situations such as ordering food, checking into a hotel, conducting interviews, or participating in religious or academic events, which helps them transfer language skills to authentic contexts. Opinion-sharing activities, including debates and discussions on topics of personal or social relevance, stimulate spontaneous speech and encourage students to elaborate their ideas, defend their viewpoints, and respond to others' arguments. Task-based projects, such as planning a school event, designing a poster, or preparing a short presentation,

require collaboration and sustained communication, shifting the focus from decontextualized grammar exercises to purposeful language use. All of these activities align well with the existing language-development programs in Islamic boarding schools, since they can be adapted into morning conversations, speech-training sessions, bilingual contests, and club activities, making them more engaging and communicative.

Implementing CLT in an Islamic boarding-school context also has important implications for students' confidence, motivation, and overall language development. Studies that have examined the impact of CLT on English speaking skills in secondary and tertiary classrooms report a marked increase in students' confidence, reduced speaking anxiety, and greater willingness to participate in oral activities. In many cases, learners shift from passive observers to active participants as they become more accustomed to using English in low-pressure, interactive environments. At the same time, CLT fosters positive attitudes toward language learning because tasks are usually more enjoyable, relevant, and socially meaningful than traditional grammar-focused exercises. In an Islamic boarding school such as Mts Ja-alhaq, where students already live in a structured environment and participate in numerous language-related rituals, CLT can help transform the existing language rules and routines into communicative practices that students find motivating and meaningful. For example, when students know that using English carries not only disciplinary implications but also opportunities for recognition, awards, and participation in bilingual contests, they are more likely to view speaking as a valuable and rewarding skill rather than a compulsory chore. Despite the many advantages, implementing CLT in practice may present certain challenges. Some learners may initially feel hesitant or reluctant to speak, especially if they have previously experienced rigid, error-oriented teaching methods. Teachers may also need time and training to shift from a traditional, teacher-centered role to a more facilitative, student-centered one. Moreover,

designing effective CLT tasks requires careful planning to ensure that activities are linguistically appropriate, culturally sensitive, and aligned with the curricular goals of the boarding-school curriculum. However, empirical studies on CLT in Indonesian and other EFL contexts have demonstrated that, when properly implemented, this approach significantly improves students' speaking proficiency, including fluency, accuracy, vocabulary range, and interactive competence. T-test results and qualitative analyses often reveal higher post-test scores and more positive attitudes among students exposed to CLT compared with those taught through conventional methods, underscoring the effectiveness of communicative language teaching in developing speaking ability.

In conclusion, improving students' speaking ability through Communicative Language Teaching offers a powerful response to the persistent problem of limited English use in Islamic boarding schools and similar contexts. By shifting the focus from isolated grammar instruction to meaningful interaction, CLT enables learners to practice English in real-life situations, build confidence, and develop comprehensive communicative competence. When integrated with existing language-development programs—such as morning conversations, language-movement schemes, self-development clubs, speech training, bilingual contests, and award systems—CLT can transform a monotonous, traditional classroom into a dynamic, interactive environment where students willingly choose to speak English. For institutions like Mts Ja-alhaq, Sentot Ali Basa Islamic Boarding School, the systematic application of CLT, supported by well-designed tasks, authentic materials, and a supportive teacher role, can significantly enhance students' speaking performance and prepare them to communicate effectively in an increasingly globalized world.

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