

Improving Students' Listening, Speaking, and Vocabulary Mastery through Conversation-Based Communicative Language Teaching at Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) through conversation-based activities to support students' listening ability, speaking ability, and vocabulary mastery. The research was motivated by students' challenges in understanding spoken English and expressing ideas orally due to conventional teacher-centered methods. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, involving one English teacher and twenty eighth-grade students at Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau during the 2025/2026 academic year. Data were collected through classroom observation, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña. The findings indicated positive changes in the classroom environment, where conversation-based activities—such as group discussions and pair work—appeared to foster higher student engagement and confidence. Observations and interview data revealed perceived improvements in students' ability to follow oral instructions, their fluency during interactions, and a more varied use of vocabulary in context. The study concludes that integrating conversation within a CLT framework serves as a beneficial approach for developing integrated language skills in EFL classrooms by providing meaningful opportunities for social interaction.

Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji penerapan *Communicative Language Teaching* (CLT) melalui aktivitas berbasis percakapan dalam mendukung kemampuan menyimak, kemampuan berbicara, dan penguasaan kosakata siswa. Penelitian ini dilatarbelakangi oleh kesulitan siswa dalam memahami bahasa Inggris lisan dan mengungkapkan gagasan secara verbal akibat penggunaan metode pembelajaran konvensional yang berpusat pada guru. Penelitian menggunakan desain deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan satu guru bahasa Inggris dan dua puluh siswa kelas VIII di Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau pada tahun ajaran 2025/2026. Data dikumpulkan melalui observasi kelas, wawancara, dan dokumentasi, kemudian dianalisis menggunakan model interaktif Matthew B. Miles, A. Michael Huberman, dan Johnny Saldaña. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya perubahan positif dalam lingkungan pembelajaran, di mana aktivitas berbasis percakapan—seperti diskusi kelompok dan kerja berpasangan—mampu meningkatkan keterlibatan dan rasa percaya diri siswa. Data observasi dan wawancara menunjukkan adanya peningkatan kemampuan siswa dalam memahami instruksi lisan, kelancaran berbicara saat berinteraksi, serta penggunaan kosakata yang lebih beragam sesuai konteks. Penelitian ini menyimpulkan bahwa integrasi percakapan dalam kerangka CLT menjadi pendekatan yang efektif untuk mengembangkan keterampilan berbahasa secara terpadu dalam kelas EFL dengan menyediakan kesempatan interaksi sosial yang bermakna.

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INTRODUCTION

English plays a crucial role as an international language in education, communication, science, and technology. In the Indonesian context, English is taught as a foreign language (EFL) and is a compulsory subject across various educational levels. The primary goal of EFL instruction is to develop students' communicative competence, which enables them to use the language effectively in real-life situations. However, achieving this goal remains a significant challenge in many Indonesian schools, where students often struggle to master both receptive and productive skills, particularly listening and speaking. These challenges are frequently rooted in a lack of vocabulary mastery, which serves as the fundamental building block for all language use. Preliminary observations at Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau revealed that eighth-grade students faced substantial difficulties in understanding spoken English, expressing ideas orally, and utilizing appropriate vocabulary during classroom interactions. The teaching process was found to be predominantly teacher-centered, focusing heavily on isolated grammar explanations and textbook-based exercises. Consequently, students had minimal opportunities to engage in meaningful communication, leading to low participation and high anxiety when prompted to speak.

While previous studies have explored Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in various contexts, there is a lack of qualitative exploration specifically addressing the integration of listening, speaking, and vocabulary through conversation-based activities within the unique environment of a foundation-based school like Yayasan Almadania. To address this gap, the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) through conversation-based activities is proposed as a strategic solution. CLT emphasizes interaction as both the means and the goal of learning, prioritizing communicative competence over the mere mastery of grammatical structures. According to Canale and Swain (1980), this competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic components. Within this framework, conversation serves as a core pedagogical tool that allows learners to practice turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and spontaneous language production simultaneously. Integrating conversation into the classroom shifts the dynamic toward a student-centered approach where the teacher acts as a facilitator.

By engaging in structured interactional tasks such as pair work, group discussions, and roleplay students receive oral input through interactive listening and produce immediate output through speaking. Furthermore, vocabulary is acquired naturally through contextualized use rather than rote memorization, which according to Nation (2001), is essential for long-term retention. Thus, conversation provides an authentic medium where listening, speaking, and vocabulary develop integratively. Based on these considerations, this study aims to investigate how the implementation of the Communicative Approach through conversation influences students' listening ability, speaking ability, and vocabulary mastery at Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau. Specifically, this research seeks to understand the classroom dynamics and the perceived changes in students' communicative engagement resulting from this approach. The findings are expected to contribute to more interactive and student-centered EFL teaching strategies in similar educational settings.

1. The Concept of Speaking Ability

Speaking is categorized as a productive skill that requires learners to produce spoken language in real-time communication. Nunan defines speaking as the ability to use language appropriately in interactive contexts to express ideas, opinions, and feelings (Nunan, 1991). Speaking competence includes several components such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and comprehension.

Brown emphasizes that speaking in foreign language learning involves micro-skills (such as producing phonemes and stress patterns) and macro-skills (such as organizing ideas coherently and using appropriate expressions in context) (Brown, 2007). Many EFL students face difficulties in speaking due to limited vocabulary, fear of making mistakes, lack of confidence, and minimal exposure to authentic communication.

Communicative teaching strategies that prioritize interaction can reduce students' anxiety and encourage them to participate actively in classroom discussions. Conversation-based learning provides opportunities for students to practice spontaneous communication and develop fluency gradually.

2. Vocabulary Mastery in Language Learning

Vocabulary is a core component of language proficiency. Without sufficient vocabulary knowledge, learners cannot understand spoken texts nor express their ideas effectively. Nation argues that knowing a word involves understanding its form, meaning, and use in various contexts (Nation, 2001). Vocabulary learning should not be limited to memorizing word lists; instead, it must involve contextualized practice and repeated exposure.

Schmitt also explains that vocabulary acquisition becomes more effective when learners encounter words in meaningful communicative situations (Nation, 2001). Conversation activities provide natural contexts for vocabulary expansion because students use words interactively rather than passively.

Therefore, vocabulary mastery is closely linked to listening and speaking ability. Students who possess broader vocabulary knowledge are more capable of comprehending spoken messages and expressing themselves fluently.

3. Communicative Approach in Language Teaching

The Communicative Approach, widely known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), emerged in the 1970s as a response to structural and grammar-translation methods. Richards and Rodgers explain that CLT emphasizes meaningful interaction and communicative competence as the primary goal of language learning (Richards & Theodore, 2001).

Canale and Swain identify four components of communicative competence: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence (Canale & Swain, 1980). These components highlight that effective communication involves not only grammatical accuracy but also appropriate language use in social contexts.

Littlewood further states that communicative activities can be categorized into functional communication activities and social interaction activities (Littlewood, 1981). Conversation tasks such as roleplay, information gap activities, pair work, and group discussions are examples of communicative techniques that foster authentic interaction.

In the classroom context of Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau, applying the Communicative Approach through conversation aligns with the need to shift from teacher-centered instruction to student-centered learning.

4. Conversation as a Pedagogical Strategy

Conversation is an essential element in communicative language teaching. Thornbury argues that conversation allows learners to practice turn-taking, negotiation of meaning, and spontaneous language production (Thornbury, 2005). Through interactive dialogue, learners develop both fluency and strategic competence.

Moreover, Harmer explains that conversation activities promote learner autonomy and engagement because students become active participants rather than passive listeners (Harmer, 2007). In conversation-based learning, teachers act as facilitators who guide interaction rather than dominate classroom discourse.

Thus, integrating conversation into EFL classrooms can significantly improve students' listening comprehension, speaking fluency, and vocabulary usage.

Conceptual Framework

This study is grounded in the problem of students' low listening ability, speaking ability, and vocabulary mastery caused by the dominance of teacher-centered instructional methods. In the EFL context, teaching that primarily focuses on grammar explanation and written exercises does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to develop communicative competence effectively.

The theoretical foundation of this research is based on the concept of communicative competence proposed by Michael Canale and Merrill Swain, who argue that language ability encompasses not only grammatical competence but also sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competence. This perspective implies that language teaching should emphasize meaningful communication rather than mere mastery of linguistic structures.

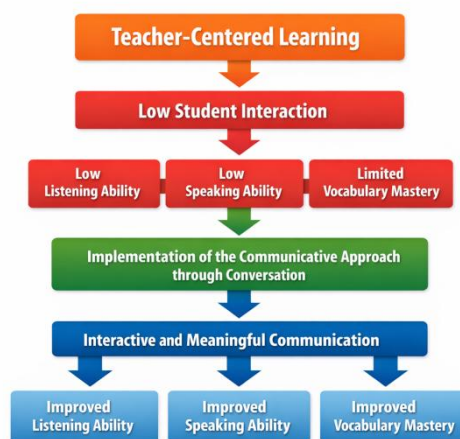
Listening ability in this study refers to H. Douglas Brown's view that listening is an active process of constructing meaning from spoken input rather than passive reception. Therefore,

learners require authentic and interactive language exposure to develop effective listening strategies. Speaking ability is understood based on Scott Thornbury's theory, which emphasizes that speaking develops through repeated communicative practice in meaningful contexts. The more students engage in real interaction, the more their fluency and confidence improve.

In terms of vocabulary mastery, this study adopts I. S. P. Nation's theory, which states that knowing a word involves understanding its form, meaning, and use in context. Vocabulary learning is not effective if limited to memorization; it must involve contextualized and communicative usage to ensure long-term retention.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, the Communicative Approach (Communicative Language Teaching/CLT) is considered an appropriate pedagogical solution. According to Richards and Rodgers, interaction is both the means and the goal of language learning. Through conversation-based activities such as pair work, group discussions, roleplays, and information-gap tasks, students receive language input through interactive listening, produce language output through meaningful speaking, and reinforce vocabulary through repeated contextual use.

Thus, the logical relationship in this study can be described as follows:



Picture 1. The conceptual Correlation

This framework illustrates that listening, speaking, and vocabulary develop simultaneously and integratively through authentic communicative activities. The Communicative Approach through conversation serves as the independent variable that influences the improvement of students' integrated language skills as dependent variables.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore and understand the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) through conversation-based activities. This design was chosen to provide a deep and naturalistic description of the teaching-learning process and the resulting communicative engagement in its original setting. **Research Setting and Participants** The research was conducted at Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau during the 2025/2026 academic year. The study involved one English teacher and twenty eighth-grade students. Participants were selected through purposive sampling. For the interview phase, five students were specifically selected based on their varying levels of participation during classroom observations ranging from highly active to passive to ensure a comprehensive understanding of how the approach influenced different learner profiles.

Research Procedure

The research was carried out over a period of six meetings, with each session lasting 80 minutes. The procedure followed three main stages: **Preparation:** The researcher and the teacher collaborated to design lesson plans centered on CLT, selecting relevant themes such as "Daily Routines," "Asking for Opinions," and "Describing People" to be practiced through conversation. **Implementation:** In each meeting, the teacher acted as a facilitator, introducing linguistic input before moving to interactive tasks. These tasks included pair work for short

dialogues and group discussions for problem-solving activities. Evaluation and Reflection: After each session, field notes and observation sheets were reviewed to identify emerging patterns in students' listening, speaking, and vocabulary usage.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using three main techniques: Classroom Observation: Guided by an observation sheet, the researcher focused on indicators such as students' response to oral instructions, their fluency during peer interaction, and the variety of vocabulary used in spontaneous speech. Semi-structured Interviews: Interviews were conducted with the teacher and five selected students. The interview focus included their perceptions of the conversation-based activities, the difficulties faced during oral interaction, and their perceived progress in vocabulary mastery. Documentation: This involved analyzing lesson plans, teaching materials, and student-produced dialogue scripts to triangulate the findings from observations and interviews.

Data Analysis and Trustworthiness

Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña: Data Condensation: The researcher selected, simplified, and transformed the raw data from field notes and interview transcripts, focusing on themes related to listening, speaking, and vocabulary. Data Display: The condensed data were organized into narrative descriptions and tables to show the progress of classroom interactions over the six meetings. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Initial patterns were verified through persistent observation and triangulation of sources (comparing teacher and student perspectives) and methods (cross-referencing observation results with interview data). Ethical Considerations To ensure ethical standards, the researcher obtained formal permission from the head of Yayasan Almadania. Both the teacher and students were informed about the study's purpose, and their participation was voluntary. To protect the students' privacy, all names used in this report are pseudonyms.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Conversation Implementation of CLT through Conversation-Based Activities

The implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) at Yayasan Almadania was executed through three distinct stages in each of the six meetings: preparation, interactional tasks, and feedback. Initially, the teacher introduced thematic vocabulary and useful expressions related to topics such as "Daily Routines" and "Asking for Opinions". The core activity shifted from teacher-centered lectures to student-centered interaction, primarily utilizing pair work and group discussions. Field notes revealed that in the first two meetings, students were hesitant to begin conversations without constant prompting. However, by the fourth meeting, students began to initiate dialogues more spontaneously. For instance, during a "Role Play" activity about ordering food, students were observed negotiating meaning when they forgot a specific word, using gestures or simpler English synonyms to keep the conversation flowing.



Picture 1. School Yard Area



Picture 2. Front Area of The Classroom



Picture 3. Rear View of The School

Indicated Changes in Students' Listening Ability

Data from classroom observations indicated a positive shift in students' receptive responses. In the early sessions, the teacher frequently had to translate instructions into Indonesian because students struggled to identify key information in spoken English. As conversation-based tasks became more frequent, students showed an increased ability to follow oral instructions without translation. During a semi-structured interview, one student (Student A) stated: "At first, I was confused when my partner spoke English fast. But after several pair-work sessions, I started to listen for keywords like 'what time' or 'where' to understand the question." This indicates that students developed practical listening strategies, such as focusing on contextual clues, rather than becoming overwhelmed by every unknown word.



Picture 4. Mosque Area

Perceived Improvements in Students' Speaking Ability

Observation data showed that students' oral production evolved from single-word responses to more complete, albeit simple, sentences. Initially, many students relied on "Yes/No" answers or short phrases. By the final meetings, students were observed using cohesive devices and clearer pronunciation during group exchanges. The teacher noted during the interview: "The students used to be afraid of making grammar mistakes. Now, especially in group discussions, they are more focused on getting their point across. Their fluency has increased because they feel less pressure from me as the teacher." These qualitative changes suggest that the conversation-based environment successfully reduced students' speaking anxiety and fostered oral engagement.



Picture 5. Teaching and Learning Process in the Classroom

Vocabulary Mastery in Context

Vocabulary mastery was observed through the students' ability to use new terms correctly in spontaneous dialogue. Rather than memorizing isolated lists, students encountered words through repetitive interaction. For example, during the "Describing People" theme, students repeatedly used adjectives such as "diligent," "helpful," and "cheerful" to describe their classmates. Documentation of student dialogue scripts showed that words introduced in the first meeting were still being utilized correctly in the sixth meeting. This suggests that the interactive use of vocabulary supported better long-term retention compared to traditional rote memorization.



Picture 6. Documentation with Students and Teacher

Student Engagement and Classroom Interaction

A major finding was enhanced student engagement. Students were more enthusiastic, cooperative, and interacted more frequently during communicative tasks. Group discussions fostered collaboration and reduced monotony, creating a more dynamic and motivated learning atmosphere.

This result corresponds with literature emphasizing that communicative activities increase motivation and participation by making language learning relevant and interactive. Research highlights that when learners engage in real communicative exchanges, they show higher involvement and ownership of the learning process (Inayah & Mega, 2024).

The improved engagement reflects the effectiveness of student-centered CLT strategies in creating active learning environments that encourage students to take responsibility for their own communicative development.



Picture 7. Group Activity in the Classroom with Communicative Approach Method

Discussion

CLT framework provides a beneficial environment for developing integrated language skills. The observed changes in listening, speaking, and vocabulary were not isolated but occurred simultaneously through the reciprocal nature of interaction. A key factor in these results was the reduction of student anxiety. By utilizing pair work and group discussions, students felt more comfortable practicing with their peers than with the teacher. This peer-to-peer interaction allowed for the "negotiation of meaning," where students helped each other comprehend and produce language. This aligns with the theoretical framework that language acquisition is most effective when it is social and meaningful. Furthermore, the shift to a student-centered model at Yayasan Almadania allowed the teacher to act as a facilitator rather than a primary source of information. This transition encouraged learner autonomy, as students took more responsibility for their communicative success during tasks. The contextualized nature of vocabulary learning within these tasks also appeared more effective for the eighth-grade level, as students could immediately see the utility of the words they were learning.

Despite the positive findings, this research has several limitations. First, the study was conducted over a relatively short duration of six meetings, which may not reflect long-term permanent acquisition. Second, the qualitative nature of the study relies on perceived improvements and classroom observations rather than standardized linguistic performance scores.

Finally, the findings are specific to the context of eighth-grade students at Yayasan Almadania and may not be generalizable to all EFL classrooms in Indonesia. Future research could benefit from a longitudinal approach or a mixed-methods design to provide a more comprehensive measurement of student progress.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of conversation-based communicative activities within the EFL classroom context at Yayasan Almadania Kampar Riau indicates significant positive changes in student participation and engagement. Data from observations, interviews, and documentation reveal that shifting from teacher-centered instruction to a student-centered model—through structured interactional tasks such as group discussions and pair work—effectively fosters students' confidence in speaking, oral comprehension, and contextual vocabulary usage. The integration of authentic conversation proved capable of creating a collaborative learning atmosphere and reducing students' communicative anxiety by prioritizing the negotiation of meaning. Pedagogically, these findings suggest that English practitioners should integrate interactive tasks that emphasize social interaction over grammatical perfection to build dynamic communicative competence. However, this research is limited by its relatively short duration and its specific focus on a single school environment. Consequently, further research employing mixed-methods or longitudinal designs is recommended to measure the long-term sustainability of students' language acquisition.

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