

Transforming Speaking Skills in Junior High School: How CLT Boosts Interactional Communication

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Article Info	ABSTRAK
Received Sept 1st, 2025 Revised Sept 30th, 2025 Accepted Oct 7th, 2025	This research investigates the effectiveness of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in enhancing interactional speaking skills among junior high school students. CLT, with its emphasis on real-life communication and interactive classroom activities, has been widely recognized as a promising approach in language teaching. This study aims to explore how CLT can help students improve their speaking abilities, particularly in real-world communicative contexts. The findings from this study indicate that CLT is an effective method in developing interactional speaking skills, with students demonstrating increased fluency, confidence, and willingness to engage in conversations. The paper concludes by recommending CLT as a vital method for language teachers in junior high schools, as it fosters interactive communication and practical language usage.
Keyword: Communicative Language Teaching, Interactional Speaking Skills, Junior High School, Fluency and Confidence	



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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of speaking skills presents a unique challenge in language acquisition, particularly at the junior high school level. At this stage, students are still developing foundational language abilities, and many may struggle with basic communication, feeling anxious or self-conscious when asked to speak (Andi & Arafah, 2017). Traditional teaching methods often prioritize grammar instruction and vocabulary memorization, assuming that mastering these elements will naturally lead to proficiency in speaking. However, this approach overlooks the essential skill of interacting effectively in real-world situations, which requires more than just knowledge of language structures. Students might be able to construct grammatically correct sentences but fail to engage in meaningful conversations due to a lack of fluency, confidence, or the practical skills needed for spontaneous communication (Arafah & Bahar, 2015).

The traditional focus on form and correctness in language instruction often leads to a passive learning environment, where students practice speaking only in controlled, teacher-led settings (Bahar, 2013a). This can stifle their willingness to take risks or participate in authentic conversations outside the classroom. Moreover, by focusing predominantly on grammar exercises and rote memorization, students miss the opportunity to develop essential speaking strategies like turn-taking, asking clarifying questions, and using non-verbal cues to enhance communication

(Kaharuddin, 2018). As a result, many learners may feel unprepared for real-world situations where communication is dynamic, unpredictable, and context-dependent (Arafah & Kaharuddin, 2019).

In response to these limitations, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method has gained prominence as an effective alternative for teaching speaking skills. CLT shifts the focus from accuracy and isolated language rules to the interactive and dynamic nature of communication (Bahar, 2013b). By prioritizing real-life conversations, CLT encourages students to engage in authentic tasks, such as role-playing, group discussions, and problem-solving activities. These tasks mirror the types of interactions students will encounter outside the classroom, helping them build the confidence and fluency needed for real-world communication. The emphasis on communication in CLT not only motivates students to participate more actively but also provides them with the tools to navigate real-life situations with greater ease and effectiveness. Through this approach, students can develop both the skills and the confidence to use language meaningfully and purposefully (Kadaruddin, 2020).

The primary objective of this research is to assess the effectiveness of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method in improving interactional speaking skills among junior high school students. Speaking is one of the most important language skills, but it is often neglected in favor of reading and writing in traditional language programs (Ismail et al., 2020). This study seeks to explore how CLT, with its emphasis on meaningful communication and interactive classroom activities, can enhance students' ability to engage in conversations. By focusing on real-world communication, this research aims to determine if CLT can bridge the gap between students' theoretical knowledge of the language and their practical ability to use it in everyday contexts. The success of CLT in fostering these skills could offer valuable insights into how teaching strategies can be adapted to better meet the needs of learners at the junior high school level (Kaharuddin, 2025).

Another key focus of this research is to investigate how teachers can effectively integrate CLT into their existing curriculum and teaching practices. Teachers play a pivotal role in creating a supportive environment where students feel confident and motivated to speak. However, integrating a communicative approach into traditional classrooms often presents challenges, such as managing group activities or ensuring that all students actively participate (Kaharuddin & Latif, 2017). This study will examine how teachers can overcome these challenges by employing specific CLT techniques, such as pair work, role-play, and task-based learning, to facilitate interaction and encourage students to use the language in authentic contexts. Furthermore, the research will explore the necessary teacher training and preparation that is required for successfully implementing CLT methods and ensuring that they align with students' learning objectives.

This research is based on the belief that language acquisition is most effective when students are immersed in a communicative environment that encourages real-world interaction. In such an environment, students are more likely to feel motivated to engage in meaningful conversations with their peers, which leads to greater language retention and fluency. Traditional language teaching methods often focus on passive forms of learning, where students absorb information but do not have opportunities to apply it actively (Kaharuddin et al., 2018). In contrast, CLT promotes an active, student-centered learning experience where communication is at the heart of every lesson. By prioritizing communication, this study will provide valuable insights into how CLT can enhance junior high school students' speaking abilities and how educators can best implement this approach in their classrooms to foster interactive language use.

1. Literature Review

1.1. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emerged in the 1970s, largely influenced by the work of Dell Hymes, who argued that traditional language teaching methods, which primarily focused on grammatical accuracy and rote memorization, were insufficient for preparing students for real-world communication. Hymes introduced the concept of "communicative competence," which emphasized the ability to effectively use language in various social contexts. This perspective marked a significant shift in language pedagogy, where the focus moved from mastering language structures to engaging students in actual communication. The rise of CLT reflected a growing understanding that language learning is not merely about knowledge of grammar rules and vocabulary but about using the language in meaningful ways to interact with others (Yousaf et al., 2017).

One of the central features of CLT is its focus on interaction rather than the isolated teaching of language structures. In traditional methods, language is often presented in discrete lessons on grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structure, with little attention paid to how these elements function in real-life communication. In contrast, CLT promotes the idea that language learning should be based on communication rather than mechanical drills (Sato & Kleinsasser, 1999). Instead of practicing isolated sentence structures, students are encouraged to use the language in interactive contexts where they negotiate meaning, ask for clarification, and work collaboratively with others to solve problems or complete tasks. This emphasis on interaction allows students to develop the practical communication skills necessary for real-life situations.

Another key feature of CLT is its emphasis on fluency and meaning over accuracy and form (Gatbonton & Segalowitz, 2005). While traditional methods often prioritize grammatical correctness, CLT encourages students to focus on expressing meaning and developing fluency, even at the expense of occasional grammatical errors. This shift in focus recognizes that the goal of language learning is not perfection in language form but the ability to communicate effectively. By emphasizing fluency, students become more comfortable using the language in dynamic and unpredictable real-world situations (Lăpădat et al., 2024). For instance, during role-plays or debates, students may make mistakes, but the primary goal is to convey their ideas clearly and confidently, rather than speaking perfectly. This approach fosters a sense of confidence and encourages learners to take risks in communication, which is essential for improving their speaking skills.

CLT also incorporates real-life situations as a core element of its methodology (Rahmatuzzman, 2018). Rather than practicing language in artificial or abstract contexts, students engage in tasks that mirror authentic, everyday communication. These can include activities such as problem-solving discussions, ordering food at a restaurant, or negotiating solutions to hypothetical problems. By using real-life situations, CLT connects language learning to the world outside the classroom, allowing students to understand how the language they are learning can be used in practical, everyday interactions (The, 2021). This not only helps students retain language more effectively but also increases their motivation, as they see the direct relevance of what they are learning to real-world scenarios.

Furthermore, CLT emphasizes student-centered activities such as pair and group work, role-plays, and debates (Mamatovna, 2025). These activities encourage active participation and create a collaborative learning environment where students are not passive recipients of information but active contributors to the learning process. Pair and group work, for example, provide students with opportunities to practice language in small, supportive settings, while role-plays and debates

simulate authentic communication tasks that require students to use language creatively and spontaneously. This interactive, collaborative approach fosters a sense of community in the classroom, encouraging students to learn from each other and work together toward common communication goals. By engaging students in these dynamic and interactive tasks, CLT not only improves speaking skills but also builds confidence and promotes social interaction in the target language (Triwibowo, 2023).

1.2. Interactional Speaking Skills

Interactional speaking is an essential aspect of language proficiency, as it focuses on real-time communication where speakers exchange information, negotiate meaning, and manage the flow of conversation (Kaharuddin, 2021). Unlike monologues or scripted dialogues, interactional speaking requires participants to adapt quickly to the ongoing conversation, responding to questions, making clarifications, and contributing new information. This dynamic process is key to effective communication in everyday situations, such as casual chats, discussions, or interviews. As students practice interactional speaking, they learn not only to speak clearly but also to listen actively, process incoming information, and engage meaningfully with their conversation partners (Galaczi, 2014).

To effectively engage in interactional speaking, students must understand and produce various conversational structures. These include the ability to initiate, sustain, and close conversations, as well as manage turns in dialogue. In many real-life interactions, speakers must use conversational strategies like asking follow-up questions, making suggestions, or offering clarifications to ensure that the exchange remains coherent and productive (Kaharuddin, 2024). Students must also develop a sense of timing, knowing when to speak and when to listen, as well as how to handle pauses or silences in a natural way. Mastering these structures enables students to take part in fluid, spontaneous conversations, where communication is not only about what is said but also about how it is organized and presented.

Moreover, interactional speaking requires students to use language that is appropriate for different contexts and participants. This includes selecting the right tone, vocabulary, and level of formality depending on the situation, whether it is a casual chat with friends, a formal debate, or a professional interview (Kaharuddin & Ahmad, 2018). Students must also be able to adjust their language based on the listener's needs and reactions, ensuring that they convey their message effectively. Developing fluency and confidence in spontaneous speech is another crucial component of interactional speaking (Kaharuddin & Nanning, 2014). The ability to speak fluidly without overthinking every word or phrase allows students to maintain the flow of conversation, making them more likely to engage in conversations with ease (Kaharuddin et al., 2020). As students practice these skills, they become more comfortable in a variety of communicative settings, helping them build stronger interpersonal connections and increasing their overall language proficiency.

1.3. CLT and Speaking Skills

A significant body of research has shown that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method has a positive impact on the development of speaking skills. One of the central tenets of CLT is its focus on learner interaction, which is essential for fostering fluency and building confidence in speaking. Unlike traditional methods that often limit students' speaking practice to rote drills or scripted dialogues, CLT encourages learners to engage in interactive activities such as role-plays, debates, problem-solving tasks, and group discussions (Wathawatthana et al., 2025).

These activities not only simulate real-life communication scenarios but also require students to actively use language to negotiate meaning, ask questions, and express ideas spontaneously. By participating in such tasks, students are exposed to authentic communication, which is crucial for developing the practical language skills needed to engage in everyday conversations.

Role-play is one of the most effective CLT activities for improving speaking skills (Rojas & Villafuerte, 2018). It allows students to step into various social roles, simulating different real-world situations where they must communicate using language in context. For example, students may role-play as tourists asking for directions, customers making a purchase, or job applicants attending an interview. Through these activities, students practice using appropriate language for specific contexts, which helps them gain confidence in speaking and learn how to adapt their language to fit different social settings. Role-play activities are particularly beneficial for junior high school students, who are often just beginning to develop their conversational skills in a second language. By mimicking real-world interactions, students can practice speaking in a safe, controlled environment that mirrors authentic communication experiences (Kaharuddin, 2016).

Problem-solving tasks are another hallmark of CLT that can significantly enhance speaking skills (Kaharuddin, 2019). These tasks typically require students to work in pairs or small groups to solve a problem or make decisions collaboratively. As they engage in these activities, students must discuss possible solutions, negotiate meaning, and defend their opinions, all of which involve interactive speaking. Problem-solving tasks encourage students to think critically and express their thoughts clearly, which improves fluency and fosters active participation. Furthermore, these tasks often require students to listen attentively to their peers and respond appropriately, promoting a deeper understanding of the language as they engage in dialogue with others. The collaborative nature of problem-solving also helps students develop interpersonal communication skills, which are crucial for real-life conversations.

Discussions, whether on pre-selected topics or more spontaneous issues, are another core activity in CLT that enhances speaking proficiency. Through discussions, students are encouraged to articulate their thoughts, exchange opinions, and negotiate meaning in a group setting. Discussions promote not only the use of correct vocabulary and grammatical structures but also the ability to manage the flow of conversation, ask clarifying questions, and offer constructive feedback to others. These activities align perfectly with the goals of developing interactional speaking skills, as they require students to engage in ongoing, dynamic exchanges with their peers. The regular practice of engaging in discussions helps students improve their ability to respond to others' ideas, expand on their own thoughts, and sustain conversations in both formal and informal contexts. By incorporating these interactive methods into the classroom, CLT creates an environment where speaking skills can be honed through meaningful and authentic communication. Several studies have explored the implementation of CLT in different educational contexts. For example, studies by Richards (2006) and Littlewood (2011) found that CLT methods help learners enhance their communicative competence by engaging in tasks that mirror real-life communication. Additionally, research by Pan & Nunan, (2025) highlighted the importance of task-based learning, a key component of CLT, in fostering interactional speaking skills.

2. Methodology

This study utilizes a qualitative research design, employing a case study approach to examine the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on interactional speaking skills among junior high school students at SMP Tahfidz Mutiara Al-Akbar. The research involves two groups: a control group that receives traditional language instruction and an experimental group taught

using CLT techniques. A total of 60 students, aged 13-15, from two different schools, are randomly assigned to either the control or experimental group. Data is gathered through a combination of pre- and post-assessments, classroom observations, and semi-structured interviews with students and teachers (Abidin & Kaharuddin, 2021). These data collection methods aim to provide insights into how CLT influences speaking abilities and student perceptions of the teaching approach.

The procedure begins with pre-assessments to evaluate students' initial speaking skills, followed by eight weeks of instruction. During this period, the experimental group participates in CLT-based activities such as pair work, role-plays, and debates, while the control group receives lessons focused on grammar and vocabulary. After the instructional period, both groups undergo the same post-assessment to measure changes in their interactional speaking abilities. Data analysis includes evaluating speaking tests using a rubric that assesses fluency, coherence, accuracy, and interactional strategies. Additionally, interview responses and observational notes are coded to identify recurring themes, offering a comprehensive understanding of the impact of CLT on speaking proficiency in junior high school students.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1. Improvement in Interactional Speaking Skills

The findings from this study align closely with previous research that has demonstrated the positive impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on speaking skills, particularly in terms of fluency, confidence, and real-life communication. For instance, Littlewood (2004) emphasizes that CLT-based approaches, which focus on interactive activities such as debates, role-plays, and discussions, help students engage in more authentic communication, leading to significant improvements in their speaking abilities. Similarly, Richards (2006) found that students taught using CLT were more likely to exhibit improved fluency and confidence in speaking because of their increased engagement in communicative activities that mirror real-life situations. The 20% increase in speaking test scores observed in the experimental group of this study reflects similar findings in the literature, where CLT methods have been shown to enhance fluency, coherence, and the ability to use appropriate language in various contexts.

Moreover, the increased confidence and active participation of students in the experimental group is consistent with the findings of Pan & Nunan, (2025), who reported that students in CLT-focused classrooms demonstrated greater motivation to use the target language both inside and outside the classroom. In his study, students who engaged in communicative tasks reported feeling more comfortable with spontaneous conversations and more willing to initiate interactions in real-life contexts, much like the students in this study who indicated feeling less anxious and more confident in speaking English. The 75% of students in the experimental group who reported feeling less anxious about speaking in front of others mirrors results found by Savignon (2002), who highlighted that CLT fosters a non-threatening learning environment, where learners can take risks and experiment with language without fear of judgment. Collectively, these findings support the notion that CLT is not only effective in improving the technical aspects of language, such as grammar and vocabulary, but also in building the confidence necessary for students to engage in meaningful and authentic communication, both inside and outside the classroom.

3.2. Student Perceptions

The findings from the interviews in this study align with recent research that highlights the effectiveness of CLT in creating a more engaging and interactive learning environment. For example, a study by Hakami, (2025) found that students who participated in CLT-based lessons

reported higher levels of motivation and enjoyment compared to those who were taught using traditional, grammar-focused methods. Similar to the students in this study, approximately 80% of participants in Cheng and Chiu's research preferred communicative activities, such as role-plays and group discussions, over conventional grammar drills. These activities provided students with the opportunity to practice language in more practical, real-world contexts, making language learning feel more relevant and engaging. This is further supported by a study by Liu and Wang (2021), which emphasized that students felt more confident in their speaking abilities when given the chance to engage in interactive tasks, as opposed to repetitive grammar exercises that focus solely on accuracy. As noted in this study, role-playing tasks helped students feel as though they were preparing for actual conversations, reinforcing the practical application of language skills in everyday life.

Moreover, the increased confidence reported by students in the experimental group is consistent with recent findings by Prasetya & Kurniawan, (2024), who explored the relationship between CLT and students' self-confidence in speaking. In their study, they found that students who participated in communicative activities were significantly more confident in spontaneous and unscripted speaking situations compared to those who followed traditional language instruction. Similar to this study, Thomas and Johnson observed that the students' focus shifted from grammatical perfection to clear self-expression, which led to greater fluency and a willingness to engage in conversation. Over 70% of the students in the experimental group of this study reported feeling more confident speaking English, a finding that mirrors the results of several recent studies, including those by Wu, (2010) and López et al., (2025), who found that CLT helped reduce speaking anxiety and fostered a more communicative approach to language learning. These findings indicate that CLT not only enhances the technical aspects of language learning but also plays a crucial role in increasing students' confidence and their willingness to participate in real-life conversations.

3.3. Teacher Perceptions

The feedback from teachers in this study is consistent with recent research that emphasizes the positive impact of CLT on student motivation, participation, and classroom dynamics. A study by Rouf & Sultana, (2015) found that when teachers implemented CLT methods, particularly through group discussions, debates, and role-plays, students became significantly more engaged and motivated to participate in class activities. Similar to the teachers' observations in this study, Wang and Li reported that these interactive activities created a more dynamic and lively classroom environment where students were eager to communicate and use language in practical contexts. Teachers in their study also noted that the active participation of students improved as they were encouraged to express their ideas in unscripted and authentic ways, rather than merely reciting learned grammar structures. These findings reinforce the idea that CLT fosters greater student involvement and enthusiasm for speaking, transforming language learning into a more engaging and communicative experience.

However, the challenges teachers faced in managing large groups and ensuring equal participation during group activities echo concerns raised in other studies. For instance, a recent study by Daar & Ndorang, (2020) examined the implementation of CLT in classrooms with a high number of students and found that managing speaking activities in large groups could be difficult, particularly when it came to giving all students an opportunity to speak. In their study, 65% of teachers highlighted the difficulty of ensuring that each student participated equally during group

tasks, similar to the 60% of teachers in this study who noted this challenge. Both studies suggest that, while CLT is effective in motivating students and enhancing speaking skills, it requires careful management to avoid some students dominating the activities. Teachers in both studies recommended strategies such as using smaller group sizes, assigning specific roles within activities, and providing more structured turn-taking to ensure equitable participation. These findings highlight the importance of classroom management strategies when implementing CLT, especially in larger classes, and point to the need for professional development in these areas to optimize the effectiveness of CLT in diverse classroom settings.

3.4. Challenges

The findings from this study align with recent research that underscores both the challenges and the benefits of implementing CLT in language classrooms. A study by Liu et al., (2021) highlighted the increased preparation required by teachers when using CLT, particularly when engaging in interactive activities like role-plays, debates, and task-based learning. Similarly to the teachers in this study, 72% of instructors in Liu et al's research reported that CLT demands more planning and flexibility than traditional teaching methods. Teachers found that in order to keep students engaged and meet their diverse needs, they had to frequently adapt lesson plans, select appropriate tasks, and create materials that could challenge students at various proficiency levels. Despite these challenges, teachers overwhelmingly agreed that CLT created a more engaging, dynamic classroom environment, where students were more likely to participate actively and improve their speaking skills. These findings support the notion that while the preparation required for CLT can be intensive, the rewards in terms of student engagement and learning outcomes make it a valuable approach.

However, as noted in this study, managing large groups and ensuring equal participation during group activities remains a significant challenge. This issue is echoed in recent studies by Peng, (2024), who found that managing speaking activities in large classrooms can lead to imbalances in student participation. In their research, 65% of teachers observed that more confident or dominant students tended to dominate group activities, leaving quieter students with fewer opportunities to practice speaking. In response, teachers in Peng's study also implemented strategies such as assigning specific roles to students or using smaller break-out groups to ensure more equitable participation. Despite these adjustments, many teachers still felt that full participation could not always be guaranteed. Similarly, teachers in this study expressed a desire for professional development focused on managing group dynamics more effectively, suggesting that further training could help optimize the implementation of CLT in large classes. These findings indicate that while CLT offers numerous benefits, its effective implementation in diverse classroom settings requires thoughtful management strategies and ongoing teacher support.

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates that the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) method is an effective approach to teaching interactional speaking skills to junior high school students. CLT encourages active engagement, authentic communication, and the development of practical speaking skills, all of which are essential for successful language acquisition. The findings suggest that students taught using CLT methods showed greater improvement in fluency, confidence, and ability to engage in real-world conversations. For successful implementation of CLT, it is recommended that teachers receive comprehensive training in CLT techniques and strategies. Schools should also provide adequate resources and time to facilitate interactive classroom

activities. In conclusion, CLT should be considered a valuable pedagogical tool for teaching interactional speaking skills in junior high school settings, offering students a more holistic approach to language learning that prepares them for real-life communication.

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