

## THE EFFECT OF COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING ON STUDENTS' SPEAKING SKILLS: A SYSTEMATIC LITERATURE REVIEW

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**Abstract:** Speaking skill is a fundamental component of English language proficiency, particularly in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts where opportunities for authentic communication are limited. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely promoted as an instructional approach that emphasizes meaningful communication, active interaction, and real-life language use. Although CLT has been extensively implemented in speaking instruction, empirical findings regarding its effectiveness remain fragmented and vary across research designs, assessment methods, and learning contexts. Therefore, this study aims to systematically review and synthesize existing research on the effect of Communicative Language Teaching on students' speaking skills. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) following PRISMA guidelines. The reviewed articles were selected from reputable national and international journals published between 2012 and 2025 using predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria. The findings reveal that CLT generally has a positive and significant impact on students' speaking skills, including fluency, vocabulary development, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and interactive competence. However, the review also identifies several methodological limitations, such as small sample sizes, short intervention durations, and the frequent reliance on perception-based instruments rather than performance-based speaking assessments. These findings highlight the need for more rigorous experimental and longitudinal studies to strengthen the empirical evidence of CLT effectiveness and to support evidence-based practices in EFL speaking instruction.

**Keywords:** *Communicative Language Teaching, Speaking Skills, Systematic Literature Review*

**Abstrak:** Keterampilan berbicara merupakan salah satu kompetensi penting dalam pembelajaran bahasa Inggris, khususnya pada konteks English as a Foreign Language (EFL) yang memiliki keterbatasan penggunaan bahasa secara autentik. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) dikembangkan sebagai pendekatan pembelajaran yang menekankan komunikasi bermakna, interaksi aktif, serta penggunaan bahasa dalam konteks nyata. Meskipun pendekatan ini telah banyak diterapkan, temuan penelitian mengenai efektivitas CLT terhadap keterampilan berbicara masih tersebar dan menunjukkan variasi dari segi desain penelitian, instrumen penilaian, serta konteks pembelajaran. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji secara sistematis pengaruh Communicative Language Teaching terhadap keterampilan berbicara peserta didik. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode Systematic Literature Review (SLR) dengan mengacu pada pedoman PRISMA. Artikel yang dianalisis berasal dari jurnal nasional dan internasional bereputasi yang diterbitkan pada rentang tahun 2012–2025 dan dipilih berdasarkan kriteria inklusi dan eksklusi yang telah ditetapkan. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa CLT secara umum memberikan dampak positif dan signifikan terhadap peningkatan keterampilan berbicara, meliputi kelancaran, kosakata, pengucapan, ketepatan tata bahasa, dan kemampuan interaksi. Namun demikian, sebagian besar penelitian masih menghadapi

*keterbatasan metodologis, seperti ukuran sampel yang kecil, durasi intervensi yang singkat, serta dominasi instrumen berbasis persepsi. Temuan ini menegaskan perlunya penelitian lanjutan dengan desain yang lebih kuat untuk memperkuat bukti empiris efektivitas CLT dalam pembelajaran berbicara.*

**Kata kunci:** Communicative Language Teaching, Keterampilan Berbicara, Systematic Literature Review

## 1. Introduction

Speaking skill is a crucial component of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learning, as it enables learners to express ideas, negotiate meaning, and engage in real-life communication. However, numerous studies have reported that EFL students often face persistent challenges in developing speaking proficiency, including limited vocabulary, lack of fluency, inaccurate pronunciation, grammatical errors, and low self-confidence when speaking English (Efriyati, 2012; Ratih, 2017). These difficulties are frequently attributed to traditional, teacher-centered instructional practices that emphasize grammatical knowledge over communicative use of language.

To overcome these challenges, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely promoted as an instructional approach that prioritizes meaningful interaction, learner-centered activities, and the use of authentic language in the classroom. Empirical evidence consistently suggests that CLT has a positive effect on students' speaking skills. Studies conducted in various EFL contexts report improvements in fluency, vocabulary development, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and interactional competence following the implementation of CLT (Lumy, 2018; Al-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019; Refaey, 2023; Basir, 2024). Similar findings are also reported in higher education and vocational contexts, indicating that CLT is adaptable across different learner levels (Pamuji & Wahyudi, 2022; Sitorus, 2019).

Despite the substantial body of research supporting CLT, existing studies reveal several methodological limitations. Many studies employ small sample sizes and are limited to single classes or institutions, which restricts the generalizability of their findings (Panambunan et al., 2016; Mulyanah et al., 2018; Wael et al., 2019). In addition, a large proportion of studies rely on quasi-experimental or single-group pretest–posttest designs without randomized control groups (Ratih, 2017; Refaey, 2023). Several studies also depend primarily on perception-based data obtained through questionnaires or surveys, rather than direct performance-based assessments of speaking skills (Silva-Valencia, 2021; Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020; Ghafar et al., 2025).

Furthermore, inconsistencies in research findings have been identified. While most studies report significant improvements in speaking skills, some research indicates only modest or limited effects of CLT, particularly when the approach is not implemented systematically or when contextual constraints are present (Mangaleswaran & Aziz, 2019; Toro et al., 2018). These mixed results suggest that the effectiveness of CLT may be influenced by factors such as instructional design, duration of intervention, teacher competence, and classroom context.

Given these methodological weaknesses and inconsistencies, there is a clear need for a comprehensive and systematic synthesis of existing research on CLT and speaking skills. Therefore, this study adopts a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to critically examine and synthesize empirical studies investigating the effect of Communicative Language Teaching on students' speaking skills in EFL contexts. By systematically reviewing and evaluating previous research, this study aims to identify overall trends, methodological gaps, and key factors affecting the effectiveness of CLT, thereby providing a stronger empirical and theoretical

foundation for future research and instructional practice (Hui & Yunus, 2023; Ghafar et al., 2023).

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 Speaking Skills in EFL Learning**

Speaking is a productive language skill that plays a central role in EFL learning, as it reflects learners' ability to use language for meaningful communication. Speaking competence generally involves several components, including fluency, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, vocabulary mastery, and interactional skills (Ratih, 2017; Lumy, 2018). In many EFL contexts, students struggle to develop these components due to limited exposure to authentic language use, anxiety when speaking in front of others, and instructional practices that prioritize form-focused instruction over communicative practice (Efrizal, 2012; Toro et al., 2018).

Previous studies indicate that insufficient opportunities for oral interaction in the classroom significantly hinder students' speaking development. As a result, learners often demonstrate passive participation and low confidence when required to communicate orally (Panambunan et al., 2016). These challenges highlight the need for instructional approaches that actively engage students in communicative use of language.

### **2.2 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)**

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an instructional approach that emphasizes the development of communicative competence through meaningful interaction and real-life language use. CLT focuses on learner-centered activities such as role plays, group discussions, information-gap tasks, and pair work, which are designed to promote authentic communication (Al-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019). Rather than emphasizing grammatical accuracy alone, CLT integrates form and meaning within communicative contexts.

Several studies have demonstrated that CLT creates a more interactive and supportive learning environment that encourages students to speak more frequently and confidently. According to Silva-Valencia (2021), CLT techniques significantly enhance students' engagement and motivation to use English in the classroom. Similarly, Abdelmageed and Omer (2020) found that teachers perceive CLT as an effective approach for fostering communicative competence, particularly in speaking instruction.

### **2.3 Empirical Studies on CLT and Speaking Skills**

A substantial body of empirical research has investigated the effect of CLT on students' speaking skills in EFL contexts. Most experimental and quasi-experimental studies report significant improvements in speaking performance following the implementation of CLT. For instance, Lumy (2018) and Ratih (2017) found that students taught through CLT achieved higher post-test speaking scores compared to those taught using traditional methods. Similar results were reported by Al-Garni and Almuhammadi (2019), Basir (2024), and Refaey (2023), who observed improvements in fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammatical accuracy.

In higher education contexts, CLT has also been shown to enhance students' speaking competence. Studies by Sitorus (2019) and Pamuji and Wahyudi (2022) revealed that CLT positively influenced students' speaking achievement and classroom interaction. Moreover, Pajangu et al. (2024) reported a notable increase in students' average speaking scores after the application of CLT in secondary school settings.

However, not all studies report strong effects. Mangaleswaran and Aziz (2019) found only slight improvements in students' speaking skills, suggesting that the effectiveness of CLT

may vary depending on contextual and instructional factors. Similarly, Toro et al. (2018) reported that although CLT strategies were implemented, they were insufficient to fully promote active student participation.

#### **4. Research Gaps in Previous Studies**

Despite the generally positive findings, several research gaps remain evident in the existing literature. First, many studies are limited by small sample sizes and lack of randomized control groups, which reduces the generalizability of their results (Panambunan et al., 2016; Mulyanah et al., 2018). Second, a considerable number of studies rely on perception-based data collected through questionnaires or surveys rather than objective, performance-based speaking assessments (Silva-Valencia, 2021; Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020). Third, the duration of CLT interventions in many studies is relatively short, making it difficult to assess long-term effects on speaking development (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025).

Furthermore, although several review studies and systematic reviews have been conducted (Ghafar et al., 2023; Hui & Yunus, 2023), many of them synthesize findings broadly without focusing specifically on methodological quality and empirical outcomes related to speaking skills. Therefore, there is a need for a more focused and systematic synthesis of empirical studies examining the effect of CLT on students' speaking skills.

#### **3. Methodology**

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, evaluate, and systematically interpret studies relevant to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and students' speaking skills in EFL contexts. The SLR method was selected because it provides a structured and transparent research approach that enables the synthesis of comprehensive and scientifically accountable knowledge (Imelda et al., 2024; Firdaus et al., 2024; Mariana et al., 2025). This method is particularly effective for mapping research trends, identifying research gaps, and formulating directions for future studies in the field of language education (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Aisyah et al., 2024; Kusumo & Mariana, 2025; Mariana et al., 2024; Mariana & Murthaza, 2019; Maulena et al., 2024; Pasaribu et al., 2024).

In the context of English language teaching research, particularly studies focusing on speaking skills, the application of SLR remains relatively limited compared to experimental and quasi-experimental approaches. Nevertheless, SLR enables a systematic and in-depth synthesis of empirical evidence related to the effectiveness of CLT, instructional designs, learner characteristics, and contextual factors influencing speaking development. Previous studies confirm that SLR is an effective approach for comprehensively and contextually reviewing educational and language teaching practices (Fikra et al., 2025; Mariana & Liza, 2024; Mariana & Safrijal, 2024; Maulidi et al., 2025; Syahputri et al., 2025; Zahrani et al., 2025; Zhul et al., 2024).

The SLR process in this study followed the stages recommended by the PRISMA guidelines, including identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Relevant literature was retrieved from reputable academic databases using predefined keywords related to CLT and speaking skills and was then screened based on established inclusion and exclusion criteria. The selected studies were analyzed using thematic analysis to categorize and synthesize key findings concerning the effects of CLT on students' speaking skills. This approach supports the development of systematic, transparent, and evidence-based conclusions (Sholeh, 2023; Arif & Aziz, 2023).

#### 4. Results and Discussion

**Table 1. Synthesis of Previous Studies on CLT and Speaking Skills**

No	Author(s) (Year)	Research Gap / Limitation	Main Findings
1	Silva-Valencia (2021)	Relied solely on perception-based survey data without performance-based speaking assessment.	CLT techniques positively influenced EFL speaking skills.
2	Fauzi & Ridwan (2025)	Sample size not reported; short intervention duration.	CLT significantly improved articulation, vocabulary, and interaction.
3	Mulyanah et al. (2018)	Conducted in a single educational context.	Experimental group showed higher post-test speaking scores.
4	Ghafar et al. (2025)	Used only questionnaires; no direct speaking performance test.	CLT improved fluency, grammar, pronunciation, and vocabulary.
5	Lumy (2018)	Very small sample size (24 students).	CLT was effective in improving students' speaking performance.
6	Pajangu et al. (2024)	Limited explanation of intervention procedures and assessment instruments.	Average speaking scores increased by 12.2%.
7	Faridha (2024)	Sample size and assessment instruments not clearly reported.	CLT contributed to improved speaking skills in EFL contexts.
8	Ratih (2017)	Non-randomized groups and relatively small sample.	CLT significantly improved speaking ability ( $p = 0.016$ ).
9	Refaey (2023)	No control group for comparison.	CLT had a positive effect on students' speaking skills.
10	Al-Garni & Almuhammad i (2019)	Female-only sample from a single institution.	CLT activities improved speaking performance.
11	Aalaei (2017)	Small sample size; unclear publication quality.	Communicative approach positively affected speaking skills.
12	Panambunan et al. (2016)	Very small sample; non-formal education context.	CLT enhanced speaking ability through specific activities.
13	Mangaleswaran & Aziz (2019)	Findings showed only slight improvement, indicating implementation issues.	CLT resulted in minimal overall improvement in speaking skills.
14	Basir (2024)	Sample size not reported.	CLT outperformed Grammar Translation Method

			(GTM).
15	Pamuji & Wahyudi (2022)	Small and context-specific sample (midwifery students).	CLT improved students' speaking ability.
16	Abdelmageed & Omer (2020)	Findings based on teacher perceptions, not student performance.	Teachers perceived CLT as effective for speaking instruction.
17	Sitorus (2019)	One-group design without control group.	Students' average speaking scores improved after CLT.
18	Wael et al. (2019)	Small sample; uncommon comparative design.	CLT had a significant effect on speaking skills.
19	Ghafar et al. (2023)	Review-based evidence, not primary empirical research.	CLT positively affected speaking and other language skills.
20	Wahyuni et al. (2021)	No empirical data provided.	Reviewed CLT implementation for speaking improvement.
21	Toro et al. (2018)	CLT implementation insufficient to ensure active participation.	CLT strategies were used but participation remained limited.
22	Hui & Yunus (2023)	Systematic review, not new empirical evidence.	Teachers and students viewed CLT positively for speaking maintenance.
23	Efrizal (2012)	Small sample; classroom action research design.	CLT improved students' speaking achievement.

#### 4.1 Overall Effectiveness of Communicative Language Teaching on Students' Speaking Skills

The findings of this Systematic Literature Review indicate that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) consistently demonstrates a positive effect on students' speaking skills in EFL contexts. Most empirical studies reviewed report significant improvements in various speaking components, including fluency, vocabulary development, pronunciation accuracy, grammatical competence, and interactional skills (Ratih, 2017; Lumy, 2018; Al-Garni & Almuhammadi, 2019; Refaey, 2023). These results align with the communicative competence framework underlying CLT, which emphasizes meaningful language use rather than isolated linguistic forms.

The positive outcomes reported across different educational levels suggest that CLT is a flexible and adaptable approach applicable in secondary and higher education contexts. This finding supports the main objective stated in the introduction, which aimed to synthesize empirical evidence on the effectiveness of CLT in enhancing students' speaking skills through a systematic review approach.

#### 4.2 Contribution of CLT to Key Components of Speaking Skills

A closer examination of previous studies reveals that CLT contributes differently to specific components of speaking skills. Several studies highlight improvements in fluency and interaction, as CLT encourages frequent oral practice through pair work, group discussions, and role-playing activities (Fauzi & Ridwan, 2025; Pajangu et al., 2024). Other studies emphasize

gains in vocabulary and grammatical accuracy, particularly when communicative tasks are integrated with form-focused feedback (Ghafar et al., 2025; Basir, 2024).

However, the degree of improvement varies across studies, suggesting that CLT does not function as a uniform intervention. The variation in outcomes indicates that the effectiveness of CLT depends on instructional design, task selection, and the balance between fluency-oriented and accuracy-oriented activities. This finding explains why some studies report only moderate or slight improvements despite adopting a communicative approach (Mangaleswaran & Aziz, 2019).

#### **4.3 Methodological Trends and Limitations in CLT Speaking Research**

The synthesis also reveals clear methodological patterns in existing CLT research. Most studies adopt quasi-experimental or one-group pretest–posttest designs, often without randomized control groups (Ratih, 2017; Refaey, 2023; Faridha, 2024). While these designs provide initial evidence of CLT effectiveness, they limit causal inference and reduce the robustness of conclusions.

In addition, many studies involve small and context-specific samples, frequently drawn from a single class or institution (Lumy, 2018; Panambunan et al., 2016; Sitorus, 2019). This limitation restricts the generalizability of findings across broader EFL contexts. These methodological issues justify the need for an SLR, as emphasized in the introduction, to synthesize fragmented evidence and identify consistent patterns across studies.

#### **4.4 Reliance on Perception-Based Data versus Performance-Based Assessment**

Another important issue identified in the literature is the overreliance on perception-based instruments, such as questionnaires and surveys, to measure the effectiveness of CLT (Silva-Valencia, 2021; Abdelmageed & Omer, 2020; Ghafar et al., 2025). Although perception data provide valuable insights into attitudes and beliefs, they do not fully capture actual improvements in students' speaking performance.

In contrast, studies employing direct speaking performance assessments, such as oral tests and rubric-based evaluations, tend to provide stronger empirical evidence of CLT effectiveness (Mulyanah et al., 2018; Ratih, 2017). This discrepancy highlights a critical research gap identified in this review and suggests that future studies should integrate both perceptual and performance-based measures to obtain a more comprehensive evaluation of CLT outcomes.

#### **4.5 Contextual and Implementation Factors Influencing CLT Effectiveness**

The findings also demonstrate that the effectiveness of CLT is influenced by contextual and implementation-related factors. Studies reporting limited or inconsistent results often attribute these outcomes to challenges such as large class sizes, limited instructional time, insufficient teacher training, or partial implementation of communicative principles (Toro et al., 2018; Mangaleswaran & Aziz, 2019).

These findings reinforce the argument presented in the introduction that CLT effectiveness depends not only on the approach itself but also on how it is implemented in specific educational contexts. Therefore, CLT should be viewed as a pedagogical framework that requires careful adaptation rather than a fixed method applicable in all settings.

#### **4.6 Implications for Future Research and Pedagogical Practice**

Based on the synthesized findings, this SLR highlights several implications for future research and practice. Methodologically, there is a need for more rigorous experimental designs,

larger and more diverse samples, longer intervention periods, and standardized speaking assessment tools. Pedagogically, teachers should be supported through professional development to implement CLT consistently and effectively, ensuring a balance between communicative fluency and linguistic accuracy.

Overall, this discussion reinforces the value of CLT in developing students' speaking skills while simultaneously addressing the research gaps and limitations identified in previous studies. By systematically synthesizing existing evidence, this study contributes to a clearer understanding of when, how, and under what conditions CLT effectively enhances students' speaking skills, thereby fulfilling the objectives outlined in the introduction.

## **5. Conclusion**

This Systematic Literature Review (SLR) concludes that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has a generally positive and significant effect on students' speaking skills in EFL contexts. The majority of studies reviewed indicate that CLT contributes to improvements in key speaking components, including fluency, vocabulary development, pronunciation, grammatical accuracy, and interactive competence. These improvements are primarily attributed to CLT's emphasis on meaningful communication, learner-centered interaction, and authentic language use.

However, the review also reveals that the magnitude and consistency of CLT's effectiveness vary across studies, depending on instructional design, duration of implementation, assessment methods, and contextual factors. Methodologically, many studies rely on quasi-experimental designs with small, context-specific samples and limited use of control groups, which restricts the generalizability of findings. In addition, a considerable number of studies depend heavily on students' perceptions rather than performance-based speaking assessments, creating a gap between perceived and actual speaking improvement.

Overall, this SLR provides comprehensive evidence that CLT is an effective pedagogical approach for enhancing speaking skills, while simultaneously highlighting critical methodological and contextual limitations in existing research. By synthesizing fragmented empirical findings, this study contributes to a clearer and more systematic understanding of the role of CLT in speaking instruction and identifies important directions for future investigation.

## **6. Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this review, several recommendations are proposed for future research and pedagogical practice. First, future studies should employ more rigorous research designs, including randomized controlled experiments, larger and more diverse samples, and longer intervention periods to strengthen causal inference and external validity. Second, researchers are encouraged to integrate performance-based speaking assessments alongside perception-based instruments to provide a more comprehensive evaluation of CLT effectiveness.

From a pedagogical perspective, English language teachers should implement CLT in a systematic and balanced manner, combining fluency-oriented communicative tasks with appropriate form-focused instruction. Teacher training programs should emphasize practical strategies for designing communicative activities, managing classroom interaction, and assessing speaking skills objectively. Additionally, educational institutions should provide adequate support, such as reduced class sizes and sufficient instructional time, to facilitate effective CLT implementation.

Finally, future SLRs and meta-analyses are recommended to explore long-term effects, contextual variations, and comparative effectiveness between CLT and other instructional



approaches. Such efforts will further strengthen the empirical foundation of communicative language teaching and support evidence-based decision-making in EFL speaking instruction.

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