

**THE IMPLEMENTATION OF A SIMPLE COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING (CLT)
APPROACH IN EARLY CHILDHOOD ENGLISH LEARNING**

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ABSTRACT

Young children learn to speak and develop their language skills. However, there are psychological barriers that make young learners passive in Early Foreign Language (EFL) settings. This study assesses the adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to first graders in SD Unggulan Hamzanwadi, and aims to fill the gaps in expanding CLT to beginners. Using the qualitative descriptive case study design, the researcher described and triangulated the data through classroom observations of four teachers, semi-structured interviews and documentation reviews. The primary findings suggest the teachers implement a “Simplified CLT”, primarily of the strategic hybrid model. This consists of a series of communicative drills designed to first teach target vocabulary, then, gamify the instruction through Total Physical Response (TPR) to songs and guessing games. This method appears to improve the enthusiasm of students and mitigate the anxiety they experience when speaking, however, the teachers reported problems with classroom management, and maintaining students’ focus during the activities. In concerning the findings, the paper determines that the rigorous parameters of CLT can be simplified to drilling/event based interactions with young learners. The results enable educators to build active, confidence stimulating lesson plans that improve pedagogical practice. Cognitive limitations and the communicative goals of the lesson pose challenges, but the findings also support practice that can balance these issues.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); Young Learners; Speaking Skill; Gamification.

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INTRODUCTION

In the present-day scenario, English competency stands as an important literacy skill that requires the same gravity as reading and writing. Speaking, the fourth skill, stands out as the most definitive component of foreign language learning, as it plays the most important role in social interaction (Rao, 2019). In young language learners, the skill for speaking English serves as a scaffold for future use and learning, as well as an efficacy tool for building self-confidence. The early school-going age, specifically the first grade, stands as the “Golden Age,” where the brain exerts maximum malleability and an extraordinary opportunity for the heightened development of the new language (Pinter, 2017). In consideration of the abovementioned facts, the important teaching processes that take place during the aforementioned period play the most important role in the future learning and development of attitudes pertaining to the language.

Nevertheless, the reality that emerges empirically pertaining to the curriculum and actual performance of students, illustrates the vast difference between the two. The silent classroom continues to be an urgent concern for most English as Foreign Language learning institutions, as it persists in the Indonesian context. Recent research conducted by Leong and Ahmadi in 2017 confirms that the psychological factors, specifically the lack of self-confidence and speaking anxieties, are the major hindrances that impede classroom participation. In the primary school setting, the issues are coupled with the vocabulary constraint and the fear of teacher correction. In addition, the traditional learning paradigms that emphasize grammar correctness and ignore the message, tend to suppress the students' eagerness and inadvertently create an oppressive learning environment (Kkonou et al., 2017).

As an antidote against the strict traditional approach, the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach has been widely promoted as an effective teaching option. CLT moved away from the mechanistic perspective of the Audio-Lingual Method and focused on the priority of "meaning over form" and the ultimate goal of promoting "communicative competence" (Savignon, 2018).

The essence of CLT lies in the involvement of the learner in meaningful interaction, such as gamification, role-playing, information transfer, and the like. Studies conducted by Ahmed (2016) and Kusuma (2020) confirmed that the creation of such communications contexts can help mitigate the affective filters of the students, allowing them to produce the target language without the paralyzing fear of making minute errors.

Although there is clear proof that CLT works, there appears to be an important research gap which the systematic study of the literature reveals. Most research, such as the study conducted by Tao and Gao (2018), focuses on intermediate or 'tertiary-level students' who are sufficiently mature enough to process intricate levels of meaning. Empirical research that focuses on the adjustment of CLT for 'absolute beginners, starting from the first grade of elementary school,' appears to be relatively limited. In fact, there appears to be some concern, some degree of skepticism, regarding the applicability of CLT for children aged six to seven years, due to the low levels of language input that they receive.

This research is conducted in the context of SD Unggulan Hamzanwadi, which offers distinctive experiences in elementary-level English learning. Initial observations show that teachers here do not merely follow the purist approach to CLT but use creative and contextualized adaptations. Also, the use of physical gamification like "Guess the Animal," "Train Game," and singing activities like "Head, Shoulders, Knees, and Toes" has shown to be effective in triggering enthusiastic oral responses, proving that language barriers can easily be overcome if learning experiences are embedded inside happy, physical, and visual activities (Harun, Az-Yunus, & Imran, 2019).

In addition, there appears to be an intriguing combination based on the initial analysis of teaching approaches. Information gathered from the interview indicates the deliberate combination of drilling methods for laying the foundation for basic vocabulary, immediately followed by basic communicative exercises. In consideration of the fact that one-grade students are not progressing to the point where free conversation becomes feasible, teachers implement repetition into the arrangement of the communicative games. This flexible teaching method, referred to as the "Simple CLT Approach" throughout the study, refutes the either-or implication that drilling and CLT are mutually exclusive processes, as it appears to be mutually enhancing for young students.

While such an adaptive strategy offers promise, the execution of the same is not without some challenges. Interview findings reveal that executing communicative strategies for such

young children on a larger scale creates substantial classroom management issues. Teachers find it challenging to keep the attention of distracted young children and ensure that the noise levels are maintained during gamification-related activity. Following passive learning for active production needs extremely meticulous scaffolding, for example, extensive use of visuals (in the form of flashcards) and Total Physical Response. An understanding of the micro-level relationship between the strategy and the challenges discussed above would help create an effective teaching model.

As such, the urgency of the research study revolves around the definition of “best practices” for child-centered and English communicative learning. More specifically, the objectives of the research study include the following three primary research inquiries: (1) What teacher practices are there for the modification and delivery of the Simple CLT strategy for teaching English in the first grade classroom of the SD Unggulan Hamzanwadi school, and (2) What are the teaching and management challenges that arise during the teaching process, and (3) How do the students react and interact during the process of the various communicative activities. The study explores theoretical aspects of the English for Young Learners (EYL) field, as it introduces the simplified CLT strategy and provides new visions and insights for the teaching process. Also, it provides practical information and insights for English teachers, as it offers an effective guide for the teaching process, concerning the age-old challenge regarding learner hesitance.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts the qualitative research design, particularly making use of the case study design. This design was particularly fitting for the research objective of exploring and explaining the process of the ‘Simple Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)’ method employed in the actual setting without the intervention of variables, as stated by Creswell (2014). This case study design makes it possible for the research to conduct an examination of the teaching styles and learning challenges experienced in the grade one classroom. This study particularly focuses on the search for the meaning of the teaching processes as interpreted from the subjective viewpoints of the research participants, the teachers and the students.

Participants and Setting This study took place at the SD Unggulan Hamzanwadi during the odd semester of the 2025/2026 school year. The major participants were selected using the purposive sampling method, specifically because they were English teachers already teaching the first-grade class and had teaching experience of six months up to six years. They had shown the capacity to implement simplified communicative approaches. In an attempt to gain an overall perspective, the first-grade students, averaging 20 to 25 for each class, were selected as the support participant. These students are categorized as “absolute beginners/young learners” and are between the ages of 6 and 7 years.

Data Collection Instruments In order to ensure methodological rigor and data validity through the process of triangulation, the study employed three different data collection instruments, which are as follows:

1. **Class Observation:** Non-participant observation research was conducted where the researcher acted as an observer and followed check-list approaches for observation. Seven key aspects of CLT observation were conducted, which were pre-session activities, teacher and learner interaction, use of target language, Communicative Tasks such as

gaming and role play, responses of the students, use of learning medium, and evaluation processes.

2. **Semi-Structured Interview:** An interview schedule was designed that would generate insights into the depth of understandings that the selected four teachers had about CLT. This research tool focused on their conceptual knowledge regarding CLT, the reasons for implementing CLT, how CLT can be adapted for young learners, and the problems faced during the process.
3. **Documentation** The study gathered teaching artifacts like Lesson Plans (RPP/Modul Ajar) and photos of classroom activities, as well as teaching resources such as flashcards and work sheets, to support observation findings.

Data Collection Procedures The process of data collection took an M-shaped trajectory. In the first phase, there was an preliminary study and acquiring necessary permissions, followed by extensive participant observation. In the preliminary phase, the researcher recorded teacher-student classroom interaction and the enactment of 'Simple CLT' teaching strategies like the use of songs, 'Guess the Animal,' and the 'Train Game' without interfering with the teaching and learning process. All the classroom sessions were recorded and documented by the researcher through extensive field notes. In the second phase, there were post-observation interviews carried out for validation and acquiring the teaching rationale.

Data Analysis Technique

Data analysis involved an iterative process following the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), where three processes are carried out simultaneously:

1. **Data Condensation:** Unedited data collected from the transcription of the interviews and field notes was subjected to data condensation. This involved selecting, filtering, and simplifying the information that would help address the research question, which focused on CLT strategies, problems, and responses.
2. **Data Display:** Data was presented through systematic narratives. In order to provide insights into the data and help understand it, the data display was enhanced by the use of quotes and vignettes.
3. **Conclusion Drawing** - The study conducted synthesis of the findings and came up with the initial conclusions based on the observed patterns. These were later validated against the field data.

FINDINGS

This section outlines the empirical findings gathered on the process of implementing the Simple Communicative Language Teaching method in the school, Unggulan Hamzanwadi. These are the data obtained from classroom observation and interviews conducted on the English teachers. These teachers were asked for their approach to teaching and how their students, the grade one students, would react to the teaching process. The data gathered were categorized into three themes.

1. Teacher Strategies for Implementing Simple CLT

Interview data indicates there is an obvious pedagogical focus for the participants, as the four teachers approach CLT not as an approach for dealing with intricate discourse, but instead as an underlying tool for instilling confidence in students regarding the expression of basic syntactical patterns. An underlying trend of methodological adjustment and integration

for the teachers involves mixing drilling approaches (the use of repetition) and communication to fill the lexical gaps that are implicit for new students.

Teacher 3 also clearly stated that in the first-grade setting, CLT is used side by side with drilling methods. Teacher 4 confirmed this hybrid practice by explaining the sequence of instruction:

“The teaching activities first focus on drilling the students, then try to build simple sentences. This way, the material does not stay with just one topic or example and moves on.” (Interview, Teacher 4)

In line with this view, Teacher 2 also stressed the use of simplification to meet the students’ cognitive ability:

“The strategy for adapting the CLT method involves simplifying the material. this is intended to trigger the students’ willingness to practice speaking.” (Interview, Teacher 2)

Additionally, Teacher 1 emphasized that the success of this practice relies on selling the content as “learning in a fun way,” so that it will not be constrained by attention span and time limits, adding: “The teacher packages the material attractively, aligning it with what brings the students joy.”

2. Classroom Activities and Implementation of CLT

Field observations in the classrooms conducted on September 20, 23, and 25, 2025, suggest that CLT classroom implementation is overly dominated by the use of gamification and visual scaffolding. Any text-based instruction was absent; rather, all instructors employed interactive media.

The following summary describes the communicative activities observed during this period:

Table 1. Observation of CLT Activities in Grade 1

Teacher	Topic	Primary Communicative Activity	Instructional Media
Siti Sarah M.	Animals	Guess the Animal: Students deduce the animal name based on the teacher’s body movements (pantomime) without translation.	Body Gestures, Songs
Nur Misouwarini	Parts of Body	Touch and Say: Using flashcards, the teacher gives rapid instructions, and students must identify/touch their own body parts.	Flashcards
N. Wardatul Uyun	Numbers	Counting Game: Students count real-world objects contained within a bag using English.	Songs, Realia (Real Objects)
Bq. Nining Kasturi	Colors	Train Game: Students form a “train”; those “caught” must answer questions regarding colors or vocabulary.	Songs, Images

Observational data indicates that the interaction between teacher and students is always two-way. In Teacher Siti Sarah’s class, for example, it was observed that “The teacher does not provide translations but models sounds and movements. subsequently asking ‘What is this?’“, while in Teacher Bq. Nining’s class, the communicative approach was achieved through physical play where the students were “compelled to speak due to the rules of the game.” From these

observations, it can be concluded that Simple CLT is enacted via a Total Physical Response (TPR) framework coupled with linguistic games.

3. Student Responses and Engagement

Field observations show that this approach is well received and mostly positive; however, this is achieved with particular dynamics relating to classroom management.

- Heightened Engagement and Affect

The checklists showed consistent evidence for positive student response under the “Student Response” indicator among all four classes. In Teacher Siti Sarah’s class, for instance, this was observed: “All students were highly enthusiastic. scrambling to raise their hands to give their response.” A similar environment was found to exist for Teacher Bq. Nining’s class: “Class was filled with expressions of tension mixed with delight while waiting for turns.” This is supported by the interview with Teacher 3: “Student reactions. they were extremely excited with the learning process and were able to give responses to questions asked.”

- sociale

Students were not passive receivers but showed active participation. In observations carried out on Teacher 4 (Topic: Songs), the following was shown: “Students were able to memorize vocabulary at a faster rate with musical rhythm compared to spoken repetition.”

- Attentional and Management Dynamics:

Despite the general enthusiasm expressed during the interviews, the collected interview data were found to reveal the difficulties specifically with regard to student attention. For instance, “regulating student attention” was cited by Teacher 1 as the biggest difficulty they experience. Additionally, for Teacher 2, “levels of attention and young abilities” continue to be important considerations. Situational anxiety was observed within Teacher Nur Misouwarini’s class with regard to “students glancing at other students sitting beside them for fear of producing the wrong response to rapid instructional delivery.”

CONCLUSION

The analysis and discussion on the gathered data form a finding that the execution of the “Simple Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)” approach at SD Unggulan Hamzanwadi is carried out not fully under the traditional method concept but instead through a blended model that can be adapted for particular needs. It is all about vocabulary drilling activities with the aim of applying gamification and Total Physical Response (TPR) activities such as songs and guessing games to implement them later within context. The activities perfectly address the gap between the limited cognitive capacity for beginners and the curriculum implemented for active learning and interaction.

This approach has made a huge impact on the students’ emotional and psychomotor development. It can be observed from the evidence gathered from the study above that there is a substantial increase in the subjects’ intrinsic motivation and active participation so that they do not feel the need to communicate in the foreign language. This was accomplished by creating speaking activities within an enjoyable play context that reduced the affective filter

and helped build a joint confidence to produce English speech without worrying about grammatical inaccuracies.

However, this study highlights some instructional difficulties that cannot be overlooked. It is the instructional difficulties that come with student behavior and the attention span typical for young kids that form the core challenge and not student resistance. Some instructional difficulties include handling student attention movement from highly engaging game activities to other activities needing quiet time as well as handling noise levels conducive to teaching. Additionally, instructional difficulties may lead to reduced exposure to the target language due to vocabulary constraints that require the teacher to teach through the dominant language/medium.

As the implication of these findings, this research provides several strategic suggestions. For teachers, it would be good to implement a more balanced approach to management during transitions between activities involving “stirring activities” and “settling activities,” and to make full use of non-verbal visual aids to minimize translation. For educational organizations, support with various types of visual educational aids is requisite. In closing, this research encourages other investigators to examine quantitatively the link between Simple CLT and student academic achievement or to explore more suitable methods for evaluation for this game-based learning approach for speaking.

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