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Contents

Dealing with Challenges in Writing through Writing Conference
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Enhancing Students’ English Achievement through Communicative Language Teaching: An Experimental Study
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A Study of the Implementation of Speaking Programat Attarbiyatul Islamiyah Islamic Boarding School In Paiton Probolinggo
Muhammad Rifa’i

Linguistic Intelligence and Reading Comprehension on Different Text-Types: Correlational Study
Nur Laili Saidah

The Effectiveness of Think Pair Share Technique (TPST) in Teaching Writing Hortatory Exposition Text
Nurul Qamariyah

Examining the Relationship between Students’ Reading Achievement and Reading Self-Concept
Tutut Retnowati

The Effect of Dictogloss on Students’ Listening Achievement through Narrative Text
Zaenabbizaho Nuraini
Enhancing Students’ English Achievement through Communicative Language Teaching: An Experimental Study

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Abstract. This experimental study investigates whether or not there is significant difference in the English achievement between students who are taught by communicative language teaching and students who are taught by conventional teaching. There were eighty four social and science students who were enrolled in this study as an experimental group and control group. Before the treatment, pretest was given to know the students initial difference, and posttest used to measure their English achievement. The test items were made in the form of multiple choices concerning about grammar and vocabulary taken from the students’ worksheet (LKS) and some supplementary materials. To reach the validity of the test, it was checked to the expert of test designer, English teacher. A factor analysis applied was analysis of covariance to address the research questions. The analysis indicated that there was significant difference between two groups with the critical F value with df 1/81 at the level of significance. 05 was 3.95, and the obtained F-value was 5.24. The findings were that experimental students had higher average score on 17.81 than the control group on 15.02. It implies that the use of Communicative Language Teaching gives positive effect to the students’ English achievement.

Keywords: effectiveness, CLT, conventional teaching, achievement

Introduction

The learners’ goals in learning English is to master the four English language skills that acknowledge the interdependence to communicate, specifically referred to communicative competence (Richards et al., 2001:155). Language is a skill, and a skill need to be applied, not just stored in the head or admired at a distance (Lewis, 1998: 41). Communicative competence is knowledge of not only if something is formally possible in a language, but also the knowledge of whether it is feasible, appropriate, or done in a particular speech community (Longman Dictionary, 2002:90). Thus, the teacher should understand that the need to focus in language is on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures (Firth, et al. 1957 in Richards and Rodgers, 2001:153).

To some extent, language learning may be seen as a process which grows out of interaction between learners, teachers, texts, and activities (Breen and Candin, 1980 in Hal, et al., 2000:14). Therefore, Breen and Candin state that a teacher could have a communicative methodology which can exploit the classroom as a resource with its own communicative potential. Thus, to achieve the goal of language learning, communicative competence where the learners could use the language appropriate to the social context, is required a good teaching method. Hence, the language teaching should emphasize the use
of language to be communicated and practiced and learners could express their willingness through interaction with their friends in real situation. Thus, Communicative language teaching (abbreviated to CLT) is one technique to be applied for this purpose.

Communicative Language Teaching consists of different concept of principles related to language competence and language learnings that are integrated in the class activities (Richards and Rodgers, 2001:172). One of the characteristics of communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to functional as well as structural aspects of language (Littlewood, 1981:155). In relation to this statement, Wilkins further describes two types of meaning containing notional categories (concept such as time, sequence, quantity, location and frequency), and categories of communicative function (request, denials, offers, and complaints). The principles of communicative language teaching, defined further by Richards and Rodgers, are that: 1) learners learn a language through using it to communicate; 2) authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities; 3) fluency is an important dimension of communication which involves the integration of different language skills; and 4) learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and errors.

In addition to the objective of communicative of communicative language teaching is that students will learn to use language as a means of expression, values and judgements to meet their own communication needs. Several new syllabus types are proposed by some advocates of CLT in Richards his article of “communicative_language_teaching_today_v2” such as a skill based syllabus focusing on the four skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking. Then, a functional syllabus is organized to the functions the learner should be able to carry out in English, such as expressing like and dislike, introducing someone, giving explanation and the like. Another syllabus type is a notional syllabus, which is based around the content and notions a learner would need to express and tasks or activities students should carry out in the classroom (Retrieved from http://www.professor_____jackrichards.com/pdfs/communicative_language_teaching_today_v2.pdf accessed on April 7, 2008).

Concerning about the teachers and learners roles in CLT classroom, Richards in his article stated that:

“Learners have to participate in classroom activities that were based on a cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning. Students have to become comfortable with listening to their peers in group work or pair work tasks, rather than relying on the teacher for a model. They are expected to take on greater degree of responsibility for their own learning. And teachers have to assume the role of facilitator and monitor. Rather than being a model for correct speech and writing and one with the primary responsibility of making students produce plenty of error free sentences, the teacher have to develop a different view of learner’s errors and of her/his own role in facilitating language learning”.

Based on pre-observation, the fact indicates that the teacher at MA Mamba’ul Ulum applies a conventional teaching. Unfortunately, the teaching is assumed still to teacher-centered although the teacher has provided activities obligating learners to communicate. In order to achieve the students’ English achievement, the communicative language teaching is applied compared to conventional teaching at MA Mamba’ul Ulum Awang-awang Mojosari. The primary aim of this study was to analyze the difference in the English achievement between the students who are taught by using CLT and those who are taught by conventional teaching. The research question is formulated as, “is there any significant difference on the students’ English achievement between those who are taught by CLT and those who are taught by conventional teaching?".

**Research Method**

The current study used quasi-experimental method with non-randomized pretest and posttest design. Wiersma (1991:135) says that when conducting research, it is not always to select or assign subjects at random. There are many naturally formed intact groups of
subject in the educational world, such as the students in the classroom. Further he adds that when intact groups of subjects are used in an experiment, it is called quasi-experimental research.

Table 1. Non-equivalent Pretest Posttest Design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Treatment</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Y1</td>
<td>CLT</td>
<td>X1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Y2</td>
<td>Conventional</td>
<td>X2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Where:
E = Experimental group; C = Control group; Y = Pretest; X = Posttest

The variables examined were independent variable, teaching English using CLT, and the dependent variable is students’ English achievement. The population was all of second year students taking English subject. Since the population is too large, it was considered to use sample. In this study, the subjects chosen were eighty-four students containing class XI IPA with thirty-eight students and class XI IPS with forty-six students. Then the subjects were organized in two groups, experimental and control group.

The instruments used were the pretest and posttest. The test was made based on the materials given and in the form of multiple choices concerning about grammar and vocabulary. The test items were considered valid because it was checked to the expert of test designer, English teacher. Djiwandono (1996:112) states that an accurate test item is little better to check it to the same teacher in order to get correction and revision for each content, instruction, and the formula of test item. Prio to the materials, they were taken from the “students’ worksheet (LKS)” and other supplementary materials. Then the scores were analyzed using analysis of covariance (abbreviated to ANCOVA) when the scores of two groups on the pretest are not equivalent in order to compensate this lack of equivalency between the groups (Holt, et al. 1979:260).

Procedures
The procedures of CLT used for the experimental group, based on Finocchiaro and Brumfit (1983:107-108) in Rodgers and Richards (2001:170-171) are evolutionary rather than revolutionary:

a. Presentation of a brief dialog or several mini-dialogs, preceded by a motivation (relating the dialog situations to the learners’ probable community experiences) and a discussion of the function and situation people, roles, setting, topic, and the informality or formality of the language which the function and situation demand.

b. Oral practice of each utterance of the dialog segment to be presented that day (entire class repetition, half-class, groups, individuals) generally preceded by teacher’s model. If mini-dialogs are used, teacher could engage in similar practice.

c. Questions and answers based on the dialog topic and situation itself. (inverted wh or or questions)

d. Questions and answers related to the students’ personal experiences but centered around the dialog theme.

e. Study one of the basic one of the basic communicative expressions in the dialog or one of the structures which exemplify the function.

f. Learner discovery of generalizations or rules underlying the functional expression or structure. This should include at least four points: its oral and written form, its position in the utterance, its formality or informality in the utterance, and in the case of a structure, its grammatical function and meaning.
g. Oral recognition, interpretative activities (two to five depending on the learning level, the language knowledge of the students, and related factors).

h. Oral production activities—proceeding from guided to freer communication activities.

i. Copying of the dialogs or mini-dialogs or modules if they are not in the class text.

j. Sampling of the written homework assignment, if given.

k. Evaluation of learning (oral only).

Research Findings and Discussion

Findings

The focus of analysis presented in this report is on quantitative analysis for pretest and posttest scores for both groups, and to test the hypothesis. The analysis on mean score of pretest from both groups indicated that the experimental group got 15.18 and the control group gained 12.09. Meanwhile, the posttest average scores showed that the experimental group had better average score on 17.81; whereas the control group was 15.02. As their initial difference on the pretest score, the analysis of covariance was applied to analyze the data.

ANOVA analysis indicated that there was significant difference on the students’ English achievement between who were taught by CLT and conventional teaching. F-value is a key indicator showing whether the use of CLT and conventional teaching in research group was significantly different. The F-value was 5.24 which were higher than F-critic with df 1/81 at level of significance .05. The ANCOVA with pretest as covariate was listed in Table 2.

Table 2 Summary of ANCOVA with Pretest as covariate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source of Variance</th>
<th>SS'</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS'</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>level of significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Between group</td>
<td>35.27</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>35.27</td>
<td>5.24</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within group</td>
<td>545.51</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>6.73</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>580.78</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Based on what have been stated above, the researcher concluded that there was significant difference on the students’ English achievements who were taught by using CLT and conventional teaching. It meant that the alternative hypothesis was accepted, and the null hypothesis, that there was no significant difference between the two groups, was rejected.

Having known from the findings of the study, it could be stated that teaching English using CLT is effective. Richards in his article of “communicative_language_teaching_v2” states that CLT is as reaction to traditional language teaching approaches as older method such as audiolingualism and situational language teaching, and it is an extension of the notional-functional syllabus (http://www.Professor.jackrichards.Com/pdfs/communicative-language-teaching-today-v2.pdf). Meanwhile, critics of audiolingual method which was the centrality on the grammatical structure and presented through short dialog did not help students achieve communicative competence in the target language; hence, it was needed new ways to develop language instruction and notional-functional syllabus that was stressed in CLT as the most effective way to teach second or foreign language (http://en.wikipedia.or/wiki/communicative_language_teaching accessed on January 1, 2008).
Discussion

In this section, the researcher discussed further about the research findings. In correlation with the research problem, the findings showed that there was a significant difference on the English achievement between students who were taught by CLT and who were taught by conventional teaching. There were several interpretative reasons to explain this matter.

First, it might be related to the students’ initial differences in the two groups. Those were the differences on the students’ ability and the result of pretest scores. It was obviously known that both groups had distinctive ability as their English teacher told the researcher that an experimental group had better knowledge than the control group. This was proven from the result of pretest average scores stating the experimental group got higher result than the control group.

Another reason was the different procedures used in teaching English as it had been mentioned in the previous chapter. The experimental group used student-centered approach, in other words the control group was treated with teacher-centered approach. During the process of the study, the researcher knew that the procedures used in the experimental group could run smoothly. It was shown by the students’ good response to study more about English although in the first meeting they felt ashamed to build up their self-confidence. The researcher provided chance for students to get involved in learning process, and she put herself to control and manage the students’ activities. It was related to one of the characteristics of CLT that was risk taking. In this case, the students were hoped to have various ways to communicate without being afraid of mistakes (Johnson and Johnson, 1998 in Rodgers and Richards, 2001:173).

On the other hand, the procedures in the control group were assumed as boring activities. Some of the students were sleepy and lazy in the middle of studying because the main attention was directed on the teacher’s explanation. Unfortunately, the students could not increase their confidence, ability and communicative desire in learning English. The teacher, moreover, dominated the class activities.

The last reason was the classroom activities chosen in teaching and learning process. These activities were of course based on the materials given in the handbook of “English Language Professional Media (LKS)”, and some supplementary materials. In the experimental group, the activities were made based on the materials given and some other sources by involving students in the exciting activity, for example finding the differences or similarities activity, information gathering activity about introduction, and the like. As stated in the classroom activities defined by Richards in his article of “communicative-Language-Teaching-Today” that some of activities used in this study were accuracy versus fluency activities, mechanical, meaningful and communicative activities, information-gap activities, and information gathering activities (http://www.Professor.jackrichards.Com/pdfs/communicative-language-teaching-today-v2.pdf).

In this learning process, the students were provided authentic texts that obliged them to communicate each other. As example of one activity was information-gap activity. In this case, the students were put in pairs and in each pair, student A was given a picture and student B was given a similar picture but has differences in some vital aspects. They were told that they were not allowed to look at each other’s material, and they had to find out a certain number of differences between the two pictures through discussion. In this kind of activity, the students should cooperate each other, be more active and communicative.

In opposite with the experimental group, the learning activities of control group were oriented on the handbook. In the process of studying, the students were focused on the topics given in the book and directed toward the researcher’s explanation. Even though there
was a dialog activity, it was still seemed that the students of control group were less enthusiastic. There were little students who engaged to the learning process and became dominant participant. Unfortunately, the rest of them became passive students.

Finally, the finding showed that both group had significant difference. It could be said that the experimental group was better than control group. The fact was known from the materials and activities used in the experimental group that support students desire to learn more about English. On the contrary, it was really different from the activities of control group that could not fulfill their need, as most of the attention was mainly organized to the teacher’s model; moreover, the emphasis was on student’s memorization, drills and practice of grammatical pattern.

Having known from the result, the researcher summed up that the teaching English using CLT was effective for the following reasons. In response to the first, the dimension of CLT is student-centered and experience based view of second language teaching (Richards and Rodgers, 2002:158). Therefore, learners could be actively involved in their own learning process and get experiences in the classroom context which is used to teach them how to adapt in real world situation.

Another reason is the advantages of using CLT which are not focused on the language practice but on how about the langauge work in the discourse (Halliday, 1994:171-172). In this case, learners are provided opportunities to use their English without being afraid of making mistakes from the grammatical or sentence errors. Indeed, they collaborated for helping each other as the activities are based on cooperative rather than individualistic approach to learning (http://www.Professor.jackrichards.com/pdfs/communicative-language-teaching-today-v2.pdf).

In addition to these reasons, CLT is effective and interested activities which the learners could be freer to create and use some language expressions based on the context. It is supported by the syllabus namely, a skill based syllabus focusing on the four skills, a functional syllabus concerning about the functions of the learner to carry out in English language expression, as like expressing like and dislike, apologize, and the like, and a notional syllabus that is based on the content and the notion that should be expressed.

**Conclusion and suggestions**

**Conclusion**

To answer the research problem, the researcher presented the result of the study in the following two sections:

The first section is related to the students’ scores for both experimental and control group. Having obtained the findings, the researcher found that the experimental group got 17.18 which was higher than the control group who gained 15.02. It means that after being taught by using CLT, the experimental students had better English achievement.

The last section is an interpretation of the findings. Based on the hypothesis testing, it is clearly known that there is significant difference on the students’ English achievement for both groups. The difference was due to several reasons. First, both groups were different in English skills as the experimental group got higher scores than the control group. Moreover, it could be known from the pretest score that the first group got 15.18 and the second group got 12.09. Then the distinguished procedures were applied in both groups. To some extent, the experimental group was students centered which allow the students to have more opportunities to get involved in learning process. In opposite, the control group was teacher-centered where the teacher became the most important attention from the students. Last, the activities done in CLT were categorized as interesting activity that could
arise the students’ enthusiasm in learning English. In contrast, in conventional teaching, the students often got bored and less attracted to study English.

In short, CLT was considered the best way of teaching English compared to conventional method. It was a reaction from grammar and vocabulary as the most important aspect to the development of the notional functional syllabus which was done in CLT. Finally, the effectiveness of CLT could improve the students’ English achievement and their communication ability well.

**Suggestions**

In accordance with the result of the study, the researcher provides suggestions for the English teachers and future researchers. First, the English teachers should think about using CLT to get better achievement as proven from the present result of study. Then he or she should choose the appropriate supplementary materials and vary the activities in order that students become more active and communicative.

The next two suggestions are directed toward future researchers. First, in relation to the application of similar research approach, she or he should conduct a longer time of study in order to deepen the treatment and achieve better English achievement. Then for future researchers who will investigate further about CLT, she or he should enlarge their understanding about CLT and vary the supplementary materials matched to its classroom activities.

**REFERENCES**


