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Using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to improve speaking skills in a1-level 8th graders

Usar la Enseñanza del Lenguaje Comunicativo (CLT) para mejorar las habilidades orales en estudiantes de octavo grado de nivel A1

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the impact of implementing Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strategies on the development of English-speaking skills among eighth-grade students at the A1 level. A mixed-methods approach with an explanatory sequential design was used, combining quantitative oral assessments conducted before and after the CLT program implementation with qualitative data obtained through student surveys. Forty students from a public basic education school in the city of Guayaquil participated, engaging for five weeks in communicative activities such as role-plays, collaborative pair work, and listening comprehension exercises. Quantitative results showed significant improvements in students' fluency, pronunciation, and coherence in conversations. Additionally, qualitative data demonstrated an increase in student motivation and participation. Despite some difficulties, the results show that this communicative methodology is effective and can be applied in similar environments.

Keywords: communicative language teaching (CLT), speaking skills, fluency development, pronunciation accuracy, EFL pedagogy

RESUMEN

El estudio evaluó el impacto de la aplicación de estrategias de Enseñanza Comunicativa del Lenguaje (CLT) en el desarrollo de la habilidad de hablar en inglés en estudiantes de octavo grado de nivel A1. Se utilizó un enfoque de método mixto con un diseño secuencial explicativo que combinó las evaluaciones orales cuantitativas antes y después de la implementación del programa CLT, con los datos cualitativos conseguidos mediante encuestas estudiantiles. Participaron cuarenta estudiantes de una institución educativa en la ciudad de Guayaquil, quienes, durante cinco semanas, realizaron actividades comunicativas como juegos de rol, trabajo colaborativo por parejas y ejercicios de comprensión oral. Los resultados cuantitativos mostraron una mejora significativa en fluidez, pronunciación y coherencia en las conversaciones de los estudiantes. En los resultados cualitativos se observó un incremento en la motivación y participación estudiantil, a pesar de los desafíos identificados, como el contexto de sobrepoblación en el aula y la escasez de recursos para impartir la asignatura. A pesar de estas limitaciones, los resultados demuestran que la estrategia es eficaz en este contexto y que puede aplicarse en otros escenarios similares.

Palabras clave: enseñanza comunicativa de lenguas (CLT), habilidades orales, fluidez, pronunciación, aprendizaje de inglés

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INTRODUCTION

Developing oral proficiency in English as a foreign language (EFL) represented a challenge for students, especially beginners. This was even more so in limited educational environments, as is the case in Ecuador and other Latin American countries, where they faced difficulties such as overcrowding in classrooms, a lack of teaching materials, limited class time, and limited exposure to the target language outside of school hours (Rodas & Rodas, 2021). These constraints disproportionately affected A1-level students who were in the initial stages of acquiring fundamental communication skills.

As outlined in the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2022), learners at this level could comprehend and employ simple, everyday expressions, but required substantial scaffolding to achieve meaningful interaction. This investigation examined how Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodologies enhanced speaking abilities among eighth-grade A1 students, with particular emphasis on fluency, pronunciation, and coherence.

Traditional language teaching focused on correct grammar and repeating rote words. However, the approach of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) prioritized interaction and real-life communication, promoted fluency, and built learner confidence through authentic language use (Urgilés et al., 2024). Although CLT has been effective in studies, most of these studies were conducted in areas with abundant resources. This left a gap in knowing how well CLT worked in crowded or under-resourced classrooms (Qasserras, 2023; Salmanova, 2025).

According to the Ecuadorian government, by the Ministerio de Educación del Ecuador (2025), students are required to take only three hours of English classes each week, which significantly limits their engagement with the language. This study looked at how Communicative Language Teaching was used in tough situations, trying to connect theory with how it was actually used in classrooms. The ideas came from the main principles of CLT and the CEFR guidelines, which both backed up teaching methods that focus on using language to communicate, not just memorizing information (Blatchford & Russell, 2020; King, 2018).

Employing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the study integrated quantitative assessment of oral performance through pre- and post-intervention testing with qualitative analysis of student survey. Building on this general aim, the study specifically evaluated measurable improvements in students' fluency, pronunciation, and coherence, as well as student engagement and the practical challenges of CLT implementation.

The central research questions were: (1) how CLT activities relate to better speaking skills, (2) how motivated students were when using CLT methods, and (3) the teaching challenges in crowded classrooms.

In alignment with these questions, the study aimed to evaluate the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) strategies on the speaking skills of A1-level eighth-grade students. The research emphasized the development of fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation through tasks that promoted authentic interaction. Additionally, this study sought to explore students' participation levels and attitudes toward tasks designed using the communicative approach, while also identifying the challenges and limitations of implementing this methodological approach in classrooms with the aforementioned reality.

The article does not propose formal hypotheses; however, the study assumed that measurable improvements in skills such as oral proficiency will occur, provided contextual limitations are minimized. The research integrated empirical and qualitative data and suggested practical recommendations for teachers working in contexts with limited pedagogical resources. The results also showed the adaptability of the CLT approach while highlighting the necessity of pedagogical changes to support safe language learning.

The CLT communicative approach underscored its effectiveness in addressing challenges in English teaching, specifically in the development of oral expression in the previously indicated group of students. Recent studies supported a shift away from grammar-based education to more student-centered communicative methods. According to Bobarin (2021), the reduction of anxiety and enhanced autonomy are additional practical contributions of communicative language teaching that fostered a safe, interactive environment.

This theoretical foundation was based on several studies that demonstrated the practical benefits of the methodological strategy. Lin et al. (2025), also found that speaking self-efficacy is closely tied to English learning motivation, further supporting the use of confidence-building strategies.

The literature reports additional and consistent achievements of the CLT strategy, with respect to significant improvements in English speaking ability. The case in Indonesia, where Fauzi and Ridwan's (2025) research yielded consistent results in favor of developing fluency, pronunciation, and confidence in secondary school students. Campoverde et al. (2024) found that, even in high-density classrooms in Ecuador, students responded positively to the CLT approach. Both cases show similarities to the study presented in this article.

These empirical results aligned with the systematic review by Bobarin (2021), which emphasized participatory learning and original collaborative tasks as central elements that served as an effective communicative approach, proving effective at the high school level.

These findings validated the use of strategies that promote contextual vocabulary use, idea sequencing, and communicative fluency, and underscored the need for continued research into the implementation of CLT in resource-constrained educational environments, particularly in public schools in Ecuador. It should be noted that the evidence not only supports the adaptability

of this methodology but also demonstrates its potential to promote meaningful participation, even in overcrowded conditions and with limited infrastructure.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

This study adopted a non-experimental mixed-methods design within the pragmatic paradigm to examine the effects of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on A1-level eighth-grade students' speaking skills. Following an explanatory sequential approach, it began with pre- and post-tests to measure fluency, pronunciation, and coherence, followed by interviews to explore student attitudes. This design offered both measurable outcomes and contextual insight. Recent research by Fauzi and Ridwan (2025) supports the effectiveness of CLT in improving speaking proficiency through a mixed-methods approach.

The research was conducted in a public school in Guayaquil, where A1-level students face challenges like limited exposure and crowded classrooms. The explanatory sequential design combined quantitative data on speaking improvements with qualitative insights from interviews to understand student engagement and perceptions. This approach highlighted practical challenges and adaptive teaching strategies, emphasizing CLT's relevance in resource-limited settings.

Population and Sampling

The study included 40 eighth-grade students, 22 girls and 18 boys. They were chosen through purposive sampling, which means they met certain specific conditions. These included enrollment in the same grade, English language proficiency aligned with A1 level, participation in the same academic shift, and the provision of informed consent signed by their legal guardians. This sampling technique ensured homogeneity across key contextual variables, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the study. The results show that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) works well for beginning learners in public schools. Moreover, the teaching method used in this study can be used again in similar school settings.

Data Collection Techniques and Instruments

Three instruments were used to evaluate the impact of Communicative Language Teaching (independent variable) on students' speaking skills (dependent variable). The primary tool was a standardized pre- and post-intervention oral test, assessed using a modified version of the MET Go! Speaking rubric, aligned with CEFR A1 guidelines (Michigan Language Assessment, 2022). Which measured fluency, pronunciation, coherence, interaction, vocabulary use, and grammatical accuracy, offering a reliable framework for assessing oral performance at the beginner level.

In addition, the attitude survey gathered information on students' motivation and perceptions regarding CLT strategies, while a semi-structured survey explored contextual factors

such as overcrowding and access to resources. All instruments were validated by an expert and pilot tested to ensure clarity, consistency, and appropriateness for the A1-level context.

Data Analysis Procedures

For the quantitative analysis, descriptive statistics were used to summarize how test scores were spread out and what the average scores were. Paired sample t-tests were also done to check if there was a significant difference between scores before and after the intervention. Particular attention was paid to emerging themes about motivational factors and practical constraints that affected the CLT implementation process.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical considerations were rigorously upheld throughout the research process. The parents of the students who participated signed permission. Strict confidentiality protocols were implemented, and participant identities were anonymized through coded identifiers. A key strength of the methodological approach was its capacity to examine both the extent of student learning and the contextual factors within the school environment that influenced such outcomes. However, However, purposive sampling limited the study's external validity due to its non-randomized nature, and the brief intervention period further constrained the generalizability of the results.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, all instruments were pilot-tested and validated by experts to confirm their clarity and suitability for the A1-level target population. Data collection procedures were standardized; the researcher conducted a preliminary analysis to minimize bias during test and interview administration. These procedures contributed to the reliability and validity of the findings, strengthening the methodological rigor.

RESULTS

The results from the pre and post tests showed that students improved in their spoken English across four areas: how well their ideas fit together, their use of language, how they interacted, and how clearly, they spoke. At the start, the overall average score across all four speaking performance criteria was 8 out of 20, indicating limited oral proficiency among students. After implementing a five weeks CLT based intervention, the average increased to 12/20, equivalent to a 50% improvement rate.

Table 1
Average Scores per Criterion in Pre-Test and Post-Test

Criterion	Pre-Test Average	Post-Test Average	Improvement (%)
Coherence	1.9	3.1	+63%
Language	2.1	3.2	+52%
Interaction	1.7	2.8	+65%
Pronunciation	2.3	3.4	+48%

Note. Scores based on the MET Go! speaking rubric adapted to CEFR A1 level.
Source: Own elaboration based on collected data

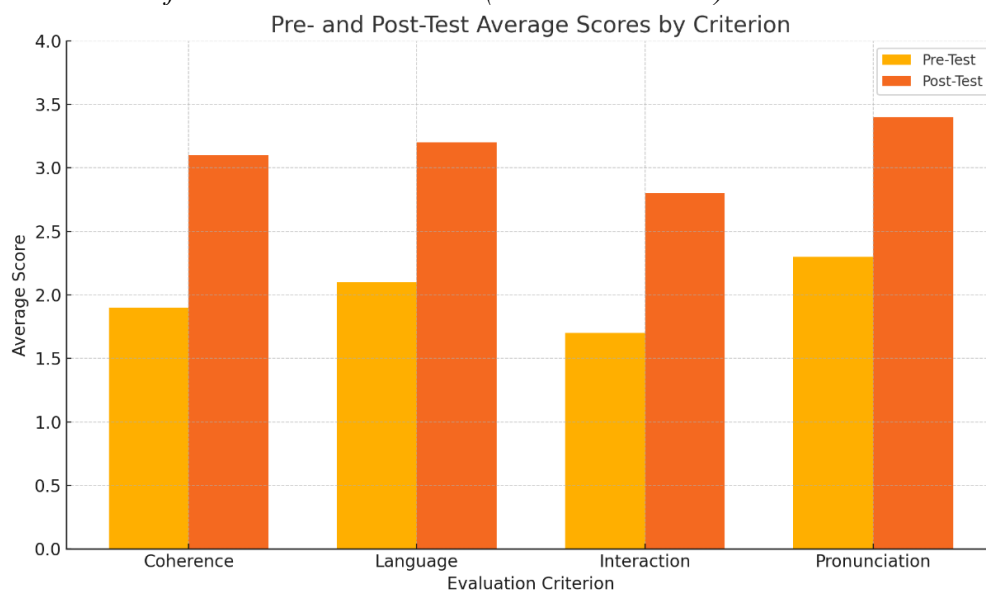
Additionally, 60% of the students were able to initiate and sustain brief conversations without requiring prompts, which was a considerable advancement compared to the 30% observed in the pre-test stage. There was also a noticeable improvement in how clearly students spoke. About half of the group reached a level that was considered “clearly understandable” based on the rubric used.

Gender-related differences were also noted. Both groups improved, but girls scored slightly better in pronunciation. Before the lesson, girls had an average of 2.4, while boys had 2.1. This pattern continued after the lesson.

Regarding topic-related challenges, topics like “Favorite Food” and “Best Friend” showed persistent difficulty among several participants. Before the intervention, 12 out of 40 students scored 6 points or less in “Favorite Food,” mainly due to underdeveloped procedural language. Post-test observations, however, revealed enhanced use of connectors (e.g., “first,” “then”) and sequencing words, particularly among those same students.

Figure 1

Distribution of Individual Student Gains (Pre- and Post-Test)

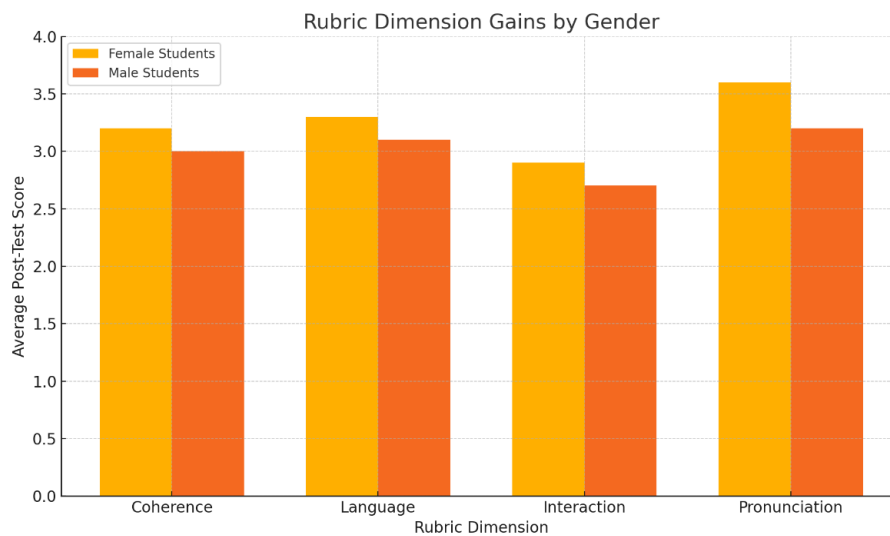


Note. The graph displays mean scores in four speaking performance criteria; coherence, language, interaction, and pronunciation, before and after a CLT based instructional program. Results show consistent improvement, with interaction and coherence showing the highest percentage gains (+65% and +63%, respectively).

Source: Own elaboration from post-intervention test results.

Figure 2

Rubric Dimension Gains by Gender



Note. Gender differences after the intervention are shown in the four dimensions. Both groups showed improvement, with students surpassing them in pronunciation and coherence.

Source: Own elaboration from post-intervention test results.

The attitude surveys showed similar results. Most students had a good view of CLT methods: 60% said the activities were fun, and 55% felt they learned real vocabulary. However, 20% said they felt nervous speaking English in class, mostly because they worried about saying words wrong or getting judged by others.

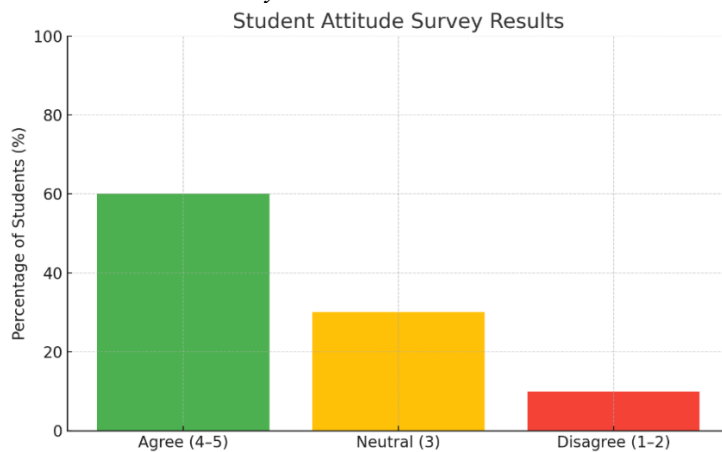
Table 2

Student Attitude toward CLT Strategies (n = 40)

Response Category	Percentage of Students (%)
Agree (4–5)	60%
Neutral (3)	30%
Disagree (1–2)	10%

Source: Own elaboration based on collected data.

Figure 3
Student Attitude Survey Results



Note. Survey results show that 60% of students agreed (ratings 4–5) that CLT-based activities were enjoyable and useful. Meanwhile, 30% remained neutral and 10% expressed disagreement. These findings support the positive affective response toward communicative strategies.

Source: Own elaboration based on collected data.

As for the classroom environment, about 30% of students said being too crowded made it hard to take part, and 20% were unhappy with how comfortable the furniture was, showing that things like space and seating can quietly affect how much students engage.

Table 3
Perceived Overcrowding Impact on Participation

Perception Category	Percentage of Students (%)
Agreed it hindered participation	30%
Neutral	50%
Disagreed	20%

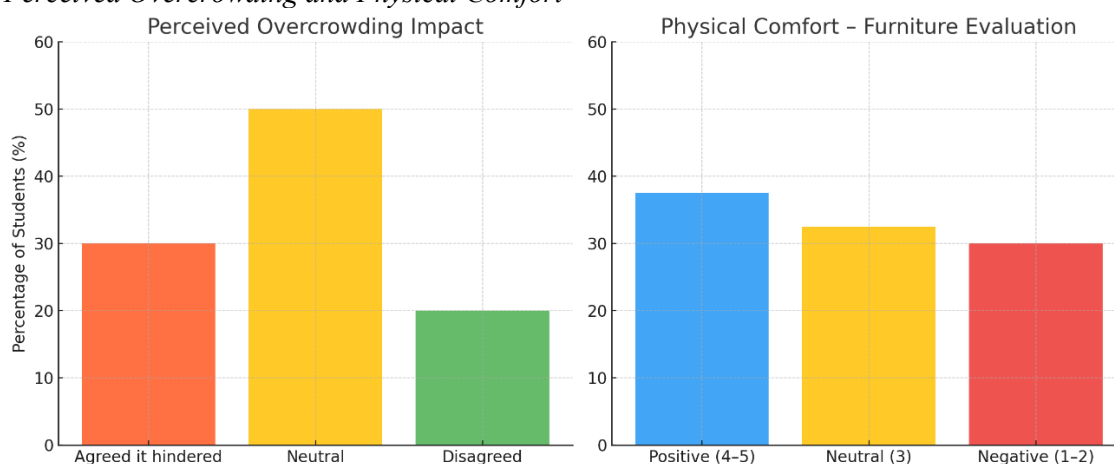
Source: Own elaboration based on collected data.

Table 4
Physical Comfort – Furniture Evaluation

Comfort Level	Percentage of Students (%)
Positive (4–5)	37%
Neutral (3)	32%
Negative (1–2)	30%

Source: Own elaboration based on collected data.

Figure 4
Perceived Overcrowding and Physical Comfort



Perceived Overcrowding Impact on Participation

Note. Thirty percent of students agreed that classroom overcrowding negatively affected their participation, while 50% remained neutral and 20% disagreed.

Source: Own elaboration based on collected data.

Physical Comfort – Furniture Evaluation

Note. Students' perceptions of physical comfort varied: 37.5% rated furniture positively, 32.5% were neutral, and 30% reported discomfort.

Source: Own elaboration based on collected data.

DISCUSSION

This study shows that using Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods really helps A1-level students improve their speaking skills. This supports the main objective of checking how effective CLT is in busy classrooms with limited resources. Improvements in fluency, accuracy, and pronunciation align with the first specific objective. These gains were not only measurable through test results but also supported by students' active participation in role-play and peer interaction, reinforcing the idea that authentic communication enhances oral development.

Student feedback revealed increased motivated and engagement, directly contributing to the second objective. As Salam and Luksfinanto (2024) affirm, CLT fosters learner confidence and communicative competence when adapted to local conditions. In this regard, the teacher's flexibility in applying CLT under challenging circumstances proved crucial. Adeoye (2023) reminds us that although non-probability sampling limits generalization, valuable insights can still emerge from real classroom contexts.

Challenges such as overcrowded classrooms and lack of resources affected the level of interaction, thereby addressing the third objective. However, peer support and scaffolding strategies enabled even less confident students to participate meaningfully in speaking tasks.

This study suggests that CLT, when creatively adapted, holds strong pedagogical value even in public systems with limited support. Its scientific contribution lies in demonstrating how CLT principles function in Ecuadorian classrooms, offering practical applications for teacher

training and curriculum development. The outcomes support the feasibility of CLT in complex educational realities and call for additional longitudinal research and comparative studies with other instructional methods, enriching the broader field of applied linguistics.

The findings consistent with the study's research objectives; the study provides a grounded perspective on the potential of CLT in improving spoken English in public education.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methods significantly helps A1-level students improve their spoken English skills, particularly in overcrowded and resource-limited public-school classrooms. Throughout the teaching process, students showed clear progress in fluency, accurate pronunciation, effective communication, and coherent organization of ideas. These improvements were visible not just in higher test scores, but also in students' feedback, which showed their changing attitudes, behaviors, and active participation in real-world communication tasks.

The chosen mixed-methods research design allowed us not only to measure concrete improvements in students' skills, but also to gain valuable insights into how to implement communicative approaches in educational contexts similar to the one in the study. In addition to the quantitative progress in students' oral expression skills, the study also reveals personal and contextual factors that influence learning. Importantly, the success of the teaching approach depended not only on the method itself but also on the teacher's capacity to adapt CLT principles to address real classroom challenges. The research results provide guidelines for educators working in similar contexts with beginning students.

In sum, the findings respond clearly to the study's general and specific objectives, confirming CLT's potential for strengthening oral competence in vulnerable educational contexts among beginner English learners. These findings set up a good base for future long-term studies and for using this communicative approach in different places. This could help make English language education fairer and more effective in public schools in Ecuador. The way the study was done and the good results it found can be used and improved in future research and teaching practices.

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