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EXPLORING COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING PRACTICES AND ORAL COMMUNICATIVE PERFORMANCE IN A FIRST-GRADE EFL CLASSROOM

**ANÁLISIS DE LAS PRÁCTICAS DE ENSEÑANZA
COMUNICATIVA DE IDIOMAS Y DEL RENDIMIENTO
COMUNICATIVO ORAL EN UN AULA DE INGLÉS COMO
LENGUA EXTRANJERA DE PRIMER CURSO**

Gema Elizabeth Zambrano Ruperti
Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador

Rosalyn Yahaira Cedeño Zambrano
Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador

Emily Nathalia Peñafiel Chávez
Investigador Independiente, Ecuador

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Exploring Communicative Language Teaching Practices and Oral Communicative Performance in a First-Grade EFL Classroom

Gema Elizabeth Zambrano Ruperti¹gzambrano9083@utm.edu.ec<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-9551-8414>Universidad Técnica de Manabí
Ecuador**Rosalyn Yahaira Cedeño Zambrano**rosalyn.cedeno@utm.edu.ec<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7683-5317>Universidad Técnica de Manabí
Ecuador**Emily Nathalia Peñafiel Chávez**penafielemily225@gmail.com<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6605-5958>Investigador Independiente
Ecuador

ABSTRACT

This study explored the implementation of the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach and the oral communicative performance of first-grade students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. Conducted at an elementary school in Manta, Ecuador, the study employed a qualitative, descriptive, and observational design. An initial informal observation was conducted in a classroom of 25 students, followed by focused observations of three intentionally selected students. The results indicated the presence of various practices associated with CLT in the classroom, such as meaning-centered instruction, opportunities for interaction, feedback, a learning-friendly environment, and the use of visual aids. Among the three students studied, comprehension emerged as a relative strength, while vocabulary was consistently identified as an area for improvement. Furthermore, the students showed considerable variation in pronunciation, fluency, expression, and intonation, as well as in listening skills, eye contact, and confidence when speaking. The findings suggest that communicative classroom practices can provide meaningful opportunities for oral participation; appropriate linguistic scaffolding, consistent language modeling, and sufficient response time remain essential for supporting the oral production of young English learners.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, speaking skills, primary education, efl learners, oral language development

¹ Autor principal.

Correspondencia: gzambrano9083@utm.edu.ec

Análisis de las Prácticas de Enseñanza Comunicativa de Idiomas y del Rendimiento Comunicativo Oral en un Aula de Inglés como Lengua Extranjera de Primer Curso

RESUMEN

Este estudio exploró la implementación del Enfoque Comunicativo (CLT, por sus siglas en inglés) y el desempeño comunicativo oral de estudiantes de primer grado en un aula de inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL). Realizado en una escuela primaria de Manta, Ecuador, el estudio adoptó un diseño cualitativo, descriptivo y observacional. Se llevó a cabo una observación informal inicial en un aula de 25 estudiantes, seguida de observaciones focalizadas en tres alumnos seleccionados intencionalmente. Los resultados indicaron la presencia de diversas prácticas asociadas al CLT en el aula, tales como la instrucción centrada en el significado, las oportunidades de interacción, la retroalimentación, un ambiente propicio para el aprendizaje y el uso de recursos visuales. En los tres estudiantes objeto de estudio, la comprensión surgió como una fortaleza relativa, mientras que el vocabulario se identificó sistemáticamente. Asimismo, los estudiantes mostraron una variación considerable en cuanto a pronunciación, fluidez, expresión y entonación, habilidades de escucha, contacto visual y confianza al hablar. Los hallazgos sugieren que las prácticas comunicativas en el aula pueden brindar oportunidades significativas para la participación oral; el andamiaje lingüístico adecuado, el modelado constante del idioma y un tiempo de respuesta suficiente siguen siendo fundamentales para apoyar la producción oral de los jóvenes estudiantes de inglés.

Palabras clave: enseñanza comunicativa de idiomas, habilidades orales, educación primaria, estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera, desarrollo del lenguaje oral

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INTRODUCTION

Language teaching is a dynamic field that has evolved over the years, adopting various pedagogical approaches to facilitate the effective learning of an additional language (Doganay et al., 2021). These approaches reflect different educational theories and students' changing cultural perspectives and needs. Since the 19th and the 20th century, teaching language has been considered a university career, despite many approaches and methods that were created and implemented in classrooms worldwide.

The development of teaching a foreign language has been modified through the years, and there is an endless range of opinions on this matter, but it is necessary to understand that the development of knowledge is different from learning (Piaget, 1964). The difference between these two terminologies, development of knowledge is a spontaneous process, tied to the whole process of embryogenesis, this refers to the development of the body, specifically the nervous system and the development of mental functions; in the case of the development of knowledge in children, embryogenesis ends only in adulthood.

The development of knowledge in children as it relates to second language acquisition is a complex process influenced by various factors, including cognitive abilities, linguistic exposure, and social interactions. The development of different skills in English at an early age is essential due to the high level of brain plasticity during childhood, which facilitates the natural acquisition of sounds, pronunciation, and intonation of a foreign language. Research suggests that children possess innate language learning capacities that enable them to acquire new languages quickly. As they develop, their cognitive skills, such as memory, attention, and problem-solving, play a crucial role in their ability to process and internalize linguistic information. Additionally, the quality and quantity of exposure to the target language and opportunities for meaningful communication significantly impact their language learning outcomes (Gitsaki, 1998).

One of the remarkable examples is Vygotsky who describes in his sociocultural theory, second language acquisition learning is fundamentally a social process that occurs through interaction within a cultural context. (Pathan et al., 2018). An approach represents the broader theoretical framework that underpins language instruction, encompassing beliefs about language acquisition and the learning process.



While an approach provides overarching philosophy, a method details the specific implementation of that philosophy, ensuring alignment between theory and practice. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014)

Likewise, many approaches are marked in the history of the acquisition of EFL, such as the oral approach, which refers to a methodology of language teaching developed by British applied linguists from the 1930s to the 1960s. Even though neither term is commonly used, the impact of the Oral Approach has been long-lasting, and it has shaped the design of many widely used EFL/ESL textbooks and courses, including many still being applied today. (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). One of the best-known approaches is the Communicative Language Teaching Approach, or CLT (Dos Santos, 2020), which focuses on developing authentic communication skills. This approach contrasts with traditional methods, which focus on memorizing grammatical rules and vocabulary. CLT creates an environment of classroom communication between students and teachers, developing fluency with different tasks (Rahmatillah, 2019).

Speaking skills are essential in developing fluency, particularly in academic language, and also allow learners to actively process and experiment with grammar, vocabulary, and sentence structures in real time. This “speaking to learn” process strengthens their grasp of the language and helps them identify and correct errors more effectively. Furthermore, academic language often requires specific discourse features like presenting arguments and justifying. Speaking practice provides opportunities to develop these skills in a dynamic and interactive environment (Doganay et al., 2021). Despite the recognized importance of speaking skills in foreign language learning, many primary EFL classrooms continue to rely on traditional teaching methods that prioritize grammar instruction, memorization, and written activities over meaningful oral interaction.

In Ecuador, specifically in the coast of Manabí, it is evidenced that first-grade students showed difficulties in participating actively in oral activities, responding spontaneously in English, and maintaining simple conversations. These challenges were associated with teacher-centered practices, insufficient use of interactive strategies, and limited exposure to communicative tasks. Consequently, learners tended to become passive recipients of information rather than active users of the language. High Schools encounter several struggles finding good strategies or techniques to apply in a classroom.



In Manta, many private schools such as Clara Barton School, are adapting new ways of teaching, however, there are some limitations to apply it in real-context classrooms.

This research was conducted to explore pedagogical practices associated with Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in early EFL instruction and to describe how first-grade students perform in oral communicative activities within this instructional context. Specifically, the study examined the presence of CLT-related classroom practices, such as meaningful interaction, opportunities for communication, teacher feedback, visual support, and student participation, together with selected dimensions of students' oral communicative performance. Rather than measuring the effectiveness of CLT or changes in speaking ability over time, the study aimed to identify patterns between the observed classroom practices and the oral performance of the focal students. The research was guided by the following question: How are Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices implemented in a first-grade EFL classroom, and what patterns of oral communicative performance are observed among focal students within this context?

General Objective

To explore how the implementation of CLT supports the development of speaking skills in first-grade students within an EFL classroom.

Young Learners and EFL

The English language has become a rapidly globalizing way to communicate to others, leading to better opportunities and valuable experiences with other cultures. Young learners can be understood as holistic learners whose English instruction needs to consider their cognitive, social, emotional, and developmental characteristics. Therefore, the methodology used with children should incorporate interactive and practical activities with meaningful purposes. Avezova (2022) emphasizes the importance of selecting teaching techniques that respond to the characteristics and needs of young learners, while Ningsih et al. (2023) highlight the value of appropriate activities and supportive learning environments.

Moreover, understanding learners' needs, using appropriate teaching tools, and focusing on communication rather than perfection are key factors for successful early English learning. When lessons are enjoyable and meaningful, young learners can develop a positive attitude toward English



and become more willing to participate. Supportive classroom environments, interactive activities, age-appropriate assessment, and the integration of appropriate technologies can contribute to successful language learning. Therefore, teaching young learners requires attention not only to linguistic content but also to motivation, participation, and the conditions under which children use the target language. Young learners therefore benefit from learning environments in which English is connected with interaction, meaningful purposes, and developmentally appropriate activities. These characteristics provide an important foundation for understanding how children acquire a second or foreign language and why opportunities for meaningful language use are particularly relevant in early EFL education. In this context, the teacher plays an important role as facilitator and motivator. Rather than limiting classroom interaction to the transmission of linguistic information, teachers need to create opportunities for children to participate, interact, and use English for meaningful purposes. This role becomes particularly relevant in communicative classrooms, where learners are expected to become active participants in the learning process.

Second Language Acquisition in Children

Second language acquisition in childhood occurs alongside cognitive development and the development of the mother tongue (Vygotsky, 1978). In this process, age does not act in isolation; learning success depends directly on the quantity and quality of exposure to the language, as well as on real opportunities to use it (Unsworth, 2016; Wu, 2022). Therefore, the classroom environment should foster linguistic development through meaningful interactions and consistent exposure to the target language, ensuring that it is presented in contexts that are understandable, relevant, and adapted to children's experiences. The Input Hypothesis is a central component of Krashen's theory of second language acquisition. It proposes that language acquisition is facilitated when learners are exposed to comprehensible input that is somewhat beyond their current level of competence (Krashen, 1985). For young learners, this suggests the importance of providing understandable language through meaningful classroom contexts, visual support, modeling, and interaction.

Interaction is closely related to both input and output because learners can receive language, attempt to produce it, receive feedback, and negotiate meaning during communicative exchanges. Pica (2013) emphasizes the relationship between learner interaction, comprehension, input, output, and negotiation



in second language acquisition. For young EFL learners, structured interaction can therefore provide repeated opportunities to use language while gradually developing confidence and control in oral communication.

Speaking Skills in EFL Contexts

Speaking is a natural and essential way to express ideas and opinions, and it plays a crucial role in communication and interaction. Proficiency in speaking is necessary for learners to become effective communicators because oral communication is central to many real-life situations. Developing speaking involves several interconnected processes, including oral production, vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, discourse organization, and the sequencing of information.

Speaking is distinguished from other language skills by the combination of dimensions involved in oral production. Among the most relevant dimensions are fluency, accuracy, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and interaction. Fluency refers to the ability to produce language with an appropriate degree of continuity and naturalness, whereas accuracy concerns the extent to which learners use the linguistic system appropriately. These dimensions are interconnected because effective oral communication requires learners to balance meaning, form, and the ability to maintain interaction.

Intelligibility and comprehensibility are particularly important dimensions of oral communication. A learner may retain a noticeable foreign accent while still being understandable to interlocutors. Recent research has examined the relationships among fluency, intelligibility, comprehensibility, and accentedness, emphasizing that successful oral communication should not be reduced to native-like pronunciation (Chau & Huensch, 2025). For young EFL learners, this perspective supports an emphasis on understandable communication rather than the elimination of every trace of a first-language accent.

Communicative Competence

Speaking is not merely about producing grammatically correct sentences, but about the ability to use language effectively in social interaction, combining linguistic knowledge with the ability to communicate meaning, respond to others, and participate in real-life communicative situations. This comprehensive view connects directly with the concept of communicative competence, which Hymes (1971) defines as the ability to use language appropriately and effectively according to the social context. In this way, the author challenged traditional perspectives focused exclusively on grammatical



knowledge, demonstrating that mastering a language involves understanding how to interact appropriately in specific situations and contexts.

Canale and Swain (1980) developed a model of communicative competence that incorporated grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence, while Canale (1983) further elaborated the model by distinguishing discourse competence. These dimensions highlight that effective communication requires learners to combine knowledge of linguistic forms with the ability to use language appropriately, organize discourse, and employ strategies when communication difficulties arise.

Communicative competence is consequently associated with meaningful language use rather than the isolated manipulation of grammatical structures, meaning that learners—particularly young learners—require frequent opportunities to use language for purposes such as requesting information, describing situations, and maintaining interaction through social and classroom exchanges (Savignon, 2002). Since speaking represents one of the principal ways in which this competence becomes observable by mobilizing vocabulary and grammar to express meaning, oral instruction must prioritize purposeful communication. This shift from structural practice to meaningful interaction serves as the foundational pedagogical orientation that leads directly to Communicative Language Teaching (Richards, 2006).

Communicative Language Teaching

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to language teaching that focuses on developing learners' ability to communicate effectively. Rather than treating grammar and vocabulary as isolated objectives, CLT emphasizes the meanings and functions of language in authentic or meaningful contexts. It integrates language skills and provides learners with opportunities for social interaction, while positioning learners as active participants in the learning process. Emerging as a shift away from mechanical practice, CLT emphasizes the communicative competence model established by Hymes (1971), Canale and Swain (1980), and Canale (1983). It prioritizes the ability to use language appropriately in context, as highlighted by Savignon (1987). Consequently, the core objective is to create classroom conditions where learners convey and interpret meaning, rather than merely demonstrating knowledge of linguistic forms.



CLT is learner-centered and flexible because classroom activities are designed to increase learners' participation and opportunities to use the target language. The teacher remains responsible for planning, modeling, supporting, and monitoring learning, but learners are expected to participate actively in communication.

Another central principle of CLT is the use of language for communicative purposes that resemble or prepare learners for real-life interaction. In young learner classrooms, authenticity does not necessarily mean reproducing complex real-world situations. Instead, teachers can create developmentally appropriate situations in which children have a genuine reason to ask, answer, describe, choose, compare, or exchange information in English.

CLT Principles and Communicative Activities for Young Learners

Interaction is a central principle of Communicative Language Teaching because language learning is promoted when learners have opportunities to use the target language to exchange information, express ideas, and negotiate meaning. Rather than limiting classroom communication to teacher-led question-and-answer patterns, CLT encourages learners to participate actively in communicative exchanges with their peers. Interaction also provides opportunities for learners to receive comprehensible input and produce meaningful output, which can contribute to the development of oral language abilities (Pica, 2013). For young learners, these opportunities are particularly relevant because communication can be incorporated into activities that are meaningful, purposeful, and appropriate to their developmental level.

Pair and group work are consistent with the learner-centered orientation of CLT because they increase opportunities for students to use the target language during classroom activities. When learners work together, they can ask and answer questions, exchange information, describe objects or situations, and solve simple communicative problems. These activities can provide young learners with more opportunities to produce oral language than teacher-fronted instruction alone. For beginning learners, pair and group work should be supported with age-appropriate vocabulary, visual resources, models, and clear communicative purposes.



Communicative Games

Games can constitute a useful communicative resource for young EFL learners when they require students to use English to accomplish a specific purpose rather than simply practice isolated grammatical forms. Communicative games can involve describing objects, guessing information, asking questions, giving instructions, or identifying differences, thereby creating opportunities for meaningful oral production. Research on primary EFL learners has also examined communicative games as a way to support speaking development, suggesting that game-based interaction can provide additional opportunities for oral practice.

Role-Play and Simulated Communication

Role-play activities provide learners with opportunities to use English in simulated social situations. In CLT, these activities are valuable because students are required to use language to perform communicative functions rather than merely reproduce predetermined sentences. Role plays can be structured according to learners' proficiency level, with the teacher providing vocabulary, expressions, visual prompts, or simple models before students interact. For young learners, situations such as greeting someone, introducing a family member, ordering food, asking for an object, or talking about daily routines can provide meaningful contexts for oral production.

Information-Gap Activities

Information-gap activities are particularly compatible with CLT because they create a genuine communicative need. In these activities, one learner possesses information that another learner does not have, requiring students to communicate in order to complete a task or solve a problem. This structure encourages learners to ask questions, provide information, clarify meaning, and listen to their classmates. With young learners, information-gap activities can be simplified through pictures, cards, matching tasks, classroom objects, or short dialogues, allowing students to communicate while working with language appropriate to their level.

Empirical Evidence: CLT and Speaking Development

Empirical research has provided evidence that communicative approaches can support the development of English among young learners. Reid (2016) conducted a yearlong study with young beginner learners in their first year of primary school in an EFL context. The study was implemented in a student-centered



CLT-based classroom that prioritized interactions between learners and used multiple sources of evidence, including video recordings, periodic speaking tests, and student questionnaires. The study is particularly relevant because it demonstrates that CLT can be investigated with beginning primary learners and through multiple measures of progress.

Evidence from young EFL learners also suggests that communicative activities supported by visual and narrative resources can contribute to oral development. Arguello San Martin, Ramirez-Avila, and Guzman (2020) conducted an action research study with second-grade students in a private school in Guayaquil, Ecuador, using storytelling through picture description as visual support. The researchers considered vocabulary, organization, and fluency as dimensions of oral development and used pre- and post-speaking assessments. Their results indicated improvement in oral performance after the intervention.

Research in Ecuador has also examined the use of CLT to develop oral skills in elementary education. Toro, Camacho-Minuche, Pinza-Tapia, and Paredes (2019) investigated CLT practices among six English teachers and 105 students in second, third, and fourth grades at a public elementary school in Loja. The study found that modeling, repetition, pair work, and group work were commonly used strategies, although the authors reported that these practices were not sufficient to promote active participation and emphasized the need for additional opportunities for students to produce language orally.

Communicative games have also been examined as a strategy for developing speaking among primary EFL learners. Naser et al. (2023) investigated communicative educational games with 86 fourth- and fifth-grade pupils in public and private schools in Duhok. The study specifically focused on speaking and compared experimental and control groups over a three-month period. Such evidence supports the inclusion of games within a broader repertoire of communicative activities, while also showing that the age and proficiency of learners should be considered when interpreting results.

Previous studies indicate that communicative approaches can affect several observable aspects of young learners' oral development, including fluency, vocabulary, oral production, participation, and classroom interaction.



In Ecuador, Arguello San Martin et al. (2020) examined vocabulary, organization, and fluency, while Toro et al. (2019) highlighted oral participation and opportunities for language production. Research with young EFL learners has also examined classroom verbal interaction and learner participation as outcomes of communicative instructional environments. These findings suggest that speaking development should be examined through specific observable dimensions rather than treated as a single undifferentiated ability.

Although CLT and communicative activities have demonstrated potential for supporting oral communication, their implementation with young learners may involve practical challenges. These include teacher preparation, limited resources, large classes, limited vocabulary, insufficient instructional time, and the need to provide appropriate scaffolding. Recent reviews of CLT implementation in elementary EFL settings similarly identify teacher training, student-related barriers, and classroom management as factors that can influence the successful implementation of communicative pedagogy. Therefore, the effectiveness of CLT depends not only on adopting communicative activities but also on how those activities are adapted to learners' needs and classroom conditions.

Overall, previous research indicates that communicative approaches can contribute to oral development among young EFL learners, particularly when students are provided with opportunities for interaction, meaningful language use, and supported speaking practice. Evidence from primary education contexts has associated communicative interventions with improvements in areas such as fluency, vocabulary, oral production, participation, and learner engagement. However, differences in learner age, instructional context, intervention type, and assessment procedures make it necessary to continue investigating how CLT can be implemented and evaluated with beginning EFL learners and how communicative activities may influence particular dimensions of speaking.

Research Gap

Previous research establishes a theoretical and empirical relationship between communicative language teaching and the development of oral communication. CLT emphasizes learner participation, interaction, meaningful language use, and communication in contexts that prepare learners for real-life language use. Empirical studies have also demonstrated the potential of communicative approaches to



support young learners' oral development. Reid (2016), for instance, investigated CLT with first-year primary learners in a yearlong EFL study, while Arguello San Martin et al. (2020) examined storytelling through picture description with second-grade learners in Ecuador.

Despite these findings, important aspects remain insufficiently explored. Studies involving young EFL learners have used different types of communicative interventions, making it difficult to determine which classroom practices are most appropriate for beginning learners. In addition, some studies have focused on general oral development or selected outcomes such as vocabulary and fluency rather than examining speaking through a broader set of observable dimensions. Research conducted with very young learners in Ecuador also remains limited, particularly when CLT is examined as an approach for systematically developing and observing speaking performance.

A more specific gap can therefore be identified in the need for research examining communicative language teaching with beginning EFL learners at the earliest stages of primary education through classroom-based observation of speaking performance. Although previous research has examined young learners, including first-year primary students in Reid's study and second-grade students in the Ecuadorian study by Arguello San Martin et al. (2020), further evidence is needed concerning how communicative activities can support the observable development of young beginners' oral performance in specific classroom contexts. This is particularly relevant when speaking development is examined through clearly defined dimensions that can be observed during communicative classroom activities.

In response to this gap, the present study focuses on the development of speaking skills among first-grade EFL learners through the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching. The study examines speaking development within a primary classroom context and focuses on observable aspects of students' oral performance during communicative learning experiences. By concentrating on young beginning learners and classroom-based speaking development, the study seeks to contribute further empirical evidence regarding the potential of CLT to promote oral communication at the earliest stages of formal English education.



METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a descriptive and observational design to explore the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and describe the oral communicative performance of first-grade students in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. A qualitative observational design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researchers to examine classroom practices and student performance within their natural educational setting rather than manipulating instructional conditions. Qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena within their contexts and interpret participants' experiences and behaviors from an exploratory perspective (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). Accordingly, the study focused on documenting observable CLT-related classroom practices and identifying patterns in students' speaking performance rather than establishing causal relationships or statistically measuring the effectiveness of the approach.

The research was conducted at Clara Barton School in Manta, Ecuador, during regular English lessons. An initial informal classroom observation involved a group of 25 first-grade students and was used to obtain an overall understanding of the instructional context and the communicative practices occurring during the lessons. Following this initial observation, three students were purposively selected for more focused observation. Purposive sampling is consistent with qualitative research because participants are intentionally selected according to characteristics that can provide relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation (Hernández Sampieri et al., 2014). In this study, the three focal students were selected based on observable differences in participation and willingness to engage in classroom activities, allowing the researchers to examine contrasting patterns of oral communicative performance. Data collection took place during regular class sessions to minimize disruption to the natural classroom environment. Ethical considerations included informed consent and the protection of participants' confidentiality.

Two complementary observation instruments were used. The first, an Observation Checklist for CLT in a First-Grade EFL Classroom, documented classroom-level indicators related to CLT implementation, including meaning-focused instruction, opportunities for authentic communication and student interaction, teacher facilitation and feedback, supportive classroom conditions, speaking activities, target-language modeling, response time, student participation, and engagement.



The second, an Observation Sheet for Evaluating Speaking Skills in First Graders, was applied individually to the three focal students and assessed nine dimensions of oral communicative performance: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, expression and intonation, listening skills, eye contact, and speaking confidence. Performance was recorded using a four-level ordinal rating scale ranging from 1 (Needs Improvement) to 4 (Advanced), together with qualitative comments describing relevant observed behaviors. The data were analyzed through qualitative descriptive interpretation and cross-case comparison, examining patterns across the CLT classroom observation and the three individual student cases. The numerical ratings were used as descriptive indicators to organize and compare observations rather than for inferential statistical analysis, while the observation notes provided contextual evidence for interpreting strengths, limitations, and recurring patterns in students' oral performance.

INSTRUMENTS AND ANALYSIS

This study employed two complementary observation instruments to document the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and describe students' oral communicative performance in a first-grade EFL classroom. The first instrument was an Observation Checklist for CLT in a First-Grade EFL Classroom, designed to record classroom-level indicators related to communicative teaching practices. These indicators included the prioritization of meaning over form, opportunities for authentic communication and student interaction, the teacher's role as facilitator, feedback, the use of supportive and low-anxiety learning conditions, speaking activities, target-language modeling, response time, student participation, and engagement. The second instrument was an Observation Sheet for Evaluating Speaking Skills in First Graders, which was applied individually to the three purposively selected students in order to document different dimensions of their oral communicative performance. The use of structured observation tools provided a systematic framework for recording classroom practices and student behaviors in the natural instructional setting.

The individual speaking observation sheet assessed nine criteria: pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, comprehension, expression and intonation, listening skills, eye contact, and speaking confidence. Each criterion was recorded using a four-level ordinal performance scale, ranging from 1 (Needs Improvement) to 4 (Advanced). The instrument also included space for qualitative comments



so that the observer could record relevant behaviors and contextual information that were not fully captured by the numerical ratings. Rather than functioning as a standardized proficiency measure, the rating scale was used as a descriptive tool to organize the observations and facilitate comparison across the three focal cases. The qualitative comments complemented the ratings by providing contextual evidence related to participation, confidence, interaction, and oral performance.

The data were analyzed through qualitative descriptive interpretation and cross-case comparison. First, the CLT classroom checklist was reviewed to identify which communicative teaching principles and classroom practices were clearly present, partially present, or limited during the observed lesson. Second, the individual speaking observation sheets were examined to identify relative strengths, areas requiring additional support, and differences across the three students. The ordinal ratings were interpreted descriptively rather than statistically, while the written observation notes were used to contextualize the numerical scores. Finally, evidence from both instruments was compared to identify converging patterns between the observed classroom conditions and the students' oral communicative performance. This analytical procedure allowed the researchers to describe how CLT-related practices and student speaking behaviors co-occurred in the observed classroom context without making causal claims about improvement or effectiveness.

RESULTS

The classroom observation showed that several principles associated with Communicative Language Teaching were present during the observed lesson, although some practices were only partially implemented. The teacher prioritized meaning over form and provided opportunities for communication and student interaction. The lesson also included a supportive classroom environment, feedback, varied activities, visual aids and realia, and age-appropriate speaking activities. These practices appeared to provide students with opportunities to participate and use English within meaningful classroom interactions.

However, the observation also identified areas requiring further instructional attention. Effective target-language modeling and the amount of time provided for students to respond were observed only partially.



Similarly, students demonstrated partial performance in the use of basic vocabulary and grammatical structures and in more demanding oral tasks, such as describing pictures or retelling simple stories. These findings suggest that the observed classroom incorporated several CLT-related practices while also presenting instructional conditions that may have constrained opportunities for more extended oral production.

Individual Speaking Performance

The three focal students demonstrated different profiles of oral communicative performance. Ratings were interpreted according to the four-level scale used in the observation sheet: 1 = Needs Improvement, 2 = Developing, 3 = Proficient, and 4 = Advanced. Missing ratings in the original observation sheets are reported as NR (Not Rated) rather than estimated or replaced.

Case 1: Developing Oral Performance with Proficient Interactional Features

Table 1

Criterion	Rating	Performance level
Pronunciation	2	Developing
Vocabulary	2	Developing
Grammar	2	Developing
Fluency	2	Developing
Comprehension	3	Proficient
Expression and Intonation	2	Developing
Listening Skills	3	Proficient
Eye Contact	3	Proficient
Confidence	3	Proficient

Case 1 demonstrated a differentiated performance profile. Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and expression and intonation were rated at the Developing level (2), whereas comprehension, listening skills, eye contact, and confidence reached the Proficient level (3). The qualitative observation also indicated that the student showed confidence and willingness to participate. Taken together, these findings indicate that although some linguistic dimensions of oral production were still developing, the student demonstrated comparatively stronger comprehension, listening, engagement, and confidence during the observed speaking activities.



Case 2: Developing Oral Communicative Performance

Table 2

Criterion	Rating	Performance level
Pronunciation	2	Developing
Vocabulary	2	Developing
Grammar	2	Developing
Fluency	2	Developing
Comprehension	3	Proficient
Expression and Intonation	3	Proficient
Listening Skills	2	Developing
Eye Contact	2	Developing
Confidence	2	Developing

Case 2 showed a predominantly Developing (2) profile. Pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, listening skills, eye contact, and confidence were rated at this level. In contrast, comprehension and expression and intonation were rated Proficient (3). The results therefore indicate that comprehension and expressive use of intonation represented comparatively stronger dimensions of the student's observed performance, while linguistic production, interactional behavior, and confidence required greater instructional support. Unlike the other two cases, no additional qualitative comment was recorded for this student; consequently, the interpretation is restricted to the evidence provided by the ratings.

Case 3: Higher Communicative Performance

Table 3

Criterion	Rating	Performance level
Pronunciation	3	Proficient
Vocabulary	2	Developing
Grammar	3	Not Rated
Fluency	3	Proficient
Comprehension	4	Advanced
Expression and Intonation	4	Advanced
Listening Skills	4	Advanced
Eye Contact	4	Advanced
Confidence	4	Advanced

Case 3 demonstrated the strongest overall communicative performance among the three focal students. Comprehension, expression and intonation, listening skills, eye contact, and confidence were rated



Advanced (4), while pronunciation, grammar, and fluency were Proficient (3). Vocabulary remained at the Developing level (2). The qualitative observation further indicated that the student enjoyed participating, showed confidence when speaking, and displayed positive pronunciation performance. These findings indicate a comparatively strong communicative and interactional profile, although vocabulary remained an area requiring further development.

Cross-Case Comparison

Table 4

Criterion	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Cross-case pattern
Pronunciation	2	2	3	Developing to Proficient
Vocabulary	2	2	2	Consistently Developing
Grammar	2	2	3	Developing where rated
Fluency	2	2	3	Developing to Proficient
Comprehension	3	3	4	Consistently Proficient-Advanced
Expression & Intonation	2	3	4	Considerable variation
Listening Skills	3	2	4	Considerable variation
Eye Contact	3	2	4	Considerable variation
Confidence	3	2	4	Considerable variation

1 = Needs Improvement; 2 = Developing; 3 = Proficient; 4 = Advanced

Table 4 summarizes the ratings of the three focal students and facilitates comparison across the nine dimensions of oral communicative performance.

The cross-case comparison revealed two particularly clear patterns. First, vocabulary was consistently rated at the Developing level (2) across all three focal students, making it the most uniform area requiring further support. Grammar also remained at the Developing level for the three students. Second, comprehension represented the strongest and most consistent dimension, with Cases 1 and 2 rated Proficient (3) and Case 3 rated Advanced (4). The remaining dimensions showed greater individual variation, particularly expression and intonation, listening skills, eye contact, and confidence.

Cross-Instrument Findings

Comparison of the two instruments revealed several converging patterns. The classroom checklist documented opportunities for interaction, meaning-focused communication, feedback, supportive classroom conditions, and varied age-appropriate resources. The individual observations



simultaneously showed different levels of linguistic, interactional, and affective oral performance among the three students.

A particularly relevant convergence concerned vocabulary and grammar. At classroom level, students demonstrated only partial use of basic vocabulary and grammatical structures, while vocabulary was rated Developing for all three focal students and grammar was Developing for the two students with available ratings. Students' ability to describe pictures or retell simple stories was likewise only partially observed. This pattern suggests a need for additional linguistic scaffolding to support more extended oral production.

The classroom observation also showed that target-language modeling and response time were only partially implemented. These conditions should be considered alongside the Developing performance observed in vocabulary, grammar, and, in some cases, fluency. Although the study cannot establish a causal relationship, the convergence suggests that more consistent language modeling and sufficient wait time could provide additional support for oral production.

Overall, the observed classroom incorporated multiple CLT-related practices that provided opportunities for interaction and oral participation, while the three focal students demonstrated heterogeneous communicative profiles. Comprehension emerged as a relative strength, whereas vocabulary was the most consistent area requiring further development. The findings also highlight areas for instructional attention, particularly target-language modeling, linguistic scaffolding, and response time. Because of the descriptive and observational design, these findings indicate patterns of association within the observed classroom rather than evidence that CLT caused improvements in speaking skills.

DISCUSSION

The findings provide a descriptive account of how CLT-related classroom practices co-occurred with the oral communicative performance of three first-grade EFL students. Overall, the classroom observation indicated the presence of several principles associated with Communicative Language Teaching, including meaning-focused instruction, opportunities for communication and interaction, teacher feedback, visual support, varied activities, and a supportive classroom environment.



At the same time, some practices, particularly target-language modeling and the provision of sufficient response time, were only partially observed. These findings suggest that the classroom provided meaningful opportunities for oral participation, although some instructional conditions could be strengthened to provide greater support for students' language production.

The presence of interaction and meaning-focused activities is consistent with the principles of CLT discussed in the literature, which emphasize communicative competence, learner-centered instruction, meaningful language use, and social interaction. Rather than treating grammatical accuracy as the sole objective of language instruction, CLT provides learners with opportunities to use language for communicative purposes and to develop their ability to participate in interaction. This perspective is particularly relevant for young EFL learners, for whom practical, meaningful, and interactive activities can provide an accessible context for using the target language. The observed classroom practices therefore reflect several characteristics associated with communicative instruction, although their implementation should be understood as contextual evidence rather than as proof of the effectiveness of CLT.

A relevant pattern across the three focal cases was the contrast between comprehension and productive linguistic resources. Comprehension was consistently one of the stronger dimensions, with the three students rated between Proficient and Advanced. In contrast, vocabulary was rated Developing for all three students, while grammar was rated Developing for the two students for whom data were available. This difference may indicate that the learners were able to understand classroom language and respond to communicative situations more successfully than they were able to independently mobilize the vocabulary and grammatical resources required for extended oral production. Such a pattern is compatible with the distinction between language input and output discussed in second language acquisition research: exposure to comprehensible input supports understanding, while opportunities to produce language encourage learners to notice gaps in their linguistic resources and develop greater control over the target language.

The classroom-level observation reinforces this interpretation. Students only partially demonstrated the ability to use basic vocabulary and grammatical structures appropriately and to perform more demanding speaking tasks such as describing a picture or retelling a simple story.



These findings should not be interpreted as evidence that limited vocabulary and grammar directly caused difficulties in extended speaking; however, their co-occurrence suggests that additional linguistic scaffolding may be necessary. Greater use of contextualized vocabulary, sentence frames, repetition, modeling, visual prompts, and guided interaction could help young learners move from understanding classroom language toward producing increasingly independent oral responses.

The three cases also revealed substantial individual variation in oral communicative performance. Case 1 demonstrated Developing performance in several linguistic dimensions but Proficient levels of comprehension, listening, eye contact, and confidence. The qualitative observation similarly documented willingness and confidence to participate. Case 2 presented a predominantly Developing profile, although comprehension and expression and intonation reached the Proficient level. Case 3 displayed comparatively stronger communicative performance, reaching Advanced levels in comprehension, expression and intonation, listening, eye contact, and confidence, while pronunciation and fluency were Proficient and vocabulary remained Developing. Rather than representing uniform stages of language development, these profiles illustrate how young learners may demonstrate different combinations of linguistic, interactional, and affective strengths within the same instructional context. The differences in confidence, eye contact, listening, and expression are also relevant when speaking is understood as part of broader communicative competence rather than solely as grammatical accuracy. The students' performance indicates that oral communication in an early EFL classroom involves linguistic resources alongside the willingness and ability to engage with an interlocutor. Nevertheless, confidence should not be interpreted as evidence of language proficiency by itself. For example, Case 1 demonstrated Proficient confidence and eye contact while several linguistic dimensions remained at the Developing level. Similarly, Case 3 combined high levels of confidence and interactional performance with Developing vocabulary. These patterns suggest that affective and interactional engagement may facilitate participation even when learners' linguistic resources are still emerging.

Another important finding concerns the instructional conditions surrounding students' oral production. Although the teacher created opportunities for interaction and provided feedback, target-language modeling and response time were only partially observed. For first-grade EFL learners, these conditions are particularly relevant because students may require clear linguistic models, repetition, visual support,



and sufficient processing time before producing an oral response. The findings therefore suggest that strengthening teacher modeling and allowing greater wait time could provide additional scaffolding for students who are still developing vocabulary, grammar, and fluency. This interpretation remains pedagogical rather than causal, since the observational design does not establish that these instructional conditions directly produced the performance differences identified among the students.

Taken together, the findings suggest that the observed classroom incorporated several characteristics of communicative language teaching and provided students with opportunities to listen, interact, respond, and participate orally. At the same time, the focal students demonstrated heterogeneous profiles, with comprehension emerging as a relative strength and vocabulary as the most consistent area requiring additional support. The convergence between the classroom observation and the individual speaking observations also points to the importance of balancing meaningful interaction with explicit linguistic scaffolding. CLT in an early EFL context should therefore not be interpreted as communication without language support; rather, communicative opportunities can be strengthened through appropriate modeling, vocabulary support, guided production, feedback, and sufficient response time.

These findings should be interpreted within the limitations of the study. The observations were conducted in a single first-grade classroom, and the focused analysis involved only three purposively selected students. In addition, the study did not include pre- and post-intervention measures, a comparison group, or repeated individual assessments capable of demonstrating change over time. Two individual ratings were also not recorded in the original observation sheets: fluency for Case 1 and grammar for Case 3. Consequently, the findings should not be interpreted as evidence that CLT caused improvements in students' speaking skills. Instead, they provide descriptive evidence of the relationship between observed CLT-related classroom practices and different patterns of oral communicative performance in this particular educational context.

Limitations and Sugestions

This study should be interpreted within the methodological limitations of its qualitative, descriptive, and observational design. The research was conducted in a single first-grade classroom at a private school in Manta, and the focused analysis involved only three purposively selected students.



Although purposive sampling is appropriate for in-depth qualitative observation, the small sample size and the single educational setting limit the transferability of the findings to other EFL contexts. Consequently, the results should be understood as a contextualized description of classroom practices and oral communicative performance rather than as representative of first-grade learners more broadly. A second limitation concerns the scope of the observational data. The study relied on classroom observations conducted during regular lessons and did not include repeated assessments, pre- and post-intervention measures, or follow-up observations capable of documenting changes in students' speaking performance over time. In addition, the research focused exclusively on classroom interaction and did not collect complementary evidence from teachers, families, or students through interviews or other qualitative instruments. Therefore, the findings describe observable patterns of participation and oral performance within the classroom but cannot establish causal relationships between CLT implementation and students' language development.

Future research could strengthen this line of inquiry by incorporating larger and more diverse samples across public and private schools, including learners from different socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds. Longitudinal designs combining repeated classroom observations with additional qualitative instruments—such as teacher interviews, student reflections, or family perspectives—would provide a more comprehensive understanding of how communicative teaching practices relate to the development of speaking skills over time. Such studies would contribute to identifying instructional conditions that consistently support oral communicative competence in young EFL learners.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) practices and described the oral communicative performance of first-grade students in an EFL classroom. The classroom observation showed that several CLT-related principles were present, including meaning-focused instruction, opportunities for communication and interaction, teacher feedback, supportive classroom conditions, and the use of visual resources. However, some instructional practices, particularly target-language modeling and the provision of sufficient response time, were only partially observed.



These findings indicate that the classroom incorporated important characteristics of communicative instruction while also revealing areas in which additional pedagogical support could strengthen opportunities for oral production.

The individual observations revealed heterogeneous oral communicative profiles among the three focal students. Comprehension emerged as a relative strength across the cases, whereas vocabulary was consistently identified as an area requiring further development. Pronunciation, fluency, expression and intonation, listening skills, eye contact, and confidence varied across students, demonstrating that oral communicative performance cannot be understood as a single or uniform ability. Instead, young EFL learners may display different combinations of linguistic, interactional, and affective characteristics within the same classroom context. These findings reinforce the importance of considering speaking as a multidimensional component of communicative competence.

The comparison between classroom practices and individual performance also suggests the importance of combining meaningful communicative opportunities with appropriate linguistic scaffolding. Interaction alone may not provide all the support young learners require for oral production. Consistent target-language modeling, contextualized vocabulary and grammatical support, visual resources, guided speaking opportunities, feedback, and sufficient response time may contribute to creating conditions in which learners can participate more effectively in oral communication. In this sense, CLT can provide a valuable pedagogical framework for organizing meaningful speaking opportunities while allowing teachers to respond to differences in learners' communicative needs.

Nevertheless, the findings should be interpreted according to the descriptive and observational nature of the study. The research does not establish that CLT caused improvement in speaking skills or that the observed students developed their abilities as a direct result of the instructional practices documented. Rather, it provides contextual evidence of how CLT-related practices and different patterns of oral communicative performance co-occurred in a first-grade EFL classroom. Future research involving larger and more diverse samples, repeated observations, longitudinal follow-up, or pre- and post-intervention measures could examine more directly how communicative teaching practices relate to changes in young learners' speaking development over time.



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