

COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING FOR ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA: JOYFUL LEARNING THROUGH GAMES

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Abstract: English has been taught in Elementary schools since many years ago. But, the effectiveness of teaching English in Elementary school practically is still debatable. Many factors influence, such as the quality of teachers, the methods used, the media applied, and the atmosphere developed. This article introduces an English teaching method called the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) to be used in teaching English to young learners. This method provides a joyful learning through some games suit to the young learner's characteristic.

Key Words: CLT, Elementary School, Joyful Learning, Games

Communicative language teaching (CLT) as an approach has been widely implemented in many different places and for many levels, and employed together with variety of techniques and methods. In this paper, CLT discussion is focused on elementary school students that can be considered as young learners of English in Indonesian context using one of teaching techniques called games or games-like activities.

The organization of the writing this essay begins with the context description; review of related theories including the reasons of teaching English for young learners (TEYL), CLT for young learners, also CLT and games; application of games used in an elementary communicative classroom; and conclusion.

ELT CONTEXT: ENGLISH IN ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN INDONESIA

English is taught in all part of the world as a second, foreign, and, the newest, international language for all ages, from very young to adult learners. Indonesia is one of countries in the world which allowed English to be one subject elementary students learn in schools, for year 4 and above, since 1994. However, English is not a compulsory subject therefore not all elementary schools students in Indonesia have the same chance to learn English at such formal education. English is considered as a local content subject which means that it can be taught if the school committees find teaching English to the students are advantageous for the local area and the school ready with everything related to it – such as teachers and materials, as well as getting

approval from local government for particular school to include English as one of their local contents. Some schools may provide English as one of extra subject taught after school hours.

Indonesian government sets a guide line for elementary schools that choose to teach English designed by Badan Nasional Satuan Pendidikan (BNSP/a national education unit committee). BNSP (2006) puts two broad aims of English subject taught in Elementary school, first to develop the basic oral communicative competence and limited to accompanying action in the school context, and secondly to build the awareness of the essential and importance of English to enhance the nation competitive power in the global community.

The objectives above are part of a new curriculum implemented in Indonesian elementary schools since 2006. The curriculum is a school based or decentralized curriculum in which schools have more power in creatively modify the implementation of curriculum based on the needs of school and its community including students, teachers, parents, and etc. Communicative language teaching is chosen as the approach in this curriculum as well as the previous one which was competency based or centralized curriculum. However, the implementation of CLT does not seem to be successful because of some obstacles found in the real language classroom, such as:

- lack of teachers' confidence to teach English and to encourage students' enthusiasm
- a very minimum exposure for students to practice their English outside classrooms
- large class size in which one class mostly consists of thirty to forty students
- examination oriented that makes students and teachers focus more on grammatical points
- inadequate materials and teaching aids (Musthafa, 2001, pp 5-6; Istianah, 2004, p 200)

Another factor which may significantly affect the successful of ELT, especially in elementary school is the insufficient numbers of qualified teachers of English. Istianah (2004, p 200) studied some elementary schools in East java Indonesia and found that teachers admitted not having good English proficiency, with very limited knowledge of English they tried to teach students the way they were taught (using grammar translation method). However, for teaching professional improvement language PPPG (2004) or teacher training development centre made a new policy since 2004 that English elementary school teachers had to get In-Service Training teacher (INSET) which is a graded teacher training with competency based.

REVIEW OF RELATED THEORIES

There are many studies on CLT from many part of the world's ELT classroom, while this paper focus on theories of communicative approach for elementary school students that can be considered as young learners and games.

Why Teach English for Young Learners?

Teaching English for children or young learners becoming more popular nowadays, especially for those who believe that the earlier learning a second or foreign language the more successful it should be. Christine and her colleagues summed up in the European Union's recommendation in 1998 that older learners, particularly in non English environment, tend to be more successful in learning SL or FL because they are more mature and have more efficient and effective strategies in learning a new language (Pinter, 2006, p 29). However, it still seems to be a common agreement that 'the early start' of learning a language is advantageous and children supposed to be excellent at language acquisition (Bourke, 2006, p279; Pinter, 2006, p 29). This belief is not solely an assumption without any scientific or research evidences. Neurolinguists from Cornell University of New York studied through Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) scan the human brain and found that children who learnt a language use a different part of Broca's area, a part of brain located in the frontal part of left hemisphere which has power over fluency and grammar proficiency, in pronouncing words and speaking while adult learners use the same part of Broca's area in both activities. However young and adult learners use equal part in understanding the meaning of a language (Gordon, 2007, p 54). This research shows that young learners should have better pronunciation frame in a SL or FL than adult.

Another benefit for learning a SL or FL in the early ages is the ability of strong acquisition in languages owned by young people pre-puberty, and this capability will gradually decrease afterwards. A collaboration of scientific from Mc Gill University and UCLA did a brain mapping study and concluded that 'the optimal age to learn a second language is from 6 years to puberty'. Before puberty is considered as 'the sensitive period' or 'Critical Period Hypothesis' for learning second and foreign language or the period when the mastery of second language success is advantageous (Gordon, 2007, p 53, Pinter, 2006, p 29)

CLT for Young Learners

In CLT, a language is regarded as a tool for communication. Using communicative approach, the function of language is emphasized more on meaning than teaching grammar and vocabulary to get the students 'accuracy' and 'appropriacy' (Harmer, 2001, p 84; Canale & Swain, 1980, p12). Students can learn better in the early stage if they focus on the meaning of the utterance and the function of it in the real communication. Thus, language can be defined as 'a system for the expression of meaning; elementary function- interaction and communication' (Nunan, 1989, p194).

The theory of language learning in communicative approach is to encourage learners involved in real communication activities, doing "meaningful tasks' and use the language to motivate learning and focus on the purpose why they use the language (Nunan, 1989, p194; Harmer, 2001). Therefore language teachers should be aware that students learn the language not only to know it but also to be able to use it in the real communication or to communicate with others using the language. Harmer (2001, p 85) promotes some criteria for language teaching activities to be called communicative. Here a communicative activity should encourage students to have desire to communicate, have a

communicative purpose of task, focus on content more than form or grammar, use more variety of language than only one language item or skill, minimize teacher power and lessen material control.

As the emphasis of CLT is more on form of language as a means of communication and minimize the rules of grammatical items, this should be appropriate approach for teaching young learners that is expected to attain basic oral communication focused on the function of language in real life, than to use traditional – grammar translation approach which may lead young learners to feel confused and bored.

Nathan B. Jones and Shun Hwa Wang (2001) studied the application of CLT in elementary school grade 4 – 6 students in Taiwan for 3 years and they found that CLT program could improve students' English skill and most of them reported to enjoy the teaching and learning process.

Relationship of CLT to Games as Joyful Learning of English

Games have been brought into play as one of popular techniques in learning second or foreign language. Penny Ur (1996) and Jeremy Harmer (2001) prefer to name it game-like activities than only games because Ur (1996, p 289) argues that mentioning language learning activities as games expresses the idea of only having fun and recreation. However, both and many other writers (Gasser & Waldman, 1979, p53; Wright, et al, 2006; Gordon, 2007) have the same opinion to use games or games-like activities as to keep students interest and motivation. Furthermore, it is not essential for teachers to let students know that they are playing a game in the class room as she/he can just give clear instruction for the activity which has game characteristics and the most important that it should be engaging (Wright, 2006, p 8).

Can games deemed to be part of CLT? Wrights et.al (2006, p 1) define games as 'entertaining, engaging and often challenging activities' where students or learners have interaction with others in anxious free environment and the activities can encourage them to 'do their best' and 'have a go'. Some characteristics of games which in line with CLT criteria (Hedge, 2000, p 57-58) as follows:

- the language, used as a means than an end, is focused more on meaning and function than form
- Learners can confidently convey their opinion, ideas in pair or group.
- The negotiation of meaning should easily take a part to obtain agreement among learners.
- The material should be challenging and can not easily be predicted, raise curiosity.
- Too much correction and teachers' intervention are avoided until the game is finished
- Strategic competence is developed through real-life action
- Learners motivation maintained well in fun and joyful activities, when learners motivated then 'learning will take care of itself' (Harmer, 2001,p 32) and they can learn more direct and indirectly, also motivation for both

teacher and learners considered the most vital component in successful of communicative approach (Canale & Swain, 1980, p 51).

The above criteria should suit young learners who enter the language classroom with their 'well-established set of instinct, skills and characteristic' that enable to facilitate them in learning new language (Halliwell, 1992, p 3-8; Harmer, 2001, p 38) as follows:

- Children have capability to seize firmly and respond meaning of words spoken by others although they may not know every single meaning of the words, especially when they are interested. They grasp the understanding from what they see, hear and even touch and have close interaction with.
- Children are capable of using limited language resources creatively as they feel more confident than adult in constructing and combining words to communicate and they have less worried in making mistakes.
- Children have competence for learning indirectly and it will be better achieved through enjoyable language use and exposure.
- Children have a great instinct to play and have fun.
- Children have vast curiosity of the world around them as well as enchanted in their imagination and fantasy.
- Children get the instinct for interaction and talk, particularly things related to themselves and around them.

Applying Joyful Learning Through Games in an Elementary Communicative Classroom

After discussing the context of elementary school in Indonesia generally and the theories related to the topic, a specific classroom will be mentioned in this part of the paper. The classroom chosen for applying the theories and techniques is a private elementary school in East Java Indonesia, year 4, with 32 students in the class. The rationale of selecting this class is that this is the first year of students to learn English as a foreign language, although some schools may start earlier. The use of games in this first time of learning English primarily is to raise and keep student motivation, and to achieve the purpose of learning language itself mentioned above.

The recent syllabus in this elementary school is topic based syllabus in which teachers and students agreed to select some themes to be learnt. The themes are as follows:

- grade 4 semester 1: introduction, numbers, things around us (classroom, school yard, home), part of the body, part of the house, and family
- grade 4 semester 2: food, drink, and vegetables; animal (pet and wild animal); clothes and colors; days, months and weather; condition of people and things at school.

Therefore, four communicative activities through games created here using some of themes above also including one learning type students may prefer differently such as visual, auditory, kinesthetic, creative, analytical, real-life, dramatic, amusing, serious, cooperative, and individual which can be developed by means of games (Wright, et., al, 2006, p. 6-7) .

Before starting the game teacher should brainstorm students' knowledge about the topic including vocabulary and expressions used, and the instruction given must be clearly understood. Once the game or activity begins, T takes less control and intervention. The feedback and correction can be presented afterward together with the conclusion of language items learnt at that moment.

- ▶ Theme: Introduction
- Possible learning style: Real-life
- Game: Find friends personal data

Pre-activities:

1. T activates Ss prior knowledge on the topic by asking how the way they introduce themselves to others, what information they give and want to know from others, and whether they have a nick name, know their address, have some hobbies and get an ambition for the future.
2. Both T and Ss spell out words and phrases related to hobby and occupation (for ambition), and construct some questions needed in introduction, especially those required in the game.
3. T becomes a model telling her nick name, address, hobby and ambition

Procedures:

4. Ss divided into group of four, each group get one activity sheet (see appendix 1) to be filled together
5. Each S is given four small pieces of card. In the first card, they are asked to write their nick name, the second for their address, the third for their hobby and the last for their ambition.
6. Ss return the cards and take out four other mixed cards from the whole class
7. Ss match the information to their friends and write them on the paper group
8. Once a card match the person, Ss can return it and take another
9. Ss should discuss the finding in groups and may make some clarification to other S for what they are not sure of.
10. After completing finding friends' data, at least four complete data in a group, S then tell the class the information found, and give their opinion about the data for example the idea why Ronny wants to be a policeman, etc.

Post activities:

11. T asks Ss what they find easy and difficult in the activity.
12. T gives some feedback and correct for inappropriate language use and reinforce the good ones.
13. T ends the class by asking Ss to repeat words, phrases and sentences they learn that day.

Note: T may give Ss homework by finding personal data of Ss from other classes or other people outside school.

- ▶ Theme: Part of the house
- Possible learning style: cooperative, and creative
- Game: Designing a great house

Pre-activities:

1. T activates Ss prior knowledge by asking which part of their house they spend most of their time, why they do so and what kind of rooms are there in their house.
2. T shows Ss a picture of a house with its parts like living room, dining room, kitchen, bathroom, bedroom, front and back yard (it will be better to show a picture of a house which is familiar to Ss context).
3. T and Ss discuss words, phrases and sentences used to describe a house including prepositions of place.

Procedures:

4. Ss divided into group of three and each group is given an activity sheet (See appendix II) which is to design a house with some parts listed and Ss take two other parts from their own ideas that are not included in the list.
5. Each group shows their design to the class and informs the rationale of the design.
6. All designs attached in front of the class then compared to one done by T beforehand.
7. Ss find the similarities and differences among design

Post activities:

8. T asks Ss the difficulty they face in doing the activity and how they solve it
9. T give some corrections and important feedbacks
10. T concludes the lesson by repeating together with Ss what have been learnt in the lesson.

Note: as the homework, T can ask Ss to describe their own house or their ideal one.

► Theme: Family
Possible learning style: Kinesthetic, dramatic
Game: My family

Pre-activities:

1. T shows a picture of her family and tells the people in it.
2. T asks Ss about their family.
3. T asks Ss to do family finger play (see the box)
 - Ss stand up and T asks them to repeat what she says by following her using their own fingers
 - T reads the first line of the chant and demonstrates her fingers
 - Ss repeat with correct pronunciation and stress pattern
 - T reads out line 1 and 2 then Ss follow.
 - T reads out line 1, 2, 3 followed by Ss
 - T reads out line 4, then 4 and 5, then 4, 5, and 6
 - Finally do complete finger play together.

Family Finger Play	
Finger play: chant	Finger play: hand movement
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Mother and father standing tall 2. Brother is big 3. Sister is small 4. Where's the baby? Where's the baby? 5. Wah! Wah! Wah! 6. I hear him/her call 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Show the index finger first and then the middle fingers. Use both hands. Hold the other fingers down with the thumb. 2. Show the ring fingers on both hands, along with the index and middle fingers. 3. Show the little fingers. Now all fingers are showing, but the thumbs are hidden. 4. Close hands into a fist and wiggle both thumbs. 5. and 6. Put both hands over your ears.
<p>Taken from McKay, P & Guse, J. (2007). Five – minute activities for young learners. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. Pp 124-5.</p>	

Procedures:

4. Ss in group of four are given one picture and 4 descriptions of the picture (see appendix II).
5. Each group get different picture from others
6. After discussing which description matches the picture then Ss tell the class their answer.
7. Other groups give comments and judge whether the answer is correct or not and give their reasons

Post activities:

8. T asks Ss' opinion about the activity whether they find it beneficial for them.
9. T gives comments and correction for some in appropriate language use
10. T ends the lesson by together with Ss summarizing what have been learnt that day and all play the 'family finger play' once more.

Note: as the homework T can ask Ss in group prepare a short drama about a family to be performed in the next meeting.

► Theme: Animal
 Possible learning style: visual, analytical
 Game: Animal we know

Pre-activity:

1. T activates Ss prior knowledge by asking the animals they know and their characteristics.

Procedures:

2. Ss are in groups of four with a pile of paper and a pen in each group.
3. T then shows a half picture of an animal and gives some clue so that Ss can discuss in groups and guess what animal is in the picture.

4. Ss show their guessing and pronounce must pronounce the word correctly to get the right answer.
5. After guessing some animal pictures, still in groups Ss select some animals they know and figure out their body and movement as well as the sound.
6. each representative of groups come forward to act as an animal and other groups guess what the animal is and why they guess so.

Post activities:

7. T asks Ss whether they are happy or not with the activity
8. T gives some corrections and feedbacks
9. T concludes the lesson by giving a song in which some animal name learnt in the class mention (see appendix IV).

Note: Ss should try to practice the song at home with friends the song can be retrieved from www.britishcouncil.org/kids-songs-animal-house.htm

CONCLUSION

Games or games-like activities are very beneficial as one technique in applying CLT, especially for children or young learners that may enjoy more than adult in experiencing fun and learning by doing of English. The characteristics of CLT and young learners can be combined in games and it should make both teachers and students motivated in the process of teaching and learning, as many expert say that motivation is the core of success teaching and learning everything in life, especially a new language. However, in applying this technique teachers should be more creative and prepare well everything before hand such as the materials, media used, and the important one is making lesson plan with its anticipated problems and possible solution, to be ready for 'magic moment, sensible diversion and unforeseen problems' may be faced in the classroom lesson (Harmer, 2001, pp 319).

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Find Friends' Personal Data

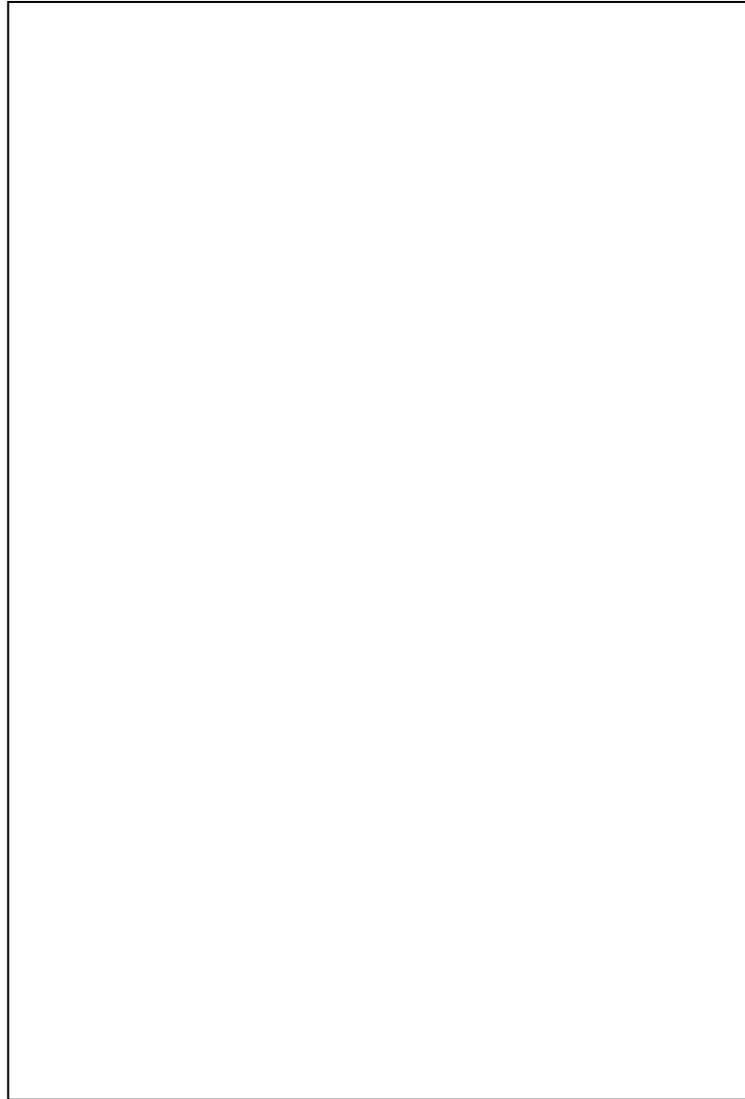
Group name:

No.	Nick name	Address	Hobby/hobbies	Ambition
1.				
2.				
3.				
4.				
5.				
6.				
7.				
8.				
9.				
10.				
11.				
12.				
13.				
14.				
15.				



Designing a house

- 1 living room
- 1 dining room
- 1 kitchen
- 1 toilet
- 2 bathrooms
- 3 bedrooms
- Front yard
- Back yard
- Garage



Note: the material is adapted from Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing tasks for the communicative classroom*. Cambridge [England] ; New York : Cambridge University Press, p 170.