



Exploring the Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching in Grammar Instruction for Maritime Cadets of East Kalimantan

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Abstract

meaningful communication and grammatical competence and is one of the most influential methods. CLT is widely acknowledged, but its use in grammar teaching remains controversial, particularly in vocational and marine education, where students require both linguistic precision and practical communication skills. This research examined how first-semester marine cadet grammar lessons at the Polytechnic of Marine Studies (PIP) Balikpapan use CLT principles. Classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with two English lecturers were utilised in a qualitative case study. The conclusions were strengthened by coding and triangulating data from many sources. The results show that the lecturers used English as the main language of instruction, visual learning materials, pair and group interaction, communicative classroom activities, and learner-centered teaching. The educational approach gave cadets real communication circumstances to learn grammar rather than rule memorisation. Poor student English proficiency limited instructional resources, large class sizes, examination-oriented teaching, and lecturers' insufficient training in communicative pedagogy slowed CLT uptake. The research finds that CLT may help marine educators teach grammar. It needs additional institutional support, teacher professional development, and genuine language-use learning contexts to succeed.

Keywords: *Communicative Language Teaching, Grammar Instruction, Maritime English, Qualitative Study, Vocational Education*

INTRODUCTION

English is becoming the main language of worldwide communication in education, business and professional practice. Farjami (2024) stated that English is even more important in the marine environment, where it is the operational language for ship-to-ship and ship-to-shore communication, for multinational personnel and for international maritime legislation. This is why maritime education institutes are required to enhance not just students' general English proficiency but also to equip future seafarers to communicate effectively, fluently and appropriately in genuine professional scenarios (Yusrah & Rahadiano, 2025).

Such expectations have led language educators to develop educational methodologies that emphasise communication rather than the memorisation of linguistic structures. Among these techniques, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been one of the most important frameworks in English language teaching (Garcitos et. al., 2024; Ratnawati et al., 2026). Studies have shown that CLT fosters learners' involvement, interaction, and communication abilities through meaningful language use, group learning, and real-world classroom activities (Kadhim & Mohsein, 2024). CLT does not see grammar as a set of rules but as something that may be developed via meaningful participation in communication (Flores, et al., 2026).

Despite its broad acceptance, the use of CLT in grammar education continues to create practical and pedagogical difficulties. Grammar is still an important component of language competency because learners need adequate grammatical competence to write messages that are correct and intelligible. But conventional grammar teaching generally includes the teaching of rules, repeated drills and decontextualised exercises, which may increase declarative knowledge but may not sufficiently promote communicative performance. Chen & Shuib (2026) show that successful grammar education should clearly attend to language form within meaningful communicative tasks,

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allowing learners to link grammatical correctness with actual language usage.

The use of CLT is especially important in vocational education, such as in marine schools. Maritime cadets are required to communicate effectively in operational scenarios, when misunderstanding can influence workplace productivity and safety. This means that teaching English in maritime education is not just about studying the English language in general, but rather it is a kind of English for Purposes (ESP). Learners need to acquire grammatical competence and communication that is particular to the industry. Current research in Maritime English shows that realistic communication, simulation-based learning, task-oriented teaching and contextualised language practice are of great importance for the development of professional communicative skills of cadets.

Nevertheless, empirical evidence concerning the implementation of CLT specifically for grammar instruction in maritime education remains limited. Most previous studies have concentrated on speaking performance, vocabulary acquisition, Standard Marine Communication Phrases (SMCP), or broader Maritime English instruction, while relatively few have examined how grammar is taught communicatively within maritime classrooms (Yusrah & Rahadiano, 2025). Moreover, studies frequently report contextual barriers such as limited English proficiency, large classes, inadequate teaching resources, examination-oriented assessment, and insufficient teacher preparation, all of which influence the successful implementation of CLT (Limbong et al., 2024).

This gap needs additional research since grammar education is a fundamental component of the Maritime English curriculum, yet little is known about how lecturers convert communicative concepts into classroom practice in maritime institutions. Understanding this process is vital to identify successful pedagogical strategies while also understanding contextual constraints that impact instructional choices.

This research investigates the adoption of Communicative Language Teaching in grammar teaching for first-semester maritime cadets at the Polytechnic of Maritime Studies (PIP) Balikpapan. In particular, the research seeks to: 1) discover how English lecturers use communicative principles in teaching grammar, 2) identify the instructional methods that foster communicative learning, and 3) identify the problems in using communicative principles in the classroom. The results are intended to add to the growing body of research on CLT in vocational and maritime education and provide practical insights into enhancing grammar teaching in English for Maritime Purposes curricula.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design

The research used an interpretative qualitative case study to investigate the enactment of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the grammar education of first-semester marine cadets. A qualitative method was chosen because the aim of the research was to understand lecturers' teaching practices, classroom interaction, and the circumstances that affected the application of CLT in a practical educational setting (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study methodology allowed for an in-depth investigation of spontaneously occurring classroom activities without manipulation of the teaching process. The research was performed on English grammar lessons at Polytechnic of Maritime Studies (PIP) Balikpapan, Indonesia.

Research Setting and Participants

This research was carried out at the English Department of PIP Balikpapan in the first-semester grammar courses of the cadets. Two English professors who taught grammar volunteered to participate in the research. Both were actively engaged in implementing communicative classroom activities and had expertise in teaching English to marine cadets; thus, they were purposively selected. Observed courses comprised around thirteen cadets, a typical learning setting at the university.

Data Collection

Data were gathered via classroom observations and semi-structured interviews. Each lecturer was observed three different times to have a thorough grasp of teaching approaches and classroom

interaction. In each observation, extensive notes were taken on teaching processes, learning activities, instructional media, lecturer-student contact, and students' answers to communicative tasks.

Following this, semi-structured interviews were performed with both lecturers to gain insight into classroom happenings, investigate the pedagogical reasons for their teaching choices, and highlight problems faced in the application of CLT. The researchers were able to compare lecturers' claimed practices with their actual classroom practice using a combination of observational and interview data.

Research Instruments

The main research instruments were an observation procedure, an interview guide and field notes. The observation protocol was developed to record instructional practices in terms of the key principles of Communicative Language Teaching, such as the use of English as a medium of instruction, learners' interaction, communicative activities, classroom management, learning materials, and teacher facilitation. The interview guide included open-ended questions aimed at soliciting the participants' views on grammar teaching, classroom practice and the elements that influence the success of communicative teaching.

Data Analysis

We used reflexive thematic analysis as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2021) to examine the data. This analytical technique offers a systematic process for detecting, organising, and analysing patterns of meaning in qualitative data, and it provides researchers with an opportunity to explore participants' experiences within the framework of their educational environments. The study started with data familiarisation, where the researchers reviewed the classroom observation notes and interview transcripts many times to get a general sense of the participants' teaching methods. At this point, preliminary analytical notes were made to notice first impressions and repeating trends. The second phase entailed developing preliminary codes. The complete data set was rigorously categorized for episodes of data relating to communicative teaching approaches, grammar instruction, classroom interaction, instructional medium, learner involvement and implementation issues. Then, similar codes were compared and improved to confirm the uniformity of the coding process. The third step included grouping similar codes into larger categories to develop preliminary themes that reflect the core features of the execution of Communicative Language Teaching. The themes were then checked against the whole dataset to see whether they adequately captured the participants' experiences and classroom activities. Themes which overlapped conceptually were combined; poorly supported themes were refined or eliminated. In the fifth step, the topics were defined and named. In this process, each subject was carefully understood and related to key principles of Communicative Language Teaching and grammar pedagogy. This method allowed the researchers to consider not only what happened in the classroom teaching, but also how these instructional techniques were congruent with communicative principles within the framework of maritime education. Finally, the themes were combined into a cohesive narrative that included information from classroom observations and lecturer interviews. Data snippets were selected to aid comprehension of each subject and highlight connections between lecturers' teaching choices and the actual implementation of CLT in grammar teaching.

Trustworthiness

The research used criteria of credibility, dependability and confirmability to improve the trustworthiness of the results. Methodological triangulation was used to increase credibility through classroom observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews. To capture regular instructional methods rather than discrete teaching incidents, each lecturer was observed throughout three classroom encounters. To ensure dependability, a clear record of the data-gathering process, coding choices, and theme development throughout analysis was kept. To ensure confirmability, the researchers consistently compared observational evidence with interview replies so that all interpretations could be substantiated by several sources of information rather than a single dataset. The researchers used iterative reflection throughout the analytical process to verify that the themes

appropriately reflected participants' viewpoints and classroom practices.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was on a voluntary basis. The lecturers were informed of the aims of the study before data collection, and they were willing to participate.

Findings and Discussion

This research used reflective thematic analysis of classroom observations, field notes, and semi-structured interviews with two English lecturers teaching first-semester marine cadets' grammar. Rather than applying Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) characteristics to the data, the analysis sought recurring patterns of meaning that showed how communicative principles were grasped, modified, and enacted in the instructional setting. The study found that CLT was a persistent clash between communicative pedagogy and grammar instruction. The data showed five interrelated themes: negotiating English-medium instruction in grammar classrooms, integrating grammar through contextualised communication, teacher scaffolding to support communicative grammar learning, persistent teacher-centred practices within a communicative framework, and contextual constraints shaping maritime grammar CLT implementation. These subjects illuminate the lecturers' teaching strategies, pedagogical concerns, and contextual realities. The following sections examine each topic using classroom observations, interviews, and related material in Communicative Language Teaching, grammar pedagogy, and English for Maritime Purposes.

1. Strategic use of English and Bahasa Indonesia in grammar classrooms.

The results demonstrated that the lecturers used English and Bahasa Indonesia strategically in teaching grammar rather than using just one language. Observations in the classroom indicated that English was largely utilized for greetings, minimal instructions, pronunciation practice and short classroom interactions. However, both lecturers often shifted to Bahasa Indonesia to ensure that the cadets understood the class while teaching grammatical rules or introducing new terminology. For example, Lecturer 1 in the third observation started the course by saying "Good afternoon" and "How was your day?", but the following discussion and explanation of grammar were mostly done in Bahasa Indonesia before students were invited to execute assignments in English. Similar patterns were found in all classroom meetings, indicating that bilingual instruction was a regular teaching method and not an occasional practice (Albahoth et al., 2024).

The interview data also provided explanations for this behaviour. Lecturer 1 said, "My cadets don't have so much vocabulary already, so I won't speak English so often." The aim is to make them know the lesson. Lecturer 2 also said, "English and Indonesian need to be balanced so that they understand the material because the cadets are still at an elementary proficiency level." These results demonstrate that the language decision was determined by the learners' needs and not by an English-only policy.

It aligns with contemporary views on pedagogical translanguaging where the learners' first language is seen as a resource for education rather than as a barrier to learning English. Huang and Chalmers (2023) have argued, in a comprehensive evaluation of EFL classrooms, that deliberate translanguaging may promote understanding, reduce cognitive load for learners, and facilitate engagement in the classroom, especially for learners with low levels of English proficiency. Similarly, a recent review by Zakharova and Lasagabaster (2026) highlights that pedagogical translanguaging allows teachers to connect learners' multilingual repertoires to communicative learning goals instead of imposing a strict English-only policy.

The current results are also in line with previous studies concerning pedagogical code-switching in Indonesian EFL courses. Code-switching is often used to explain difficult concepts, clarify instructions, check learners' understanding, and maintain classroom interaction without compromising students' exposure to English. The first language provides instructional scaffolding, helping learners develop meaning before they can use English independently, rather than serving as a substitute for English. This pattern is similar to the instructional techniques found in current

research, where Bahasa Indonesia was deliberately employed to explain grammar while English was used for classroom procedures, practising pronunciation, and producing sentences. These practices showed that the lecturers adapted Communicative Language Teaching to the conditions of first-semester marine cadets whose English ability was still improving. These findings suggest that effective communicative teaching in Maritime English depends on teachers' skilful use of both languages as a resource to facilitate comprehension while gradually building learners' communicative competence, rather than assessing CLT implementation solely by the amount of English spoken.

2. Contextualizing grammar in everyday communication

The data revealed that grammar was often presented in familiar contexts before lecturers explicitly defined the grammatical principles. Instead of separate phrase patterns, the two lecturers often used examples from the cadets' everyday life, e.g. food, vacations, family members, fasting, and classroom activities. For example, in the first observation, the lecturer introduced the simple past tense by inquiring what the cadets ate the night before and showed the pattern with the phrase "I ate gado-gado last night." In another class on future forms, the lecturer similarly asked the cadets about their vacation plans before teaching the usage of will, shall and be going to. In the lesson on comparative adjectives, two cadets were called to the front of the class to compare their ages and physical attributes in English. The examples show that grammar was always connected to relevant and familiar circumstances before pupils practised the target structures.

This is borne out by the interview data. Lecturer 2 said that grammar was often presented via questions that connected to students' genuine experience before the grammatical form was defined. She said: "Usually I asked a question using a kind of tenses and if my cadets false to answer, I corrected their sentence... After that, I explained it to the cadets." In a similar vein, Lecturer 1 also commented that grammar explanations were accompanied by contextual examples that would assist learners in comprehending when and how a particular tense was used in everyday life (Basturkmen, 2025).

The results indicate that the lecturers were trying to relate grammar teaching to meaningful speech rather than providing grammar as separate rules only. This method is in line with current research on contextualised grammar education and Focus on Form, which suggests that learners gain grammatical competence better when language forms are embedded in meaningful settings rather than being taught in decontextualised exercises alone (Nasaji, 2021). According to Ellis (2020), Focus on Form helps learners to identify grammatical elements in a meaningful context. Moreover, recent research shows that contextualised grammar training promotes learner engagement and helps learners comprehend the practical application of language in genuine conversation rather than merely memorising sentence patterns (Spada & Lightbown, 2022). The explanations of grammatical points in the current research were still mostly teacher-led. However, using familiar situations is an essential step toward communicative grammar training in Maritime English classes.

3. Providing Interactional Scaffolding by Providing Corrective Feedback

The results indicated that lecturers regularly used interactional scaffolding via corrective feedback during grammar teaching. Rather than just correcting mistakes, they helped the cadets produce more accurate English by imitating speech, reformulating incorrect replies, providing hints, and offering positive reinforcement (Ellis et.al., 2006; Li & Lee, 2026). These methods were included in the classes, and they motivated the cadets to continue engaging in the classroom instead of avoiding communication.

For example, in a class on the present continuous tense, a cadet asked what he was doing, and replied, "Writing in my book." The lecturer did not reject the answer but reconstructed it as "I write in my book" and then explained the grammatical pattern. Similar practices were also found when lecturers corrected the pronunciation of words such as walked, cooked, and answered and encouraged students to revise incorrect sentence structures. Moreover, positive reinforcement was given continuously through terms such as "Very good," "Good job," and "Excellent" when students improved their replies effectively. Such classroom interactions suggested that corrective feedback was employed as part of the learning process and not only for evaluation.

The interview results further supported these instructional approaches. Lecturer 2 said, "Normally I would ask a question using a type of tense and if my cadets are not able to answer, I would correct their sentence. Then I told it to the cadets." Likewise, Lecturer 1 said that positive replies like "Very good" and follow-up questions were deliberately utilised to improve students' confidence and encourage them to keep speaking English.

These results are in line with current studies on interactional scaffolding and corrective feedback in second language acquisition. Lyster (2021) suggests that corrective feedback is most successful when it highlights learners' faults and gives them an opportunity to alter their language through engagement. A meta-analysis of classroom-based corrective feedback studies by Li (2023), for example, demonstrated that recasts, elicitation, and prompts consistently aid learners' grammatical growth while retaining their communicative engagement. Supportive feedback does not disrupt the dialogue, but it makes the learners recognise the difference between their present use of language and the desired form, leading to more correct language output.

The current results are also consistent with Sato and Ballinger (2022), who claim that interactional feedback is a kind of educational scaffolding since it provides learners with an opportunity to improve their language while staying engaged in the communication process. In the classrooms observed, corrective feedback was used not only to correct errors but also to uphold learners' confidence through encouragement and instant support. This pattern reflects the lecturers' endeavour to preserve grammatical correctness and conversational engagement. Supportive corrective feedback seems to be a significant teaching method to progressively enhance both grammatical competence and confidence in using English, in Maritime English where first-semester cadets are still learning fundamental English ability.

4. Striking a Balance Between Teacher-Centered Instruction and Communicative Learning

The data showed that grammar teaching was still very much teacher-centred, although the professors were constantly trying to integrate communicative learning activities. In most classroom observations, the lecturers dominated most instructional phases, such as teaching grammatical principles, modelling sentence patterns, correcting students' replies, and assessing classroom assignments. The students mostly answered questions, did translation exercises, and practised grammar using examples given by the teachers. Group discussion and pair work were infrequent, and most tasks were carried out separately. But the lecturers often invited the students to engage by asking questions, giving contextual examples, and providing brief communicative practice, showing that they tried to blend explicit instruction with communicative learning rather than conventional teaching.

The balance is well shown by the observation data. Lecturers introduced grammatical principles on the blackboard throughout multiple lectures and then asked cadets to use them in contextualised activities, e.g. comparing peers while studying comparative adjectives or asking and answering questions outside the classroom. Although these activities enabled communication, they were nonetheless highly directed by the presenters. The observation checklist also indicated that learner-centred activities and cooperative learning were used to a limited level.

The interview statistics show why the professors selected this method. "I want my cadets to be more active, not passive when I teach them," Lecturer 1 said. Similarly, Lecturer 2 remarked that, "It was difficult to make my class student-centred because most of the cadets were passive. I wanted the lesson to go on, and I became the focus of the class. The comments show that the lecturers realised the importance of learner engagement, but they adapted their instructional roles to suit the cadets' preparedness and the needs of grammar education.

The results are consistent with contemporary views on Communicative Language Teaching, which do not see CLT as a learner-only method or as a total withdrawal of instructor assistance. Richards (2022) argues that CLT now enables teachers to shift flexibly between explicit teaching and communicative facilitation, depending on learners' needs and instructional objectives. Similarly, Macaro (2022) claims that good language teaching consists of instructors changing the balance between teacher-led instruction and learner independence depending on the students' language competency, rather than using a single instructional approach for all situations. Moreover, Derakhshan, Greenier, and Fathi (2023) discovered that instructor support is an important factor in

boosting learner engagement, especially in EFL contexts when learners are not confident or proficient. Using aids for example learning English application can boost students' motivation to communicate in English (Rusmawaty et.al., 2024). These views account for the strong instructional presence maintained by the lecturers in this research and the gradual building of opportunities for communication. Rather than challenging CLT, these actions reflect adaptive communicative pedagogy, where explicit grammar teaching serves as a scaffold for subsequent communicative use of English. A balanced approach between teacher guidance and communicative learning appears to be a practical and pedagogically appropriate approach in the setting of Maritime English, where first semester cadets are still developing foundational language skills.

5. Teaching Grammar Communicatively: Contextual Factors Affecting the Implementation

Results indicated that the learning environment had a more important role in the adoption of CLT than pedagogical preferences. Classroom observation indicated that many cadets were reluctant to speak in English, had limited vocabulary, and frequently fell back on Bahasa Indonesia in response to queries. Therefore, the instructors often changed the way they taught by simplifying explanations, offering fast feedback, and switching between English and Bahasa Indonesia to keep students participating. This was constant throughout the classroom sessions, suggesting that the instructional choices were driven by learners' preparedness rather than a set way of teaching.

The interview data shed additional light on these classroom practices. "I know my cadets do not have such a big vocabulary, so I will not speak English that often," said Lecturer 1. The aim is to help them grasp the lesson. Lecturer 2 also said, "Most of the cadets are still at an elementary proficiency level, so English and Indonesian should be balanced. Both instructors agreed that many cadets were passive throughout the classroom exercises, which made it impossible to properly execute student-centred learning. These comments indicate that the lecturers often modified their teaching approaches to make sure that the grammatical ideas were mastered before expecting the students to speak freely.

The results are in line with previous studies, which have shown that effective implementation of CLT depends on contextual variables such as learners' language competence, classroom involvement, and institutional circumstances rather than the teaching strategy per se. Richards (2022) says that CLT should be seen today as a flexible pedagogical framework which enables instructors to modify instructional tactics to meet the requirements of their learners, rather than as a set of inflexible methodological rules to be followed. Macaro (2022) also underlines the need for language instructors to make context-sensitive judgments while learners are still at the early stages of basic competency, especially in English-medium and vocational contexts. Also, Derakhshan, Greenier, and Fathi (2023) emphasise the need for teacher support and instructional flexibility to sustain learner engagement when students are not confident in using English.

The present results contribute to recent debates within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Maritime Purposes (EMP), highlighting the necessity of language instruction that responds to learners' professional and educational contexts, rather than resorting to general language teaching methodologies (Vidhiasi et al., 2022). Future professional communication requires the development of communicative skills and mastery of grammatical precision throughout the training of maritime cadets. Therefore, the lecturers' choices to combine explicit grammar teaching, strategic bilingualism, corrective feedback and directed classroom engagement are pedagogically valid adaptations, rather than departures, of CLT principles. The application of communicative grammar teaching in this research should therefore be seen as a context-sensitive pedagogical process, where instructional tactics are dynamically adapted to learners' competency, classroom engagement, and learning requirements. The finding extends the current discussion on CLT by showing that effective communicative teaching in Maritime English classrooms is not achieved by the strict application of communicative techniques, but by the teachers' ability to adapt the principles to the realities of vocational language learning.

Conclusion

This study examined the use of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in first-semester marine cadet grammar instruction at PIP Balikpapan. The findings show that Communicative

Language Teaching in Maritime English grammar classrooms is a context-responsive pedagogical adaptation that balances grammatical accuracy, communicative learning, and learner readiness. The five themes were the strategic use of English and Bahasa Indonesia, contextualization of grammar through everyday communication, interactional scaffolding through corrective feedback, teacher-led instruction and communicative learning, and contextual factors affecting instructional choices. These traits show that lecturers regularly adjusted their teaching methods to cadets' language abilities, classroom participation, and learning needs while focusing on communicative competence.

The findings add to the literature on Communicative Language Teaching and English for Maritime Purposes by showing that communicative grammar instruction should not be measured solely by classroom English use or communicative activities. However, its execution depends on lecturers' ability to apply communicative techniques to language learning in practice. Thus, strategic translanguaging as a context-responsive instructional technique helps students move from grammar to communicative ability in Maritime English. Planned translanguaging, contextualised grammar education, interactional scaffolding through corrective feedback, and lecturer assistance help learners learn grammar and gain confidence to use English for meaningful conversation.

The findings are also important for English language teaching in marine education. Professional development courses should teach lecturers to use communicative principles and context-sensitive education to meet students' competence and occupational needs. Instead of an English-only approach, teacher education should foster intelligent pedagogical decision-making that balances grammatical clarity, meaningful engagement, and learner preparedness in English for Maritime Purposes lessons. Future research may examine communicative language teaching at other maritime institutions, student perspectives, and the effects of context-responsive communicative grammar instruction on learners' communicative competence over time. This research would show us how communicative language instruction can work in vocational and professional English education.

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