ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH DIRECT COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY IN TERTIARY EFL CONTEXT

Masrurotul Ajiza[*1], Feny Arafah[*2]
masrurotul_ajiza@lecturer.itn.ac.id[*1], feny_arafah@lecturer.itn.ac.id[*2]
Faculty of Civil Engineering and Planning[*1,2]
Institut Teknologi Nasional Malang[*1,2]

ABSTRACT

This study explores the impact of Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) on student engagement and critical thinking in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom. It aims to answer three questions: (1) How is Direct CLT implemented? (2) In what ways does CLT influence students' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement during English lessons? and (3) How do CLT-based activities develop students' critical thinking in classroom interactions? Conducted with 1 English lecturer and 15 undergraduate Geodetic Engineering students of Institut Teknologi Nasional (ITN) Malang, this qualitative study collected data through classroom observations and student questionnaires combining Likert-scale and open-ended items. The findings reveal that Direct CLT shifted the classroom dynamic from a teacher-centered to a student-centered environment, where learners actively participated, collaborated, and communicated meaningfully. Students demonstrated behavioural engagement through teamwork, emotional engagement through enjoyment and positive interaction, and cognitive engagement. The use of authentic, discipline-related tasks enabled students to link English learning with real-world communication and professional relevance. Overall, the findings indicate that Direct CLT effectively enhances communicative competence, critical thinking, and collaboration among engineering students, suggesting that ESP instruction should integrate communicative and contextualized pedagogies to better prepare learners for authentic professional communication.

INTRODUCTION

In the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), particularly within engineering education, communicative competence is essential for preparing students to engage effectively in professional and academic communication. As engineering students increasingly face the demands of professional and academic communication, the ability to engage effectively with peers, colleagues, and

industry stakeholders becomes crucial. In the field of engineering, this extends beyond basic fluency to include technical reporting, collaborative project discussions, and professional interactions where precision is as vital as clarity. For instance, students in disciplines like Geodetic Engineering must be able to present technical designs or offer specialized products to non-experts, requiring a blend of technical lexicon and communicative adaptability. Traditional teacher-centered instruction, however, often limits students' opportunities to use language meaningfully and to develop higher-order thinking skills (Tezci et al., 2016; Gow & Kember, 1993,(Luna-Ríos, F. 2021; Ahmed Alsamadani, 2017). To address this gap, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) offers an alternative approach that emphasizes interaction, authentic communication, and learner autonomy.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) plays a pivotal role in modern educational paradigms, particularly in developing active student engagement in communicative scenarios that reflect real-world contexts. While Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been widely discussed in general English instruction, there is a significant research gap concerning the application of Direct CLT—a modified approach combining explicit direct instruction with communicative practice—within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) for engineering. Engineering students often prioritize technical mastery over linguistic competence, leading to a disconnect in traditional classrooms. This study addresses this gap by investigating how Direct CLT can bridge structural accuracy and professional communication needs, a niche that remains under-explored in current ESP literature.

One of the fundamental principles of CLT is its focus on real-life communication scenarios, which allows students to practice language skills in relevant contexts. As noted by Metruk (2023), CLT has evolved as a response to grammar-oriented approaches, providing learners with opportunities to engage actively in conversations that mirror practical applications of language. This shift is essential in preparing students for real-world interactions, increasing not only their language proficiency but also their confidence when communicating in English. One of the core tenets of CLT is its focus on facilitating authentic communication. Research shows that students engaged in interactive and authentic communication exercises reported enhanced confidence and improvement in their English proficiency (Aswad et al., 2024). By integrating communication-focused methodologies into language education, CLT promotes active involvement, helping learners apply their skills in real-world scenarios. For engineering students, this includes contexts such as collaborative projects, technical presentations, and professional interactions pertinent to their field of study (Basireddi et al., 2025).

The participatory nature of CLT not only contributes to linguistic skills but also fosters essential soft skills such as teamwork and problem-solving, which are crucial in engineering disciplines. Engaging in simulations of real-world tasks, such as project discussions and technical reporting, encourages students to practice the language in scenarios reflective of their future workplace. Consequently, when properly implemented, CLT can significantly bolster students' speaking abilities, as students exposed to task-based practices tend to show notable improvements compared to those taught through traditional methods (Basireddi et al., 2025).

The primary aim of CLT is to move beyond traditional rote learning methodologies that prioritize grammatical accuracy, immersing learners in authentic language use through diverse activities such as role plays, problem-solving tasks, and group discussions. This shift towards experiential learning has been shown to enhance not only linguistic fluency but also behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement among students (Eroz & Akbarov, 2015;Fadilah, 2018). By actively participating in communicative interactions, students develop critical thinking skills necessary for reasoning, negotiating meaning, and analyzing various perspectives, which are essential in both academic and professional settings (Zare & Biria, 2018; Herreño-Contreras, 2023).

Research indicates that CLT enables learners to construct meaning in authentic contexts, promoting a more profound understanding of language as a tool for communication rather than merely a set of grammatical rules (Eroz & Akbarov, 2015;Fadilah, 2018). For instance, Higgins & Elliott (2011) emphasize that experiential learning can lead to learners developing a heightened awareness that allows them to influence and navigate organizational dynamics effectively. This resonates with the goals of CLT, as students become more than just passive recipients of knowledge; instead, they engage critically with content that reflects personal, social, or professional realities.

Moreover, the pedagogical implications of CLT highlight its role in facilitating critical thinking and learner autonomy. As noted by Zare & Biria (2018), Zare and Biria, the development of critical thought is essential in English for Specific Purposes (ESP) contexts, as students are often required to engage in discussions that transcend simple language use. Thus, the active participation fostered by CLT supports deeper learning processes, encouraging students to take responsibility for their learning through self-instruction and self-evaluation.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has been recognized as an effective method to bridge the gap between teacher-centred and students-centred methods. By emphasizing interaction, authentic communication, and student-centred activities, CLT encourages learners to develop their communicative competence in practical contexts (Chang & Suparmi, 2020; Qasserras, 2023). A study from Chang & Suparmi (2020) indicates that CLT actively involves students in language learning through activities such as pair or group work, information gap tasks, and the use of real-world materials. This methodology contrasts sharply with traditional approaches that prioritize rote memorization and grammar-focused instruction (Chang & Suparmi, 2020); M. Alwazir & Shukri, 2016).

Moreover, the systematic review conducted by Qasserras (2023) highlights the global acceptance of CLT within ESL and EFL settings, asserting its relevance in enhancing learners' communicative competence. This perspective is reinforced by research that emphasizes that CLT not only fosters linguistic skills but also incorporates cultural and contextual awareness, which are vital for students in technical fields (Zhang, 2023; Luo, 2024). Understanding the interplay between communication and context is particularly relevant for engineering students, who must often navigate complex information and collaborate across diverse teams.

Despite its recognized benefits, implementing CLT faces various challenges in different educational settings, such as cultural resistance and systemic barriers

within educational systems, resistance from some educators accustomed to traditional methods, and the necessity of adapting CLT techniques to fit specific classroom environments (Sherwani & Kilic, 2017); M. Alwazir & Shukri, 2016). A study from East (2021) showed that the preparation and readiness of the educators in the implementation of CLT is very important. His study showed that educators tend to love grammar-translation approach because they feel too comfortable with it and did not want to try another one. Direct CLT specifically addresses these challenges by acting as a transitional framework; it retains the structured, explicit guidance that teachers are 'comfortable' with while systematically shifting the classroom toward communicative goals. By providing this direct structural support, it lowers the barrier for educators resistant to purely implicit methods. Research by Chen (2016) Chen reveals that successful CLT implementation requires careful consideration of curricular design and teaching strategies that encourage higher-order thinking. The contextualization of this teaching method allows educators to tailor their approach, thus addressing the unique language needs encountered in specific domains like engineering education (Han, 2022).

The discussion of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has evolved predominantly within the realm of general English language instruction; however, there is limited research focused on Direct CLT. Conceptually, Direct CLT is a hybrid pedagogical construct that bridges the 'fluency-accuracy' divide by integrating Direct Instruction—characterized by explicit teaching of linguistic structures and guided practice—with the core tenets of CLT, which prioritize meaningful interaction and functional language use. This approach is legitimized by the need for focused communication in technical fields, where learners require both the structural precision of technical lexicon and the ability to deploy that language in real-world professional scenarios. In engineering programs, students frequently view linguistic competence as a secondary concern, a perception that can lead to diminished motivation. Consequently, there is an urgent need for innovative pedagogical methods that move beyond rote learning to foster professional relevance and intellectual stimulation. Mulis & Blouin (2024) argued that engineering students often regard English as a secondary subject, which necessitates innovative pedagogical methods to enhance relevance, engagement, and intellectual stimulation in their learning experiences. By integrating the structural clarity of direct instruction with the functional application of CLT, educators can better address the specific communicative demands of the engineering field. Such an approach not only enhances student engagement but also ensures that language acquisition is perceived as an essential tool for professional success.

Regarding the implementation of Direct CLT, some studies indicate that traditional language teaching methods, such as grammar-translation and direct methods, are still favoured in many engineering educational settings (Yung, 2023; Luo, 2024). In their study, Shaukat et al. (2025) mentioned that educators still used grammar-translation method because they saw this approach was essential to help the students of engineering department to achieve their technical proficiency in English. Similarly, Shrivastava & Shrivastava (2021) argued that grammar-translation approaches align with traditional methods prevalent in many educational

contexts, helping to foster a strong foundational knowledge that is crucial for students who need to master technical language skills. This reliance on conventional approaches can lead to a disconnect between the language learning experience and the practical communication skills that these students require in their professional lives. In many engineering contexts, educators still favor grammar-translation methods, viewing them as essential for technical proficiency. However, this reliance creates a critical disconnect: students may master technical lexicon but lack the practical communication skills required for global professional environments. This study argues that Direct CLT is the necessary 'middle ground' to solve this issue. As noted by Qasserras (2023), while CLT has a recognized emphasis in many educational settings for its ability to promote interactive learning and communication efficacy, engineering contexts have not fully explored this potential. The need to adapt CLT principles to accommodate the unique demands of engineering lexicon thus becomes critical in addressing students' perceptions of English ((Namai, 2021).

Institut Teknologi Nasional Malang is an institution focusing on Engineering disciplines where direct CLT was applied by the English lecturer. Attempting to close the gap between linguistic theory and real-world application, the lecturer has shifted to using Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in this technical setting. This study tried to understand not only the pedagogical execution of these methods but also their profound impact on the student experience. Therefore, this study aims to explore how Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is implemented in an ESP classroom for engineering students and how it influences their engagement and critical thinking. By exploring various aspects of classroom dynamics, the investigation seeks to address three pivotal research questions: (1) How is Direct CLT implemented in the classroom? (2) In what ways does Direct CLT influence students' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement during English lessons? and (3) How do Direct CLT-based activities develop students' critical thinking in classroom interactions?

By addressing these questions, the study seeks to contribute to the understanding of Direct CLT's pedagogical potential in technical education contexts. It offers insights for ESP practitioners to create more meaningful and reflective learning experiences. This approach seeks to bridge the gap between structural accuracy and communicative fluency, ensuring that language acquisition aligns with the high demands of professional fields.

RESEARCH METHOD
Research Design
This study employed a qualitative descriptive design supported by descriptive statistic to examine the classroom implementation of Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and its effects on student engagement and critical thinking. The qualitative approach was chosen to capture the natural classroom interactions, behaviours, and perceptions of both the lecturer and students in an authentic learning environment.

Participants

The research was conducted in the Geodetic Engineering Department of a private university in Indonesia. The participants consisted of 1 English lecturer and 15 second-year engineering students enrolled in an English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course. The participants consisted of 20% male and 80% female students coming from all areas ofs Indonesia, such as Malang, Batu, Pasuruan, Lumajang, Kediri, Kendari, North Kalimantan, Balikpapan, and Dompu Regency. 46.7 % of the participants are from Senior high school and vocational high school respectively, while another 6.7% participants are from Madratsah Aliyah. The students' English proficiency levels varied from low to intermediate although 46.7% of the participant have been learning English actively for more than 10 years, 40% of them in the range of 6 to 10 years, and 13.3% are between 1 to 5 years of active English learning. The lesson observed focused on the topic "Offering a Product," which was designed to simulate real-world workplace communication tasks relevant to their field.

Research Instruments

This study used two instruments which are observation and questionnaire. Both instruments were all self-constructed to fit the needs based on aims of this study.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two main instruments:

1. Observation sheet used to record the classroom activities, teacher-student interactions, and evidence of engagement and critical thinking. The observation focused on five indicators: (a) lesson structure, (b) authenticity of materials, (c) teacher's role, (d) student collaboration, and (e) language use.
2. Questionnaire consisting of both Likert-scale items and open-ended questions, distributed after the class to capture students' perceptions of their engagement and critical thinking during the communicative activities. The questions in the questionnaire were delivered in Bahasa Indonesia to avoid bias for the students to give their responses.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, following the multi-staged process outlined by Braun & Clarke (2006). The analysis proceeded through three primary coding stages: first, open coding was used to identify initial concepts in the observation notes and open-ended questionnaire responses; second, axial coding was applied to group these concepts into broader categories; and finally, selective coding was used to establish the overarching themes of behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Theme development was an iterative process where recurring patterns were mapped directly to the research questions.

To ensure the findings' trustworthiness, several strategies were employed: (1) Triangulation: data from classroom observations were cross-referenced with student questionnaire responses to ensure consistency; (2) member checking: preliminary findings were shared with the participating lecturer to verify the accuracy of the classroom descriptions; and (3) peer debriefing: the coding process and thematic labels were reviewed by a colleague to minimize researcher bias. The findings were then interpreted to illustrate how Direct CLT supported students' engagement and critical thinking in an ESP setting.

Research Procedures

The classroom observation was conducted in a 100-minute session. Prior to the lesson, students were instructed to bring one random item from home and list it in a WhatsApp group to avoid duplication. In class, they were divided into four groups and assigned a task to create a company and promote their products using English. The lecturer acted as a facilitator, guiding the learning process while allowing students to collaborate, negotiate, and present their ideas. After the class, the researcher sent questionnaire to the students via Google Form to get their ideas and perspectives related to the use of Direct CLT.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

The data obtained from classroom observations and student questionnaires were interpreted qualitatively to capture the authentic classroom dynamics and students' perspectives. The analysis focuses on answering three questions: (1) How is Direct CLT implemented in the classroom? (2) In what ways does Direct CLT influence students' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement during English lessons? and (3) How do Direct CLT-based activities develop students' critical thinking in classroom interactions? The results are organized according to the three research questions to ensure a coherent discussion as follows:

**RQ 1. The Implementation of Direct CLT in the Classroom**

The application of Direct CLT was characterized by a fundamental transition in pedagogical focus and classroom roles.

Teacher-centered input shifts to student-centered tasks

In this CLT-based lesson on "offering a product," students brought random items to form diverse group collections. Each group created a plausible company name and prepared a sales pitch for the lecturer. During a 30-minute preparation phase, students engaged in negotiation, creative role-assignment, and collaborative discussion. This student-led process ensured every member had a speaking role. The high level of engagement demonstrates the successful application of a student-centered approach within the Direct CLT framework. This initial task preparation is illustrated in Figure 1.

Figure 1. The task before the class starts
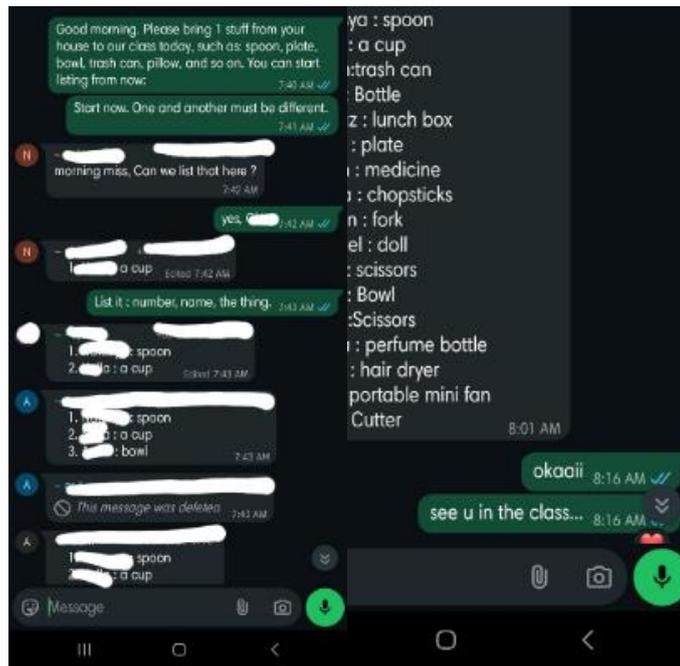
The integration of real-life and discipline-related materials

The lecturer integrated authentic materials which was workplace communication scenarios "offering products" to make learning more meaningful for engineering students. The students seemed to enjoy their presentation and spoke English more confidently because they felt connected with the conversation.

Lecturer as an active facilitator rather than corrector

The lecturer acted as a facilitator, guiding and monitoring interaction instead of dominating the class. She minimized her own talk time (TTT) and maximized student talk time (STT); she just asked small questions to make the students talked more. She made a very small interruption to make the students more confident and to keep maintaining communication flow. As the evaluation, the lecturer made the correction in the end of the class while giving positive reinforcement and feedback .

Promotion of a collaborative learning environment

During the preparation of the presentation, the students were encouraged to work in pairs or small groups. They were seen helping each other use English for specific tasks like describing processes or explaining designs. The use of AI like ChatGPT or Canva were allowed to develop their idea.

Figure 2. The Students' Activity During Discussing, Negotiating, and Creating

Emphasize on language use over language form

During the presentation, the students were seen made some mistakes in grammatical. Occasionally, the students found it difficult to recall the appropriate vocabularies in English. However, they understood well what they were talking about.

RQ 2. Influence of CLT on Students' Engagement

Direct CLT demonstrated a strong positive influence across the 3 dimensions of students' engagement:

Behavioural engagement

During the English lesson, CLT was seen influencing the student's engagement. The data indicates a high level of agreement among students that communicative activities enhance their attention and participation. Specifically, the results from the Likert-scale questionnaire show that almost all participants perceived the interactive nature of Direct CLT as a primary driver for their sustained focus during the lesson. The data reflects a combined 93.3% of students agreed or strongly agreed that these activities increased both their attention span and their active participation, confirming the method's effectiveness for classroom management and engagement (Figure 3). Furthermore, student interest was exceptionally high, with 100% of surveyed students reporting the class activities to be either interesting or very interesting (Figure4). This suggests the Direct CLT are highly successful in capturing student interest. Furthermore, observation noted several students voluntarily asking follow-up questions to other groups. Despite occasional struggles with pronunciation, students made determined efforts to use English for both presentation delivery and questioning. While active, some students were still noted to be heavily relying on their notes. In addition, the high level of participation was also quantified in the questionnaire results (Figure 5), with 66.7% of students reporting they were very motivated to engage in CLT, followed by 26.7% who were motivated, confirming the powerful motivating effect of CLT on classroom communication.

Figure 3. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Students' Engagement

Saya lebih memperhatikan dan tetap aktif ketika dosen menggunakan kegiatan komunikatif.
15 responses

Figure 4. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Students' Interest

Kegiatan kelas membuat pembelajaran Bahasa Inggris menjadi lebih menarik bagi saya.
15 responses
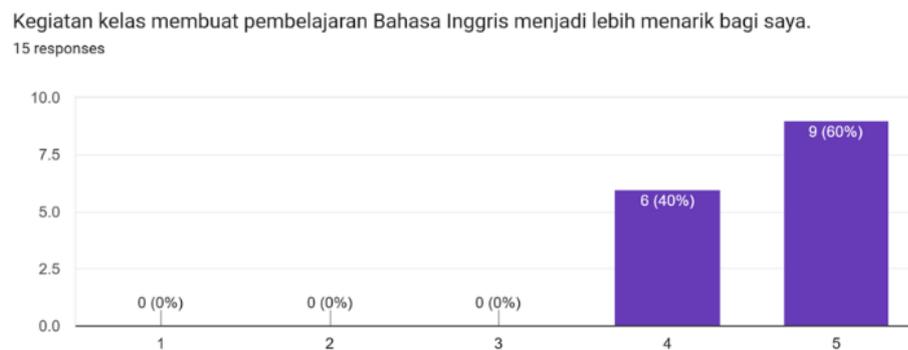
Figure 5. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Students' Participation

Saya merasa termotivasi untuk berpartisipasi dalam kegiatan komunikatif selama pelajaran Bahasa Inggris.
15 responses

Emotional
Initial challenges were observed: a few students experienced frustration due to random group assignment which required the lecturer to act as a mediator to ensure

equitable role distribution and participation. However, the data reflects that approximately 80% of the students enjoyed interacting with peers (Figure 6). The lecturer strategically intervened during preparation by posing questions designed to prompt deeper thinking and encourage more elaborate explanations later. The high efficacy of this technique is supported by the data (Figure 7): 93.3% of students (categories 4 and 5 combined) agreed or strongly agreed that the lecturer's questions successfully motivated active participation. This sense of self-assurance is substantiated by the findings (Figure 8), where 60% of students felt confident or very confident expressing ideas in English during tasks. Although a quarter remained neutral, the low percentage of students indicating a lack of confidence (13.3%) suggests the communicative activities are generally effective in fostering self-assurance.

**Figure 6. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Discussion**

Saya menikmati berbicara dalam Bahasa Inggris dengan teman sekelas saat berdiskusi atau mengerjakan tugas.
15 responses

Figure 7. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Active Participation

Pertanyaan dari dosen mendorong saya untuk berpartisipasi secara aktif di kelas.
15 responses

Figure 8. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Developing Ideas

Saya merasa lebih percaya diri dalam mengungkapkan ide-ide saya dalam Bahasa Inggris selama kegiatan komunikatif.
15 responses
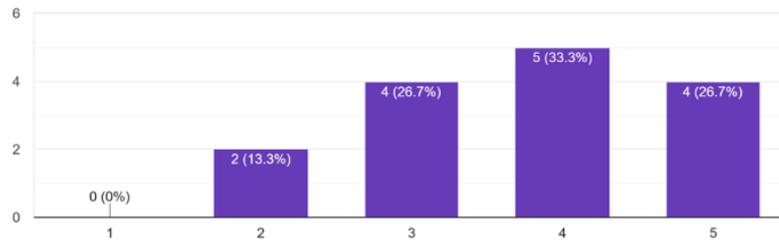
Cognitive
Rather than relying on simple "what" or "who" questions, students naturally gravitated toward using "why" or "how". The quantitative data confirms this inclination (Figure 9): a significant majority of 66.7% (categories 4 and 5 combined) reported frequently using "why" and "how" questions, indicating a preference for deep engagement and critical analysis over superficial information. A notable example involved a group successfully rationalizing the "sleeping company" name based on the diverse items they were selling (doll, medicine, plastic bag, and chopstick). They also constructively and critically responded to classmates' opinions, helping when peers struggled with idea development or translation into English. 93.3% of students (Figure 10) agreed or strongly agreed they possess good cooperative skills during communicative activities. Finally, 60% of students felt confident in offering new or alternative solutions, a notable third (33.3%) were neutral (Figure 11). This suggests that while a majority are confident in contributing novel ideas, this specific skill is still developing for a substantial group.

Figure 9. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Creating Questions

Saya sering mengajukan pertanyaan "mengapa" atau "bagaimana" untuk memahami topik secara lebih mendalam.
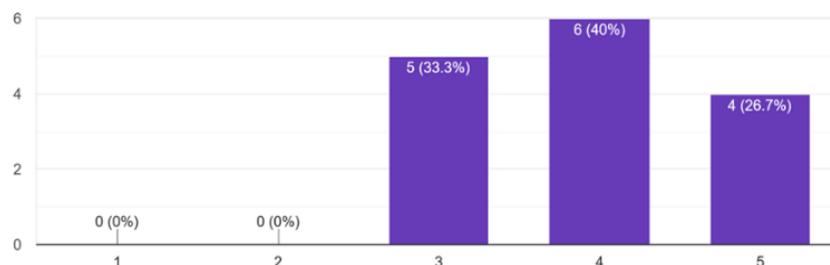15 responses

Figure 10. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Developing Class Communication

Saya dapat bekerja sama dengan baik dengan teman sekelas selama kegiatan komunikatif.
15 responses

Figure 11. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Developing Alternatives in a Discussion

Saya dapat mengusulkan solusi baru atau alternatif selama diskusi berlangsung.
15 responses

RQ 3. How do CLT-based activities develop students' critical thinking in classroom interactions?

In doing Direct CLT, the students justify opinions with logical reasoning. For instance, when questioned about corporate sustainability, students moved beyond simple answers to provide deeper reflections on material science. When the teacher used "why" in the question, it would lead the students to deeper reflection. The questionnaire data (Figure 12) showed 80% of the students (categories 4 and 5 combined) are actively explain and provide reasons for their responses when prompted by the lecturer. To justify their idea, they also like to give some examples or evidence. 86.7% of the students prioritize supporting their claims with evidence or examples to ensure reliability (Figure 13). Moreover, the students compare and evaluate multiple ideas. For example, in deciding which perfume was the exclusive one. One member said they had several smells, while another one disagreed with

her. After some questions from the lecturer, they decided together that "*this perfume is exclusive from our company especially for women because it is soft and floral smell….*" As the questionnaire data showed that 80% of the students in Figure 15, agree or strongly agree that they actively use peer comparison as a strategy for problem-solving and optimizing their answers. This indicates that students are highly engaged in collaborative critical evaluation and value classmates' input in achieving superior results. Next, 86.7% (combining categories 4 and 5), agree or strongly agree that they can participate in discussions by critically evaluating ideas while simultaneously demonstrating mutual respect (Figure 15). This is a strong indicator of a positive, mature, and constructive classroom communication environment. Finally, another remarkable benefit of the use of CLT is the students could reflect the material better. 86.6% of the students (combining categories 4 and 5) agree or strongly agree that engaging in communicative activities enhances their self-reflection on the material they have learned (Figure 16). This suggests that these activities are highly effective not only for interaction but also for fostering metacognition and deeper processing of the lesson content.

Figure 12. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Answering the Questions

Saya berusaha menjelaskan jawaban saya dengan alasan ketika dosen mengajukan pertanyaan.
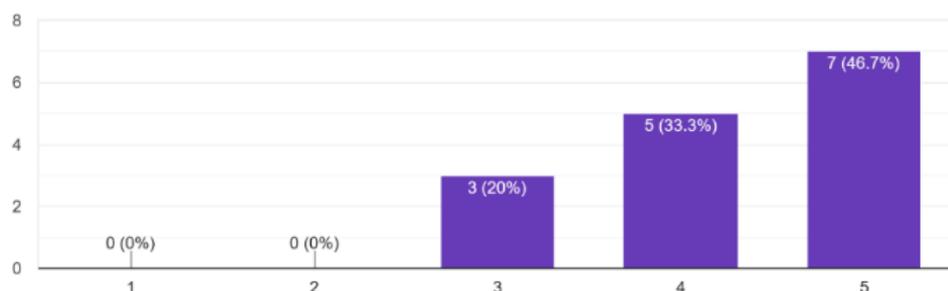15 responses

Figure 13. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Providing Evidence in Discussion

Saya berusaha memberikan contoh atau bukti ketika menyampaikan pendapat saya.
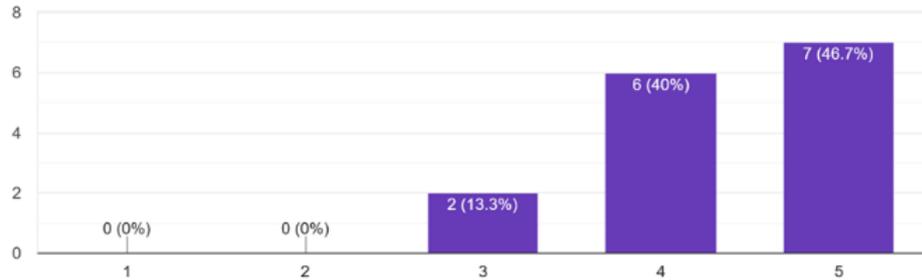15 responses

Figure 14. The Benefit of Direct CLT In Idea Défense

Saya membandingkan jawaban saya dengan jawaban teman untuk menemukan solusi terbaik.
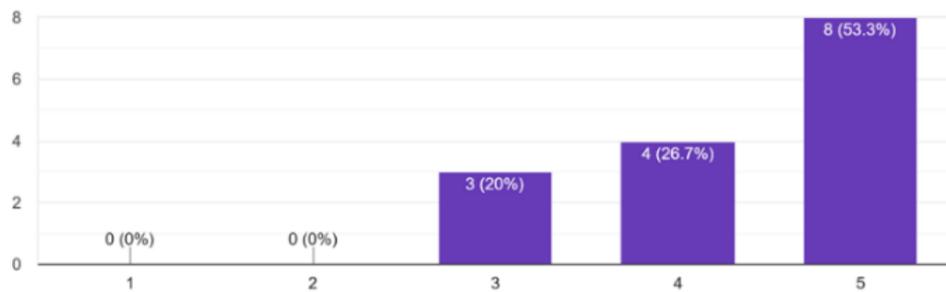15 responses

Figure 15. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Critical Thinking

Saya dapat mengevaluasi ide teman sekelas secara kritis dan dengan sikap saling menghargai.
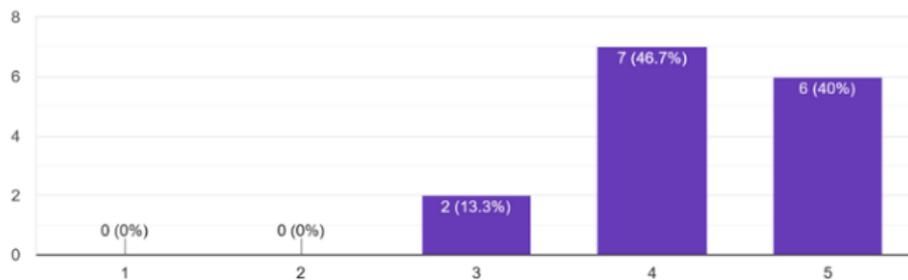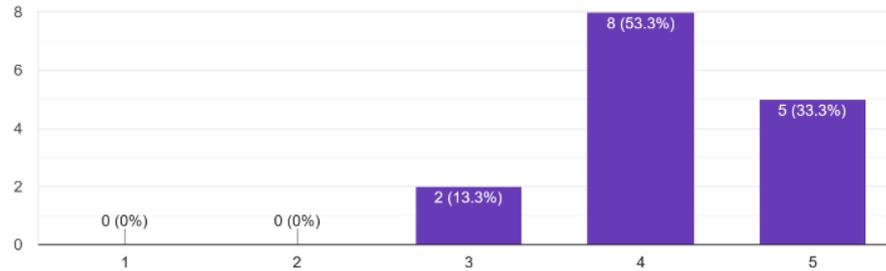15 responses

Figure 16. The Benefit of Direct CLT in Material Reflection

Masrurotul Ajiza[*1]*, Feny Arafah*[*2]*

ENHANCING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND CRITICAL THINKING THROUGH
DIRECT COMMUNICATIVE LANGUAGE TEACHING: AN EMPIRICAL STUDY
IN TERTIARY EFL CONTEXT

Kegiatan komunikatif membuat saya lebih merefleksikan apa yang telah saya pelajari.
15 responses

Discussion

The discussion synthesizes the quantitative and qualitative findings to explain the impact of the Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach on student engagement and critical thinking within the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. The results remarkably demonstrate that the Direct CLT implementation successfully achieved its goal of shifting the classroom dynamic from a traditional, teacher-centered model to a highly student-centered environment, where learning is active, collaborative, and meaningful. However, the effectiveness of this transition is rooted in specific pedagogical mechanisms rather than just the novelty of the activities.

Influence on Student Engagement

The direct communicative approach was highly successful in influencing all three dimensions of student engagement which are covering behavioural, emotional, and cognitive.

Behavioural Engagement (Participation and Attention)

The data indicates a high level of agreement (93.3%) among students which is affirming that the communicative activities increase both attention and active participation. This suggests that the Direct CLT framework functions as a "social catalyst" in the ESP classroom. Different from traditional models where students are passive recipients, the direct instruction phase provides the necessary linguistic scaffolding—technical vocabulary and sentence starters—which reduces the cognitive load during the communicative phase. This explains how students who previously felt "stuck" were able to sustain longer focus; the structural clarity gave them the linguistic confidence to participate without the fear of immediate failure. This aligns with Marliana et al. (2025) and Lazuardi & Syarif Muhammad Syaheed (2024) who found that interactive learning strategies, including simulations, led to statistically significant improvements in speaking fluency, demonstrating how engaging tasks can transform traditional classrooms into dynamic learning environments. The adaptability of such methods is also echoed in Wang's research, which indicates that virtual simulations can lead to notable increases in both student engagement and speaking proficiency (Wang, 2024).

Emotional Engagement (Enjoyment and Interest)

Students showed a highly positive emotional response with 100% finding the activities interesting to the Direct CLT. This widespread enthusiasm suggests that the integration of authentic, discipline-related tasks, like the product-offering simulation, allowed students to find professional relevance in their language learning. However, a critical analysis of the 20% who did not report strong enjoyment suggests that some students may still experience communicative apprehension—a common barrier in EFL where students with lower baseline proficiency feel overwhelmed by the spontaneity of CLT. Tran (2022) argued that CLT can avoid the students from having a passive learning. It works the same as the application of Game-Based Learning (GLB). Where Yulistiyani et al. (2025)declared that GBL combines enjoyment and education, drawing students in with game-like methods that encourage cooperation, communication, and problem-solving. While the findings are positive, they must be viewed alongside the Hawthorne Effect, where students may perform better because they recognize the innovative nature of the study. Nevertheless, the qualitative feedback points to the authentic task design as the primary driver of interest.

Cognitive Engagement (Focus and Reflection)
The approach promoted deeper processing, with 86.6% of students reflecting more on their learning. This occurs because CLT moves learning beyond rote memorization. As Sultana (2023) notes, CLT forces students to understand context rather than just grammar. In this study, cognitive engagement was triggered by the need to negotiate meaning; students were not just using English, they were solving problems using English, which requires a higher level of mental investment.

These results affirm that CLT moves learning beyond rote memorization, encouraging learners to take responsibility for their learning through self-instruction and self-evaluation. This is important for the students to make them ready in every context of communication. Like Sultana (2023) said that CLT makes the students understand the cultural context in diverse setting.

Development of Critical Thinking
The CLT-based activities effectively fostered critical thinking by requiring students to justify their positions, compare ideas, and develop solutions.
Justification and Reasoning
The use of open-ended questions like "Why?" or "How?" moved the interaction from Display Questions (fixed answers) to "Referential Questions" (original thought). This shift is crucial in an engineering context because it mirrors the professional requirement to justify technical decisions. As Phan (2020) argues, effective questions in CLT from a lecture will lead the students into their critical thinking. An open ended is better since it can challenge the students to analyse their arguments more critically.

Collaborative Criticality and Problem-Solving

The environment cultivated both cooperation (93.3%) and critical judgment. These findings indicate that collaborative activities encourage students to defend, question, or modify their opinions, leading to collaborative argumentation. This is essential for professional settings where engineers must synthesize knowledge from various sources (Yulianto et al., 2021).

Challenges and Implications
While successful, a critical tension exists within the findings: despite 60% of the participants reporting high levels of confidence, the qualitative data revealed persistent issues regarding performance anxiety and fluency gaps. This suggests that Direct CLT is not a panacea for fluency. While it improves the willingness to communicate (WTC), the pressure of real-time technical word choice remains a hurdle.

The condition of performance anxiety and linguistic hesitation as observed in this study, as noted by Choi et al. (2019), is common among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, but it can be mitigated by the lecturer acting as a mediator rather than a traditional evaluator. The lecturer's strategy of active facilitation rather than correction during the presentation flow was a successful strategy for mitigating this anxiety and maintaining fluency, with corrections only being made in the final evaluation session. This approach proved instrumental in reducing the students' anxiety and sustaining communicative fluency in real-time. by doing a final evaluation session, the lecturer can ensure that the students remain focusing on the message delivery more.

In conclusion, the implementation of Direct CLT approach is a transformative pedagogical tool in the ESP context, effectively nurturing linguistic competence alongside essential soft skills—such as critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. For engineering students, the integration of the mentioned competencies are beneficial and vital prerequisites for professional success in a globalized technical field. The challenges identified point toward the need for continued practice focused on spontaneous speaking to convert intellectual comprehension into fluent, confident communication.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION
The implementation of Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in the English for Specific Purposes (ESP) classroom demonstrated a clear shift from teacher-centred instruction to a more student-centred and interactive learning environment. Through authentic, real-world tasks such as product-offering simulations, students became active participants who negotiated, collaborated, and creatively communicated within their groups. The lecturer's role as a facilitator—rather than a corrector—encouraged fluency, confidence, and meaningful interaction, while supportive tools like ChatGPT and Canva further enhanced creativity and engagement. The findings revealed that Direct CLT positively influenced students' behavioural, emotional, and cognitive engagement. Students actively participated in discussions, displayed enthusiasm and enjoyment, and showed perseverance despite varying proficiency levels. Their emotional responses indicated a supportive and motivating classroom climate that fostered both collaboration and confidence. Cognitively, students demonstrated curiosity,

reasoning, and creativity by posing analytical questions, defending arguments, and solving problems collaboratively. Importantly, the communicative tasks enabled students to connect English learning with real-life and professional contexts. They began to perceive English not merely as a subject but as a practical medium for critical thinking, problem-solving, and teamwork. This shift in perspective underscores the transformative potential of Direct CLT in nurturing linguistic competence alongside higher-order thinking skills. Overall, this study highlights that Direct CLT can effectively enhance engagement and critical thinking among engineering students by integrating meaningful communication, authentic contexts, and collaborative learning into ESP classrooms.

Implications and Recommendations

The findings strongly support implementing Direct Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), especially within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in engineering, as a powerful method to enhance engagement and critical thinking. Pedagogically, educators should shift from content delivery to facilitating and guiding interaction, designing tasks that mirror real-world professional scenarios (e.g., simulations, presentations). This approach—prioritizing communication fluency and providing process-focused feedback over strict linguistic correction—builds student confidence and bridges the gap to workplace communication. In curriculum, integrating CLT principles and fostering collaboration between language and engineering faculty will ensure materials are relevant and contextually authentic. Future research should explore the long-term impact of this approach and the strategic use of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Canva) to further support communicative learning and creative problem-solving. Ultimately, this context-based, collaborative method develops not only English mastery but also crucial soft skills essential for the engineering profession.

REFERENCES

Ahmed Alsamadani, H. (2017). Needs analysis in ESP context: Saudi engineering students as a case study. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, *8*(6), 58. https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.alls.v.8n.6p.58

Aswad, M., Putri, A. M. J., & Sudewi, P. W. (2024). Enhancing student learning outcomes through the communicative language teaching approach. *AL-ISHLAH: Jurnal Pendidikan*, *16*(4). https://doi.org/10.35445/alishlah.v16i4.5204

Basireddi, R., Dasam, S., Anumula, V. S. S., Jayasri, S. V., Pettela, R., Vijaya, K. P., Bolleddu, S. N., & Suvarna, L. K. (2025). Improving students' speaking skills in engineering colleges through task-based language teaching. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *15*(3), 698–705. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1503.04

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). *Using thematic analysis in psychology*. https://doi.org/http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Chen, M.-H. (2016). Theoretical framework for integrating higher-order thinking into L2 speaking. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *6*(2), 217. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0602.01

Choi, N., No, B., Jung, S., & Lee, S. E. (2019). What affects middle school students' English anxiety in the EFL context? Evidence from south Korea. *Education Sciences*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci9010039

East, M. (2021). What do beginning teachers make of task-based language teaching' A comparative re-production of East (2014). *Language Teaching*, *54*(4), 552–566. https://doi.org/10.1017/S026144481900048X

Eroz, E., & Akbarov, A. A. (2015). The implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) in an EFL context: a case study of learners' attitudes and perceptions. *ŠVIETIMAS POLITIKA VADYBA KOKYBĖ / EDUCATION POLICY MANAGEMENT AND QUALITY*, *7*(3), 118–126. https://doi.org/10.48127/spvk-epmq/15.7.118

Fadilah, E. (2018). Rethinking the Maintenance of CLT in Indonesia: A response to Ariatna's "the need for maintaining CLT in Indonesia." In *TESOL Journal* (Vol. 9, Number 1, pp. 224–236). Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, Inc. https://doi.org/10.1002/tesj.341

Gow, L., & Kember, D. (1993). Conceptions of teaching and their relationship to student learning. *British Journal of Educational Psychology*, *63*(1), 20–23. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8279.1993.tb01039.x

Han, I. (2022). Contextualization of communicative language teaching in Confucian heritage culture: challenging pedagogic dichotomization. *SAGE Open*, *12*(1). https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440221079895

Herreño-Contreras, Y. A. (2023). Mapping higher order thinking skills in English for specific purposes classes. *Lengua y Sociedad*, *22*(2), 417–454. https://doi.org/10.15381/lengsoc.v22i2.25312

Higgins, D., & Elliott, C. (2011). Learning to make sense: What works in entrepreneurial education? *Journal of European Industrial Training*, *35*(4), 345–367. https://doi.org/10.1108/03090591111128324

Lazuardi, A. M., & Syarif Muhammad Syaheed. (2024). Enhancing Arabic language proficiency through interactive learning programs. *Lahjatuna: Jurnal Pendidikan Bahasa Arab*, *4*(2), 89–102. https://doi.org/10.38073/lahjatuna.v4i2.2584

Luna-Ríos, F. E. (2021). Engineering students' needs in the design of an English for specific purposes reading course. *Revista Lengua y Cultura*, *3*(5), 24–36. https://repository.uaeh.edu.mx/revistas/index.php/lc/issue/archive

Luo, X. (2024). Communicative language teaching and contextual teaching and learning: challenges and prospects in Chinese high-school English education. In *Science and Technology and Social Development Proceedings Series Sci. Technol. Soc. Dev. Proc. Ser* (Vol. 2). https://soapubs.com/index.php/STSDPS

M. Alwazir, B., & Shukri, N. (2016). The use of CLT in the Arab context: a critical perspective. *International Journal of English Language Education*, *5*(1), 15. https://doi.org/10.5296/ijele.v5i1.10486

Marliana, R., Ali H, A. H., Warqiah R, W. R., & Syamsul, C. P. (2025). Practical English communication: role plays training for SMKN 1 Majene students. *Room of Civil Society Development*, *4*(3), 460–474. https://doi.org/10.59110/rcsd.639

Metruk, R. (2023). University EFL learners' perceptions of communicative language teaching and learning. *Journal of Language and Cultural Education*, *11*(2), 53–59. https://doi.org/10.2478/jolace-2023-0014

Mulis, M., & Blouin, A. (2024). Exploring English language needs: Non-English major students at University of Al-Qolam Malang. *At- Ta'lim : Jurnal Pendidikan*, *10*(2), 10–15. https://doi.org/10.55210/attalim.v10i2.1648

Namai, K. (2021). Some linguistic suggestions in conducting Malay language classes. *MALIM: Jurnal Pengajian Umum Asia Tenggara (Sea Journal of General Studies)*, *22*(1), 104–117. https://doi.org/10.17576/malim-2021-2201-08

Noveriana Chang, A. (2020). The implementation of communicative language teaching (CLT) and factors hindering teachers from implementing it in high school. *Al-Ta'dib: Jurnal Kajian Ilmu Kependidikan*, *13*(1).

Qasserras, L. (2023). Systematic review of communicative language teaching (CLT) in language education: a balanced perspective. *European Journal of Education and Pedagogy*, *4*(6), 17–23. https://doi.org/10.24018/ejedu.2023.4.6.763

Shaukat, R., Arbab, S., & Bashir, A. (2025). The critical review of social sciences studies a comparative study of explicit and implicit grammar instruction: effects on learner uptake. *The Critical Review of Social Sciences Studies*, *3*(2), 2025. https://thecrsss.com/index.php/Journal/about

Sherwani, S., & Kilic, M. (2017). Teachers' perspectives of the use of CLT in ELT classrooms: a case of Soran district of Northern Iraq. *Arab World English Journal*, *8*(3), 191–206. https://doi.org/10.24093/awej/vol8no3.13

Shrivastava, S. R., & Shrivastava, P. S. (2021). Promoting the conduct of medical education journal clubs in teaching medical institutions. *Avicenna Journal of Medicine*, *11*(03), 156–159. https://doi.org/10.1055/s-0041-1735126

Sultana, Z. (2023). The Role of English language teaching in promoting intercultural understanding in Pakistani classrooms. *Spry Journal of Literature and Linguistics*, *1*(2), 91–112. https://doi.org/10.62681/sprypublishers.sjll/1/2/3

Tezci, E., Akif Erdener, M., & Atıcı, S. (2016). The effect of pre-service teachers' epistemological beliefs on teaching approaches. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, *4*(12A), 205–215. https://doi.org/10.13189/ujer.2016.041326

Thi Van Anh Phan, & Phan, A. (2020). *Questioning in English as a Foreign Language University Classes*. Victoria University of Wellington.

Tran, T. H. T. (2022). Employing CLT approach to improve English speaking skill for Hau Giang community college students. *International Journal of Language Instruction*, *1*(1), 29–40. https://doi.org/10.54855/ijli.22114

Wang, Z. (2024). Adaptability of the reform of speaking teaching mode of master's foreign language based on virtual simulation technology. *JES: Journal of Electrical System*, *20*(3s), 551–561.

Yulianto, A., Yuliyanto, A., Hamdu, G., Nur, L., Fitriani, D., & Hamzah, N. (2021). Disclosure of student ability in working on higher-order thinking skills

questions through Rasch modeling. *Al Ibtida: Jurnal Pendidikan Guru MI*, *8*(1), 130. https://doi.org/10.24235/al.ibtida.snj.v8i1.7865

Yulistiyani, S. S., Kurniawan, E. A., Zahiroh, V., & Pujiani, T. (2025). Game-Based learning as an interactive learning media in English classroom. *Wiralodra English Journal*, *9*(2), 152–165. https://doi.org/10.31943/wej.v9i2.360

Yung, K. W. H. (2023). Engaging exam-oriented students in communicative language teaching by 'packaging' learning English through songs as exam practice. *RELC Journal*, *54*(1), 280–290. https://doi.org/10.1177/0033688220978542

Zare, M., & Biria, R. (2018). Contributory role of critical thinking in enhancing reading comprehension ability of Iranian ESP students. *International Journal of Research in English Education*, *3*(3), 21–28. https://doi.org/10.29252/ijree.3.3.21

Zhang, S. (2023). Assessing communicative language teaching competencies among teachers in Shaoxing University Yuanpei: A foundation for training and development planning. *International Journal of Research Studies in Language Learning*, *9*(1). https://doi.org/10.5861/ijrsll.2023.3001