Assessing Students’ Speaking Ability Using Communicative Language Testing Approach on Secondary Level in the Pandemic Era

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Abstract

The objectives of this study are: (1) to find out what types of speaking skills in the communicative language testing approach do the teachers use on the secondary level; (2) and to find out which of the five types of speaking skills on the communication language test were most used by teachers during the pandemic. This study used the descriptive qualitative method. Respondents of this study were English teachers at the secondary level in Jakarta, which consisted of 20 teachers. The results of this study indicate that: first, the English teacher only uses performance to assess students’ speaking ability in this pandemic era. Second, Assessing Students’ Speaking Ability Using Communicative Language Testing Approach on a Secondary Level in the Pandemic Era is only carried out during the initial assessment stage and formative test. The implementation of the assessment of students’ speaking abilities using a Communicative Language Testing Approach was applied when the teacher asked students to build a response or performance that is not just providing information. The teacher asks students to solve specific case problems (problem-solving). The teacher asks students to select the correct response that requires information and concepts so that they are more active in class because they must be able to bring information to solve problems based on the learning material that has been previously delivered. Third, teachers’ perceptions are assessed using Communicative Language Testing is very good for improving students’ speaking ability because students clearly show their work. Students can convey their ideas without fear. Students not only understand the theory but practice it in real life. On the other hand, the use of authentic assessment takes a long time.

Keywords: Assessing speaking ability, Communicative Language Testing, English

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INTRODUCTION

Assessment is the process of determining the ability and performance of students and therefore becomes the essential aspect of education. After providing teaching materials in class, teachers should use the most appropriate tools, methods, and procedures to evaluate students to obtain accurate information. The assessment results of the student’s knowledge of specific English skills can be information. And then can determine the best strategy or actions to improve the weakness.

Assessment is a continuous process using various methodological methods (Abduh, 2021; D. Brown & Abeywickrama, 2010). According to Patricia et al. (2002), this is a neutral tool that can objectively measure an individual’s performance level. Assessment speaking seems easy because it can be directly observed. However, this can be difficult because these observations are permanently colored. Due to the accuracy and effectiveness of the examiner’s listening skills, the reliability and usefulness of the oral proficiency test will inevitably be impaired. The teacher’s assessment of these results is related to the student’s learning, and therefore, it is essential to give assessments to students.

It is well understood that assessment entails measuring. Measurements were taken by physically monitoring and assessing students’ behavioral traits and assigning a numerical rating to the instrument. Most teachers follow this method; however, they occasionally lose sight of the main aim of the assessment and just assess to obtain student data in the form of report cards. Assessment in this context is more than just monitoring and assessing students. The most critical aspect is that the teacher has a clear image of the students’ abilities. The teacher's data through the exam, then the teacher considers finding the best solution for the student's problem based on the test results obtained.

Assessment is a critical component of the learning process. As a result, this is seen as the teacher's success in instructing students. Teachers are required to explain science to students and offer assessments. After completing the evaluation, the teacher determines what percentage of students passed the lessons presented by the teacher. While the teacher finds out when assessing students that more students earn good grades above the standard, the teacher has succeeded in teaching. Nevertheless, if more students fail, it means that students fail, and teachers fail in the teaching process of students in class. As a result, a teacher should not criticize his students by using harsh words just because the student failed the class but instead use the failure to improve in the following lesson.

Communicative language testing is one type of language assessment. Teachers can utilize communicative language assessment to assess their students' abilities to use the language in realistic content-specific settings and assignments. According to Morrow (1981), communicative language testing assesses students' capacity to communicate, receive, and understand ideas and information from another speaker/reader and vice versa using one or more of the language's syntactic, semantic, and phonological systems.

This paper describes the ways of communicative language testing emergence, including their measurement and theoretical foundation. Furthermore, an analysis of the models on which communicative language testing is founded and how communicative testing varies from other types of language testing will be presented. Then, an example of a speaking test performed in preparatory year EFL classrooms at the secondary level will be described to see if they match the requirements they claim to test. Finally, the many issues that communicative language testing encounters and how these concerns have been solved will be discussed.

Students in English Class 176 Junior High School learn four English language skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. Speaking is one of the classes in English that requires performance. The majority of students in the speaking class learn how to talk in everyday situations. It implies that pupils are encouraged to speak up in all cases. They also engage in talks, speeches, and other activities linked to their
speaking ability. The teacher applied communicative language testing in this class. It shows that the students used their speaking ability in this lesson. The teacher applied communicative language testing for the evaluation.

The researchers conducted the observation and asked several questions using a questionnaire for some secondary level students in various schools from various countries. The English teacher indicated that she employed a variety of measures to assess students, particularly in the speaking session. She believed that the English teacher should be more innovative in her assessment tools since the results can determine students for everything and advance them to a higher level. It indicates that the English teacher was well-versed in the evaluation procedure. The researchers watched the teacher utilize instructions such as a lesson plan, syllabus, and an English textbook as an English workbook (LKS) to complete assignments and assessments after instructional activities.

Teachers present specific topics for students to discuss in most speaking classes throughout the pandemic era. The teacher then assigns a topic-related activity to the students and is invited to speak on video without further action from the professors. When the teacher does not specify what is being assessed, the students must talk adequately to receive a score. These pointless practices are common in public speaking classes. Furthermore, because there are many inactive students in speaking, the assessment approaches do not help them develop. The assessment approach employed by teachers should motivate them to grow. In this instance, the passive students feel ignored and do not get more experience from the speaking session.

Indonesia is using the current curriculum, known as the 2013 curriculum. The Minister of Education and Culture of the Republic of Indonesia Regulation No. 66 of 2013 regarding educational evaluation standards. Communicative language testing is one sort of examination. This CLT approach's purpose is to use language to communicate. CLT developed in the inner circle, according to Nunan (2015). Its teaching and learning emphasize interaction, dialogue, and language usage rather than grammar, vocabulary, and phonetics; in other words, it builds communicative competence, implying that the language is being taught for social interactions.

To emphasize, some research discussed communicative language testing. The first research was conducted by Wardhono and Spanos (2018). This research focused on assessing English speaking and listening skills through the Telegram mobile application. The application is used to evaluate the interaction of communicative learning. The application also can be accessed by smartphone and computer. The result of the research showed that the test appears to be a valuable tool for not just evaluating students' listening and speaking needs but also for increasing their interest in learning and practicing conversational English. The second research was conducted by Harsono (2005). The study aims to create a communicative language test for senior high school students. The three key tasks involved in conducting the study are identifying the objectives, defining the test specification, and developing the communicative language tests. The communicative language tests are designed in fifteen sub-steps, starting with establishing what language abilities are examined, finding appropriate source materials, and rewriting the communicative language tests to be used as an alternative in senior high school. The result showed fifteen communicative language tests, including three listening tests, three reading tests, three speaking tests, and three writing tests. The third research was conducted by Albiansyah et al. (2020). This article aims to know about the content of the English test that was used to assess students' communication abilities. Five tests were collected from five schools in South Tangerang, Indonesia, in various clusters. The research results show that the tests failed to measure the student's communication competence.

Based on the three studies above, it can be said that the communicative language test is used in the classroom to test students' communication skills in English. Although this paper discusses the same topic as the previous third study, this research can still find the novelty interested in investigating how a teacher assesses students’ speaking skills in EFL classes in the pandemic era. Therefore, the researchers are very
interested in conducting the research entitled – Assessing Students’ Speaking Ability Using Communicative Language Testing Approach on Secondary Level in the Pandemic Era. This research wants to know what types of speaking skills in the communicative language testing approach the teachers use on the secondary level and which of the five types of speaking skills assessments in communication language tests were most used by teachers during the pandemic era.

**LITERATURE REVIEW**

**Language Testing and Assessment**

As teachers, we must find ways to test and assess the abilities of each student. We can find out the extent to which a student has mastered the learning material that has been delivered. Language testing and language assessment are interrelated. According to Brunfaut et al. (2021), a language test is used to see a person's proficiency in reflectively using a certain language. Assessment is usually used to see students' abilities based on the teacher's activities to measure students' abilities (Tan et al., 2020). The basis of language assessment involves the standards of the language content. Language testing and assessment determine the expectations, results, and objectives that must be completed. Besides that, an essential factor that is the goal of language testing and assessment is the standard of language performance itself. This determines the language skills a student should develop to pass the assessment. Based on the definition above, language testing is related to language assessment. We can assess students’ ability based on the test related to the course or the topic, including four English skills: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. We can assess these four skills by gathering information about students' abilities through various means such as formal tests and self-assessments. On the other hand, we need some approach to assessing the students' ability. Language testing can be defined as a test tool to assess and measure a person's language skills. This can be said to be an evaluation of one's language proficiency.

**Approaches to Language Testing**

In assessing language ability, we need some approaches to language testing. Heaton (1988) proposes four approaches to language testing as a following:

The first is the essay translation approach. Heaton argues that no specific skills in testing are used in this approach, and this relies on subjective teacher assessments. In this approach, the tests usually used are essay writing, translation, and grammar analysis. The three tests above provide comments on the language that is often studied.

The second one is the structuralist approach. This approach can be seen based on learning about language, especially those related to a systematic set of habits. This is related to structural linguistics, especially in measuring students' abilities from separate language elements such as phonology, vocabulary, and grammar. Above skills can be tested by using the structure of words different from any context.

The third is the Integrative approach. Heaton states that this third approach involves examining language in context and is concerned with communicative meanings and effects. Thus, it impacts language skills and is divided into test reliability. Conversely, this test is done when you want to assess the ability of students who use two skills simultaneously. It can be concluded that the integrative test is related to a person's skills. The test that is usually used in this approach is the dictation test.

The fourth is the communicative approach. Heaton suggested the communicative approach as the last approach. He defines this approach as a test related to the language used in communication. It aims to incorporate the tasks that students do into real life. The test’s success through this approach is assessed through its effectiveness in communication. However, some communicative tests include an assessment of proficiency in the target language. This paper tries to analyze the research using a communicative language
testing approach. One of the English skills that can be diagnosed by communicative language testing is speaking skills. We can test the students’ speaking ability and assess it through the communicative approach.

**The Definition of Communicative Language Testing**

The communicative language test offers teachers information on target language competency in content-specific assignments. It is widely recognized that “in the mid-1980s, the discipline of language testing focused on creating communicative language testing activities” (Brown & Lee, 2015). This communicative language testing technique addresses issues of reliability and validity in language testing throughout the 1960s (Spolsky, 1989).

Further study is being conducted on the communicative language teaching approach, and several advantages are being acquired. They use communicative language assessment to assess their students’ capacity to employ situational language with personalized content. The communicative language exam measures students’ skills to communicate, receive, and understand ideas and information from other speakers/readers by employing language’s syntactic, semantic, and phonological systems (Amiri & Ghonsooly, 2015).

A communicative language test aims to assess language acquisition, communication skills, and language use in real life. The communicative test focuses on communicative competence and consists of four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing. According to Swain and Lapkin (2000), communication competency encompasses linguistic competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence.

To comprehend the communicative competence model, it is required to create a communicative language test that includes the aim of the test and its impact on the learning process in the classroom for students.

**The Principles of Communicative Language Testing**

The communicative language test measures students’ abilities, especially language learning. This is done to take and see the use of language through communication in real life. The communicative language test can be applied to the four English skills: writing, reading, speaking, and listening. Nunan (2003) explained some principles of communicative language testing. First, we should know what we are measuring. For example, We want to measure the ability of the students. Second, we can measure the ability to deal with discourse. Third, we should concentrate on communication processes. Fourth, we can create real situations. Finally, we should recognize that mistakes are not always mistakes because minor grammatical errors do not frequently impede communication and correct grammar is not the only requirement for successful communication. Brown (2004) established five prerequisites for communicative language assessment. The first of which is meaningful communication. The test should be related to the students, especially their personal needs. The second is the authentic situation. They should communicate by using the language productively in every case. It can see their communicative ability. The third is unpredictable language input. It is correlated with the second requirement because when we communicate with others, they give their feedback, and it can be said as creative language input is the fourth requirement. Thus, it can be concluded that those three requirements are relationships. The last requirement is integrated language skills. When we communicate with others, we can arrange our language so they can understand.

**Assessing Speaking Skills**

As previously mentioned, assessing is an essential thing in education. We may use the communicative language test for the students to evaluate their speaking ability. Assessing speaking ability is done to determine a student's capacity based on the course provided by the professors. Brown (2004) discovered numerous methods relevant to judging speaking abilities. There are several types of speaking, including intensive speaking, responsive speaking, interactive speaking, extensive speaking, and imitative speaking.
Intensive speaking entails creating a small number of words in a high-control environment. Intensive speaking comprises a task, such as a read-aloud activity, a dialogue completion task, and a picture cued task.

Speaking in a Receptive Manner. According to Brown, this approach is utilized to reply and communicate briefly, which is accomplished through small conversations, basic requests, remarks, questions, and responses. It can also be done by giving guidance, paraphrasing, etc.

Interactive Speaking. Unlike the previous theory, this theory is carried out for longer and is also more complex. This requires students to talk more with the interlocutor. Some of the ways used in this theory are interviews, role play, discussions, and conversations, and games.

Extensive Speaking. Extensive speaking requires students to give a speech, oral presentation, or retelling text/story. Brown argues that before doing some of the above actions, students must prepare materials first. For example, if the student wants to give a speech, the student must prepare the text he wants to convey.

Imitative Speaking. In this theory, the preferred ability is the ability to imitate a word, phrase, or sentence. In this case, oral skills such as the phonetic, lexical, and grammatical pronunciation of the language can be the criteria that can be assessed. Imitative speaking tasks are oriented towards repetition because students need to repeat the sentences they hear when doing this test. For example, the tasks that can be done in this theory are reading aloud and completing sentences and dialogues. Based on the speaking skills we mentioned, we choose five speaking skills that will be assessed: role-play, re-telling text/story, oral interview, group discussion, and oral presentation.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive qualitative approach is used in this research to find the English teachers who assess their speaking skills through the communicative language testing approach. Descriptive qualitative research discusses what researchers are interested in in the process, meaning, and understanding obtained through words or pictures (Creswell, 2014). Hence, the descriptive qualitative method means to describe the result of observation with the help of data search from existing sources (Ary et al., 2010). Qualitative methods are considered methods relevant to this study because they involve collecting data to describe the existing results.

The data were collected using a questionnaire distributed to English teachers. The teachers’ were teaching at the secondary level. Twenty English teachers were chosen as the participants in answering the questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of 13 questions about how the teachers assess speaking skills through communicative language testing.

FINDING AND DISCUSSION

Finding

This section describes the findings obtained in this study related to the methods in the approach to testing the communicative language used by the teacher, the communicative language test techniques used by the teacher, the type of feedback, and the percentage of language used in the class that is considered when using communicative language teaching approach. There are four-part questions on the questionnaire about English Teachers' Understanding of Assessing Students' Speaking Ability Using Communicative Testing Approach on Secondary Level in the Pandemic Era. The first part asks about teacher identity and the second part about assessing speaking online. The third part discusses Issues around assessing speaking, and the last part asks about assessing speaking online vs. face to face.
Figure 1. Total number of participants

In Figure 1, it is clear that 20 participants filled out the questionnaire from various regions that teach English at the secondary school level, namely from Bekasi, Jakarta, Bogor, Serang, Medan, and Tangerang.

Figure 2. Type of school participant teach

We know that of the 20 participants from various regions, 6 participants teach at state/governmental schools, and 14 participants teach at private schools. They teach different grades 7, 8, and 9.

Figure 3. Online platform teachers use in teaching

Researchers asked participants to answer questions by choosing what online platforms were usually used in teaching speaking skills during a pandemic. The diagram above shows that of the 20 participants choosing the online platform, the most were zoom and google meet, each of which got 40% or the same as 8 participants. And the lowest results are on the online platform line/voice, note-getting 5% or the same as 1 participant, and offline who get 5% or the same as 1 participant who chooses. There is one participant who teaches offline, not online. The teacher teaches at a boarding school in the Tangerang area.
To provide more in-depth information about teachers' understanding of the application of communicative language testing in Assessing Students' Speaking Ability at the Secondary Level in the Pandemic Era, we asked them to give their opinion on the extent of their knowledge about the meaning of communicative language testing itself. Here are the conclusions of the 20 participants who answered about the meaning of communicative language testing.

### Opinion about Communicative Language Testing

1. A communicative language test requires the students to complete an authentic task.
2. A communicative language test tests learners’ language performance in meaningful/real-life situations. This test not only tests the learners’ competence, that is, what the learners know about the language and how to use it, but also the performance.
3. Communicative language testing is about the students’ ability to perform in the target language in specific context-specific tasks.
4. A communicative language test is used to measure language learners’ ability to participate in communication acts.
5. Communicative language testing is the kind of approach that the teachers can use to see the language ability of the learners.
6. Communicative language testing is intended to provide the teacher with information about the learners’ ability to perform in the target language in specific context-specific tasks.

### Figure 4. Understanding Communicative language Testing

![Role play](chart1.png)

![Retelling text/story](chart2.png)

![Oral interview](chart3.png)

![Group discussion](chart4.png)

![Oral presentation](chart5.png)

### Figure 5. Types of speaking skills in communicative language Testing

According to Brown (2004), in the Types of speaking skills in communicative language testing, teachers can use 5 types of communication language during a pandemic, namely role play, retelling text/story, oral interview, and group discussion and oral presentation. Participants were asked to choose more than 1 type of speaking skill in communicative language testing that they usually do on students during a pandemic. Based on the results of 20 participants who answered five types of speaking skills in communicative language testing, the most widely selected and often used were retelling text/stories and oral presentations with the same number, namely 55.6%, and the lowest result, namely oral interviews, got results 11.1%.

### Discussion

A strategy was a plan on how to act to attain set goals. Teaching and learning strategies are basic patterns of teacher and student actions in implementing teaching and learning activities to achieve the goals indicated. Thus, the approach was essentially designed actions with vast and profound significance resulting from a deep study and reflection based on specific ideas and experiences. Language learning strategies are classified into two types. There are two types of strategies: direct and indirect (Hermansyah, 2016).
The findings of this study are significant and valuable for learning to speak English for various reasons, including 1) the process of English speaking learning is carried out through a combination of online applications, such as video, internet applications, or social media. 2) The combination of learning applications has made it simple for teachers to direct and guide students to develop their English speaking abilities. 3) Teachers can provide immediate feedback on students' speaking learning. 4) The teacher and students might interact positively during the learning process. 5) The study discovers learning media findings ideal for the online learning process during a pandemic. As a result, online media learning is excellent for English-speaking learning. Hence, the quality of student learning is increasingly impacted by their encounters with online learning media (Zainuddin & Perera, 2019).

Students practice speaking utilizing Zoom Meetings during the speaking learning process and may also contribute material concepts discussed in the conversation. Furthermore, students felt better at ease using Google Meetings for several discussion groups. These applications are utilized to speak English for one semester during the learning process. Learning tools for teachers include videos. The usage of internet videos to improve speaking abilities has introduced students to visual perception in the development of speaking competence (Hilton, 2016). As is well known, several online learning systems have been introduced in many nations. A similar project was established in Romania utilizing the CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning) approach and the tandem Method (Lyddon, 2016).

Language assessment or testing is a crucial stage in language teaching and learning since it helps monitor students' educational development and evaluate the quality of school systems (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007). The data produced by this study is convincing evidence that in assessing students' speaking skills at the secondary level by utilizing the communicative language assessment technique in the pandemic era.

A communicative language testing system necessitates tests that assess not just learners' knowledge of a language and how to use it (competence) but also the amount to which learners apply their knowledge to relevant communication situations (performance) (Fulcher, 2014). Assessments should be based on the following ideas and qualities to assess language competency and performance.

When creating a communicative language test, test creators should define precisely what they expect examinees to do when using the target language in a particular setting - what is tested. Then, to verify the validity of the test, test creators should develop scales and evaluation criteria that can precisely quantify the stated qualities of testees' performance. Darling-Hammond, Herman, and Pellegrino (2013) refer to this idea as 'start from someplace' since it is believed that assessment criteria must be developed. The second principle is 'focus on content.' Test creators must pay attention not only to themes but also to task kinds. Both the content and the task type should be appropriate for the test takers' age, skill level, interests, and requirements. The linguistic activities our learners are expected to complete in their future occupations will lead us with the tasks we will set in our assessments. The third principle is 'bias for best,' defined by Dean (2005) as "a word that extends slightly beyond how the student interprets the exam to a degree of strategic participation on the part of student and instructor in preparing for, putting up, and following the test itself." In other words, test creators should ensure that test takers are properly prepared or conversant with the test.

According to Dean (2005), five essential qualities to consider when developing a communicative language test. Examples are conversations, real situations, unexpected language intake, creative language output, and integrated language abilities (p. 21). First, because language acquisition's goal is communication, language learners' communicative competence should be assessed. Language tests, in other words, should be focused on communication that is relevant to students and satisfies their requirements. Authentic settings can aid in the development of genuine conversation.

Dean (2005) defines 'unpredictable language input' and 'creative language output' to suggest that in real-life settings, it is not always feasible to foresee what speakers will say (unpredictable language input).
Therefore learners must prepare for responding (creative language output). The last trait is integrated language skills. A communicative test should require test takers to demonstrate their ability to combine language abilities as they would in real-world communication scenarios. These mentioned features should be considered and incorporated into communicative language tests.

The data were produced by this study to assess the students' speaking ability using the communicative language testing approach at the secondary level in the pandemic era. In this study, 20 participants participated. The participants who took part in this study taught more at public schools than in private schools. Of course, in the current era of pandemics, teachers are required to teach from home, and teachers must use online media or platforms as learning media for students to facilitate distance learning. Many media or platforms can be used, such as zoom, google meet, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Line / Voice notes, etc. From the questionnaire results that participants have filled in, online platforms that are widely used as learning media during this pandemic are zoom and google meet. This study focuses on Assessing Students' Speaking Ability Using the Communicative Language Testing Approach at the Secondary Level in the Pandemic Era.

The researchers asked the participants to what extent their knowledge of the communicative language testing used in the speaking skill assessment. It turns out that many participants already know about communicative language testing itself by providing understanding, and they have applied the Communicative language testing to their students. According to Brown, there are five types of assessing speaking skills in communicative language testing: role play, retelling text/story, oral interview, group discussion, and oral presentation. Based on five types of assessing speaking skills in communicative language testing, the most widely used by participants were retelling text/stories and oral presentations. Because Retelling text/story and oral presentation are chosen to improve their confidence to tell their work orally, in that way, the teacher can identify their ability to read aloud and their understanding of the text. Meanwhile, retelling was used by the students to develop their critical thinking while presenting their idea.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

There are various issues with communicative language testing. It is up to teachers and academics to find solutions. Because language theory describes language as a set of structures, assessing communicative language aims to enhance the level of language education, encourage students, and promote the learning process. In a communicative approach to language testing, students' language abilities in the classroom will be measured. When creating the exam, the findings must be statistically assessed first to guarantee the validity and reliability of the communicative language test results. Many assumptions regarding various testing practices rely on multiple-choice tests, which cannot yet be quantified while taking speech examinations or assessing students on the teaching they have not yet received. By challenging these practices and assumptions that have a negative impact on testing, communicative language testing can help students develop their communication abilities. Furthermore, the communicative language test assists students in improving their speaking abilities. Moreover, it will be a valuable addition to the teacher's success.

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