



Promoting Students' Speaking Proficiency through Communicative Activities. Case Study of Department of English, Faculty of Education, Champasack University

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Abstract

The study was to examine the effectiveness of the communicative activities (CAs), and to explore the students' attitudes and perceptions towards the application of communicative activities by two groups before treatment and after treatment. The Quasi-experimental design was used. There were 54 total English third-year students at the English Department, Faculty of Education, Champasack University. There were two groups of participants: the "Experimental group" (30 students) and the "Control group" (24 students). The experimental teaching was conducted for 36 hours within a 9-week period in 4 cycles with the uses of the three communicative activities; group discussion, role-play, and debate which including Pre-Posttest, rubric of speaking proficiency, attitude and perception questionnaire, observation checklist, ten sub-communicative activities within 4 debate periods were employed for this study. Pre-posttest and questionnaires were given to students in both experimental and control groups to check the reliability of the test, this research used three senior score raters to measure the students' speaking proficiency by using the rubric of speaking proficiency. The observation checklist was noted by the researcher in every class within the communicative activities used. The data were statistically analyzed by t-test independent and paired-t test for the dependent sample by comparing the mean scores of the pretest and posttest to determine whether there was a significant difference between the experimental and control groups. Moreover, the students were required to respond the attitude and perception questionnaire to explore their attitudes and perceptions towards the communicative activities. Two groups compared the findings of the test; it was found that the CAs were effectiveness to improve students' speaking proficiency as can be seen through the increasing of the test score of the experimental group, which started from 74.43 to 83.90 (9.47) with the significant level of $p < .05$. In addition, the majority of the students had positive attitude and perception towards the effectiveness of the communicative activities used.

Key words: *The Communicative Activities (Group discussion, Role play & Debate), Speaking proficiency, English year 3 Students, Attitude & Perception.*

1. Introduction

Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established in 1967, at that time, English has become an ASEAN official language. On 23rd July, 1997, Laos PDR has also an opportunity to join the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN); the result of the English language has become the first priority foreign language which is needed in both the public and private sectors. Currently, ASEAN consists of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and Laos. Since its establishment, ASEAN countries have gradually become the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) by the end of 2015. The English language has played a very crucial in communication between ASEAN citizens and other countries in the world (Thaweesak et al., 2013).

The main purpose of the Lao government's reform educational strategies plan has been to increase the number of students in basic and higher education in order to approach the requirement of developing the quality of human resources. Therefore, an English language is used for communication in education, science, technology, trade and politics. In the 21st century, there has been an attempt by the Lao Government to improve the communication language skills especially; in the higher education system, and to promote the use of language teaching methods for improving the language learning and teaching effectively.

Subsequently, communicative language teaching (CLT) is the method that has been utilized in the Lao higher educational institution's curriculum since 2005. One of the three other foremost goals of this curriculum is to build and develop students' communicative capacity on the four language skills; reading, writing, speaking and listening (National University of Laos (NUOL), 2005); Richards & Rodgers (2001) as cited in Iwai & Yuko (2009). The main purpose of CLT is to build the communicative competence as the goal of language teaching and to develop techniques, and

procedures for teaching language skills that are based on interdependent aspects of language and communication. Communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, and strategies (Richards & Rodgers, 2008 as cited in Iwai & Yuko, 2009).

Communicative activities (CAs.) are applied to support the Communicative language teaching (CLT) which aims to encourage learners to speak and listen to other learners in classroom setting. According to Moss Ros (2003) as cited in Kittiya (2012) states that Communicative activities include any activities that encourage and provide the learners to speak with and listen to other learners. Thornbuty (2008) mentions that communicative activities serve two important languages needs particularly; for preparing learners to use language in their real-life situations and supporting the atomization of language knowledge.

Since it has been concerned for years; speaking is an activity used by someone to communicate with others in the society and workplaces. It takes place everywhere and it has become a part of our daily activities. When someone speaks, he or she interacts and produces the language to express his or her ideas, feeling and thought. He or she also shares information with other through communication. English speaking capacity is very important for people interaction where people almost speak everywhere and every day through English. In this global era, many people used English as a media of communication and it makes people who come from different countries to interact and communicate together easily. For teaching and learning English speaking has the goal of emphasizing students so that they are able to use English for communication and as a tool for furthering their studies. Communicative language teaching method (CLT) is very practical and important in learning and teaching English speaking in the current and it is driven by developing communicative competence (Richard & Rodgers, 2002).

However, English has been generally well-known that most people faced some problems in learning English as a foreign language in non-English speaking countries; particularly, in Lao People Democratic Republic (Lao PDR). According to the researcher's experiences of teaching English for years; majority of students have mentioned that speaking was the most difficult skills to master in terms of mastering vocabulary, grammar and interaction skills; a few of them was not willing to speak; if they were asked by the teachers to speak up, they just kept quiet and say nothing and sometimes they understood, but they could not produce messages fluently. This indicated that they have problems of confidence. Souriyavongsa, L. (2013) found that students were lacked of English background knowledge; low confidence and lacked of teaching methods to encourage students to study. Addition, Biya (1997) as cited in Manussanun & Suksan (2012) state that teachers have faced many obstacles and barriers in teaching and learning English that means they have lacked of inadequate equipped classrooms, effective activities; English teaching methodologies and educational technology used.

Consequently, referring to Champasack University has promoted the faculty members to conduct research in order to improve learning and teaching implementation as many as possible. Therefore, the researcher conducted this study in order to find out better innovations such as teaching methods, techniques and practical activities for improving learning and teaching English at the Faculty to be improved. This is a kind of experimental research which

focused on learning and teaching speaking in classroom by using the three communicative activities such as group discussion, role play, and debates. In order to examine the effectiveness of the three communicative activities by conducting with the English year 3 students at Department of English, Faculty of Education, Champasack University in academic year 2020-2021.

Research objectives are to examine of the students' speaking proficiency achievement by applying communicative activities in teaching, and to explore the students' attitudes and perceptions towards the applying of the communicative activities.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Research Design

This is quasi-experimental research, according to Oraphin (2012) stated that quasi-experimental research is similar the experimental research but lacks random assignment. Quasi-experimental designs are to establish internal validity by using constructed controls in order the overcome extraneous variables. The most commonly used quasi-experimental design is a pretest and posttest for a treated and comparison group and neither same nor different size number of participants. This study aimed at improving students' speaking proficiency by using the three communicative activities (CAs) with the experiential group. The three communicative activities; **group discussion, role-play and debate** were designed in 4 cycles and each cycle consisted of 4 plans consistently that related to the textbook contents as show in the following feagure1:

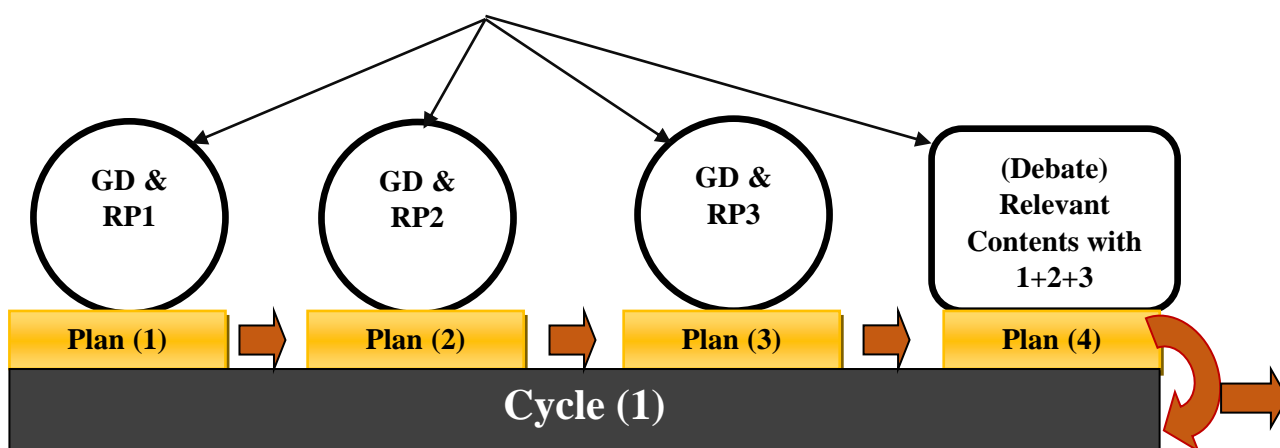


Figure 01: Model of Communicative Activities Designed by 4 Cycles.

2.2 Research Hypothesis

The relationship that will be tested by applying the communicative activities (CAs) in English language teaching and students' English-speaking improvement that can be identified in the following hypotheses:

H_0 = There is statistically significant difference between two groups within the significant criteria standard of $P < 0.05$ or

H_1 = There is no statistically significant difference between two groups within the significant criteria standard of $P > 0.05$

2.3 Research Population and Participants

The total population was 334 students, however, mixed random sampling methods to select year3 students randomly which consisted of 2 classes; one was used as the experiential group (EG) and another one was used as the control group (CG). Therefore, there were totally 54 students participated in this study, which included 30 (56%) students in experiential group and 24 (44%) students in the control group.

2.4 Research Instruments and Experimental Materials

(1) Research Instruments

- Attitude and perception questionnaire.
- Speaking proficiency test (Pre/Post test).
- Observation checklist.

(2) Experimental Materials

- Textbook (General English5) with course syllabus.
- Lesson plans (group discussion, role-play and debate).

- Students check list.
- Audio recorders/Video recorder.
- LCD projector
- Laptop computer
- Handouts.

2.5 Validity and reliability

▪ Test: There were 3 assessors and the test pilot reliability was 0.84 (very high) which were shown in the following results.

- Pretest reliability Correlation in EG was 0.86 (very high)

- Pretest reliability Correlation in CG was 0.83 (very high)

- Posttest reliability Correlation in EG was 0.84 (very high)

- Posttest reliability Correlation in CG was 0.81 (very high)

▪ Questionnaire: Pilot questionnaire regarding to the Cronbach' alpha statistical analysis finding was 0.78. According to (Cronbach Alpha, 1952) cited in (Med Teach, 2011) the value Alpha of 0.70 is typically acceptable level.

▪ Rater agreement by Intra class Correlation Coefficient (ICC), at the level of $p < 0.001$:

- Pretest: ICC = 0.89; and

- Posttest: ICC = 0.98

2.6 Data collection procedures

1. Developed the research tools.
2. Piloted the research tools.
3. Checked the reliability and validity of research tools.

4. Administrated the pretest and questionnaire.

5. Experimental instruction: week1 to week 9 (treatment, adapted lesson plans, observation).

6. Administrated the posttest and questionnaire.

7. Analyzed the results and report the findings.

2.7 Data analysis

- Descriptive statistic was used to analyze frequency, mean and standard deviation.

- Pretest and posttest (speaking proficiency tests) were marked by three assessors (raters) with inter-rater reliability correlation of 0.83.

- The t-test (independent sample t-test) was used to analyze the test scores of the two groups; experimental and control groups.

- The t-test (dependent sample t-test) was used to analyze the pre-posttest of one group's test scores

- Mean and SD were analyzed the attitude and perception questionnaires.

3. Results

3.1 Findings of Pre/Post test

Regarding to the table1, the data obtained from achievement test (pre-test and post-test) of EG and CG was tabulated and interpreted using Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) and T-test. In pre-test, the mean score of EG and CG were (M=74.43, SD=4.50) and (M=71.96, SD=5.19) respectively. The difference between the mean scores of two groups which was significant at 0.097, this result indicated that $P > 0.05$. So, no significant statistical difference was found between the two means obtained by EG and CG. This finding related that there were two groups were almost equal in English speaking proficiency achievement before the treatment period. In the post-test, the mean scores obtained by EG and CG were (M=83.90, SD=4.27) and (M=76.46, SD=7.62) respectively. The difference between the two mean scores was .000, which was significant at $P < 0.05$. So, significant statistical difference was found

between the two means which indicated that the scores in both EG and CG were different in achievement after the treatment of 9-week periods. In the following table 2 and table 3 were shown the details of the achievement of all five assessment aspects between pretest and posttest by the two groups as shown in the following tables 2 & 3:

As shown in table 2, the detailed segmental pre-test results also indicated that the two groups were almost equal in English proficiency and there was no statistically significant difference found between the achievements of the two groups in any part of the test result, while the standard of significance was 0.05 at alpha.

As shown in table 3, firstly, the highest significant statistical difference of students' speaking proficiency achievement of 'Communicative Strategies' between two groups were the (M=18.17, SD=0.95) in EG, meanwhile, just the (M=15.21, SD=1.58) in CG. Secondly, the high significant statistical difference of students' speaking proficiency achievement of 'Pronunciation' were the (M=17.17, SD=0.87) in EG, meanwhile just the (M=15.83, SD=1.71) in CG. Thirdly, the high significant statistical difference of students' speaking proficiency achievement of 'Fluency' were the (M=16.83, SD=1.20) in EG, meanwhile just the (M=15.33, SD=1.83) in CG. And the last, the high significant statistical difference of students' speaking proficiency achievement of 'Vocabulary' were the (M=16.80, SD=1.29) in EG, meanwhile just the (M=15.13, SD=1.54) in CG. The findings were indicated that the students' speaking proficiency regarding to 'Fluency', 'Pronunciation', 'Vocabulary' and 'Communicative strategies' in EG were higher improved than in CG. However, 'Grammar' segment was no significant statistical difference such a partial inconsistency in the segmental result might be due to the limited treatment period and the same holidays were occurred during the treatment periods and addition, the activities content used might lack of focusing on grammar. Whereas, it did not mar the

authenticity of findings. In conclusion, the total score obtained by the two groups in the post-test signifies a significant statistical difference in achievement which covered by larger segments such as the fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and communicative strategies were significant statistical difference between the achievements of the two groups, therefore, it could be said that the communicative activities used in EG were more effective than in CG did.

3.2 Findings of Students' attitude and perception towards the CAs

3.2.1 Students' perceptions

The data obtained from the students' perception scores by EG and CG were analyzed into Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) and the significant statistical difference by T-test independent. The perception questionnaire scores, In EG and CG were (M=3.91, SD=0.77) and (M=3.77, SD=0.65) respectively. The difference between the two mean scores was 0.305, which was greater than 0.05 Alpha levels. So, no significant statistical difference was found between the two means obtained by EG and CG. This finding signifies that the two groups were almost equal perception achievement before the treatment period.

3.2.2 Students' Attitude

As shown in the table6, the data obtained from the students' attitude scores by EG and CG were also analyzed into Mean (M), Standard Deviation (SD) and the significant statistical difference by T-test independent after treatment period. The attitude questionnaire scores in EG and CG were (M=4.24, SD=0.70) and (M=3.95, SD=0.62) respectively. The difference between the two mean scores was 0.001, which was lesser than 0.05 Alpha levels. So, significant statistical difference was found between the two means obtained by EG and CG. This finding signifies that the two groups were almost different attitude achievement after the treatment period.

3.3 The findings of the observation checklist in Experimental Group

In this segment was interpreted about the result of observation checklist that were noted

and scored in each cycle by the researcher during the instruction program ran with 14 communicative activities used. The result of the observation checklist in 4 cycles were analyzed and calculated into percent and then the researcher interpreted into qualitative description as the following details:

According to the results of the cycle1 had the lowest score with 76%. It might be caused by students; they might unclear about the procedures and familiarity with the activities. They had limited in using vocabulary or idioms. They did not use much gestures, eyes-contact, not higher correct pronunciation and less natural speech particularly, the lowest score in the activity "experience teller" with 68% Therefore, they had not well performance in participating about doing the activities in classroom. Whereas, the last class4 of this cycle, they felt happy and tried to provide some dears with friends, they tried to correct themselves, they also tried to use more vocabularies with correct sentences structures when they spoke in "Debate class" with the highest score 84%.

In the cycle2, the score became higher with 78%, it was indicated that students had higher improved their speaking skills in terms of using varied gestures, eyes contact, had more self-confident to share ideas and asked their friends questions during the activities ran, they felt happier and varied vocabularies and idioms with mostly correct sentences produced particularly, in the class1 an class2 with the highest score 82%. Whereas, in the last class3 of this cycle with lowest score 72%. Some of the students did not have self-confident to do the task well, they did not ask any questions with friends and the teacher and they also had lack of gestures, postures, eyes contact and speech looked less naturally. In personal believe, this period, students had almost two weeks holiday of "First National University Game" and the researcher continued the activities, students might be still tired and their lesson might be stumble.

In cycle3, the score was slightly higher with 80%. Continued the class2 in the same

week, there were something wrong with students in the first class of this cycle with the activity “Gesture competitor” with the lowest score 68%. Due to the problem, in the researcher’s personal believe, this might be caused by the holiday of “The First National University Games” and lack of students’ motivation in doing the activities. Therefore, they had lower confident to do the task, did not provide any more ideas and did not used much gestures, postures and eyes-contact. Due to the problems, the researchers discussed and made more comprehension with students in order to motivate them, adapted the weak point of the activities and provide them deep understood about in participating the lessons particularly, in doing the activities. However, the later classes they did well performance again in doing activities such as the activities “Opinion investigator” “Simi-Speech contest” and so forth.

After the problems were solved in cycle3. So that in the cycle4 was well conducted with highest score with 92%. In general, students had more responsibilities in learning and well performance in doing the activities. They worked harder and paid more attention to study English public speaking. First seen, they had fun in doing activities, more self-confident in speaking, provide more their ideas with the classmates, used varied gesture, postures and eyes-contact when they spoke English in class. It looked all students spoke English better in terms of correct pronunciation, increased speaking skills and naturally speech.

4. Discussion

Communicative language teaching (CLT) is valuable in teaching English for communication in the current day especially, teaching English as foreign language. Galloway (1993) stated that communicative language teaching created use of real-life situations that needs of communication and the teacher makes a situation that students are likely to encounter in real life. Jack (2006) claimed that communicative language teaching (CLT) today, emphasize on teaching speaking, learning by doing, grammar is no longer important,

classroom activities should be meaningful and involve real communication, focus on both accuracy and fluency. In order to support and apply this method the instructors could create varied communicative activities (CAs) and use varied teaching techniques for teaching English to promote communication competence. Littlewoods (1981) as cited in Liu & Xu (2010) summarizes some of the contributions that communicative activities could make to language learning as to improve motivation, to provide “whole-task practice”, to allow natural learning and can create a context which supports learning. The finding of the study was approved that the communicative activities were effective in teaching speaking skills in classroom.

Firstly, they really like the CAs because the CAs are interesting for them and they were motivated and understood the activities easily because the use of varied pictures, videos and LCD Project to facilitate them to learn English the activities that the students learnt including 10 communicative activities created focusing on public speaking for example, experience tellers, experience hunters, academic consultant, TV Talk Show program, debates and etc. therefore after learning they perform successfully. And addition, the activities have clear procedure because the teacher gives them a very good guidance and clues in each activity. The finding is appropriated with Phuphunpet (2004), stated that clear purpose of communicative activities could help students to comprehend how to use the language to succeed the task and encourage them to speak English. In other word, they understand why they have to speak and participate the lessons.

Secondly, the contents of the communicative activities are related to their lives, the communicative activities could help them to use varied gestures, pronounce correctly and better natural speech. And addition, the CAs could help them to see the significance of learning English language. This because, the contents of the communicative activities within the activities designed are appropriately to their

lives and they would be able to adapt to apply in their daily lives such as 'Group demonstration' learn how to use Power Point, how to present on slide. 'Gestures contest' and 'Semi-speech contest' learn how to use gestures, postures, and eye contact and 'Debate' teach them to practice their critical thinking, make them to have more confident to speak and share ideas with friends and they have more experience about their future debate competition. Argawati & Ningtyas (2014) found that communicative activities make a students' ability and had more confident to use language in their daily lives effectively. And furthermore, the contents are very suitable for students' daily lives and they also could use varied speaking strategies with their speech every time.

And the last, the communicative activities are interesting for students because the teacher uses varied activities in classroom, they feel enjoyable and fun and the communicative activities are very useful and could be applied in classroom. The activities are not too complex to implement in classroom. It could provide students a good atmosphere and to have more opportunities speaking English in classroom. Create a very good relationship among students and the teacher; the class becomes dynamic learning and teaching. The noise of laughing and clapping hand is increased among the class, students move around to talk and share ideas together. Make students to have more confident to speak and take parts of the lessons a lot. Liu & Xu (2010) stated that communicative activities help create interaction in the language classroom. Moreover, communicative activities can motivate the learners and establish good relationships between the teachers and the students as well as among the students thereby encouraging a supportive environment for language learning. Littlewood (1981) mentioned that there are communicative activities that support and require students to speak with and listen to other students in classroom.

However, nothing is without mistakes; that means the communicative activities which used

in classroom, they have a few weak points particularly, the teacher needs to improve some of the activities again, particularly; the procedures of doing the activities. Review the video many times in order to make sure students' comprehension and they would be easy to do the activities. To use the best techniques to manage the students during conducting the activities and focusing on some of students with lower attention.

5. Conclusion

This study could be concluded that there is a significant difference between pretest and posttest. This shows that the use of the communicative activities in the experimental class is more effective than in the control group due to the students able to improve their speaking skills because the students in experimental class could communicate with fluency, correct pronunciation, vocabularies increasing, communicative strategies, but grammar proficiency was much improved respectively.

Regarding the findings of the questionnaire; he results were also shown that the students they had positive attitude and perception towards the use of communicative activities; this is because the communicative activities and lessons are focused on communication skills, but less use of language forms.

6. Conflict of Interest

We certify that there is no conflict of interest with any financial organization regarding the material discussed in the manuscript.

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Table1: Overall achievement pretest and posttest by two groups

Test segments	Groups	N	M	SD	T	Sig. (2tailed)
Pre-test	EG	30	74.43	4.50	1.87	.097
	CG	24	71.96	5.19		
Post-test	EG	30	83.90	4.27	4.53	.000
	CG	24	76.46	7.62		

Table 2: Detailed achievement in **pretest** by two groups

Assessment Aspects	Groups	N	M	SD	T	Sig. (2tailed)
Fluency	EG	30	14.77	1.35	1.06	.292
	CG	24	14.29	1.92		
Pronunciation	EG	30	15.40	.89	1.65	.104
	CG	24	14.92	1.24		
Vocabulary	EG	30	14.80	1.15	1.39	.170
	CG	24	14.33	1.30		
Grammar	EG	30	14.53	1.25	1.03	.305
	CG	24	14.17	1.34		
Communicative skills	EG	30	14.77	1.07	1.44	.156

Table 3: Detailed achievement in **posttest** by two groups

Assessment Aspects	Groups	N	M	SD	T	Sig. (2tailed)
Fluency	EG	30	16.83	1.20	3.61	.001
	CG	24	15.33	1.83		
Pronunciation	EG	30	17.17	0.87	3.71	.001
	CG	24	15.83	1.71		

Vocabulary	EG	30	16.80	1.29	4.33	.000
	CG	24	15.13	1.54		
Grammar	EG	30	15.07	1.04	1.13	.261
	CG	24	14.71	1.26		
Communicative strategies	EG	30	18.17	.95	8.49	.000
	CG	24	15.21	1.58		
