



An Investigation of Thai Students' English-speaking Problems and Needs and
the Implementation Collaborative and Communicative Approaches to
Enhance Students' English-speaking skills

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed at investigating students' English-speaking problems and needs, and how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills. The research informants consisted of 100 lower secondary students drawn from five schools in Phitsanulok, 20 teachers of English from different institutions and 8 experts. Structured interviews were used as tools for data collection. The participants involved were interviewed to gather information related to students' English-speaking problems, needs and how collaborative and communicative approaches can be used to enhance students' English-speaking skills. Content analyses were used to analyze the data gotten from the structured interviews. The results of the study revealed as follows. Firstly, students face linguistic problems, such as the inability to use correct grammatical structures in sentence construction, lack of vocabulary and inability to understand and use vocabulary in different situations, poor pronunciation, and inability to understand different English accents. Students also face problems related to their instructors such as teachers-centered method, tensed classroom environment as teachers gave negative and offensive feedback to students and teacher's continuous use of the Thai language during the learning process.

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It also revealed that students face general problems such as fear of being mocked by friends and lack of confidence. The results of studying students' needs revealed that they need to learn correct pronunciation rules. It also revealed that students need activities that will enable them to interact such as working in groups or pairs, role-play, paired conversations, communicative game and questions and answer sessions that will enable them to overcome fear, develop confidence and improve their speaking skills. Students also expressed the need for videos and audios to be used during the teaching learning process in order to enable the learning not boring as well as facilitate understanding. Secondly, the results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills revealed that interactive, pair, group dialogues/ conversation tasks, role-play and communicative games are collaborative and communicative activities that can be implemented to enhance students' speaking skills with students working together to prepare, practice and present oral tasks while the instructor facilitates, encourages, gives feedback and corrects students as they work.

Keywords : Collaborative Approach / Communicative Approach /
English-speaking Problems / Needs / English-speaking Skills

Introduction

Nowadays, English has become one of the most popular and widely used international languages spoken almost all over the world. It has been accepted as a global language that people around the world use not only for communication but also used for business, job seeking and employment, and academic purposes. It is used as a lingua-franca for international communication in the era of globalization for the exchange of information and knowledge in different settings, for problem solving, and for other aspects. An English-speaking skill is one of the English language skills that must be mastered by foreign or second language learners. According to Nunan (1991), acquiring English-speaking skill is one of the most important aspect of learning a second or foreign language, and success is measured in terms of the ability to carry out a conversation in the language.

Speaking in particular is one of the most important skills used for communication and interaction that has deserved great recognition throughout the history of English teaching since it is referred to as an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). It is one of the most

important language skills to be particularly enhanced in learners as it is a must have skill needed to survive in different situations and in the job market (Morozova, 2013). In speaking, many aspects should be paid attention to. Attention is not only paid to spoken language and what is being spoken but also, the listener who is also considered during speaking activities (Tarigan, 1987). The speaker should be able to speak continuously without pauses or hesitations, consistently communicate all ideas without difficulties, pronounce words clearly and correctly, use varied and correct vocabulary and be able to communicate them properly, consistently use correct grammatical structures and gestures properly. According to Burnkart (1998), language learners should have a mastery of three aspects for effective speaking to take place namely: 1) mechanics of language elements which include correct grammatical structures, pronunciation, vocabulary 2) language functions which deal with speaking performance in the form of transaction and interaction, that it, knowing how to change and give a clear message and knowing how to move from one idea to another.

According to Richards (1990), the mastery of speaking skill in English is seen as a priority for many English as second or foreign language learners across the world. Moreover, he adds that learners consequently often evaluate their success in language learning based on how well they feel they have improved in their spoken language skill. Brown (2007, p. 237) states that social contact in interactive language functions is a key in which it is not what you say that counts but how you say it, what you convey with body language, gestures, eye contact and another non- verbal message.

English language needs in Thailand are similar to those of other countries all over the world. In Thailand, the English language is used as a foreign language. It is one of the foreign languages used in official, professional, academic and commercial circles. It is taught compulsorily as a subject at all levels of education in public and private educational institutions, colleges and universities. As it is the language basically required for lucrative and powerful jobs, it is much in demand and becomes a must-have language for many individuals (The Basic Core Curriculum, 2008; National Education Plan, 2017). The importance of the English language in Thailand has been noticed and it can be seen from the national curriculum. Following this trend, it has been made a compulsory subject at all levels of education, with increased number of hours with the aim to develop Thai citizens with communicative English language skills (National Education Act, 2008). In the junior high school and lower secondary schools, the English teaching process is targeted to enable students to

gain the functional literacy, that is; the ability to communicate both in simple oral and written English to deal with the daily activities such as understanding manuals, asking/giving information, apologizing, expressing their feelings and opinions, etc., hence becoming the name English for communication (The Basic Core Curriculum, 2008; Wongsothorn, 2003). Therefore, the emphasis is on developing students' four language skills; which are listening, speaking, reading, and writing. These four skills should be learned in the same proportion by the students (The Basic Core Curriculum, 2008, pp. 252-259). In fact, in the English teaching and learning process at almost all junior and high schools and university levels, students seem to have less proportion in learning speaking skills.

The government Thailand and the Ministry of Educational have been putting a lot of efforts to enhance students' speaking skills, but still students cannot express themselves fluently. This has led to negative consequences as the English Language Proficiency Index, Thailand is ranked at 17th position out of 21 countries with 49.78%. They are deficient in their English-speaking ability (Office of The Basic Education Commission Ministry of Education, 2014). From the above issues, the researcher intends to investigate students' English-speaking problems and needs, and how collaborative and communicative learning approaches can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills.

Literature Review

English-speaking skills is seen as one of the skills that needs to be harnessed in students as it plays an important role in communications in the area of Education, trade and business, politics and as it also plays a great role in interactive processes of constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). English speaking skills can be enhanced through interaction and communication (Paultson, 1978).

According to Littlewood, (2002) & Harmer, (2001), speaking skills can be enhanced by engaging learners in interactive and communicative activities which aim at giving learners the opportunity to effectively communicate meaning. Larsen (2004), English speaking can be enhanced through interactive and communicative activities with the instructor facilitating in the classroom. During teaching English speaking skills, the instructor explains some parts of the lesson and then allows the students to work in communicative activities as he observes and gives them directions (Laresen, 2004). In an English-speaking classroom, learners do most of

the speaking and frequently the scene of a classroom during a speaking exercise is active, with students interacting with each other to complete a task (Ann Galloway, 1993).

According to Bygate (1987), fluent speaking and communication cannot be achieved merely by knowing the technical side of speaking. Naturally, one needs to know the vocabulary and grammar structures of a language to be able to speak, but one also has to learn the skill to use that technical knowledge correctly in order to communicate the right meanings at the right time. He views speaking as a combination of motor-perceptive skills, and interaction skills. Motor-perceptive skills include perceiving, recalling and articulating sounds and structures of a language in the correct order. They enable one to master the superficial aspect of speaking. However, to be able to communicate and convey correct meanings, one needs to have interaction skills as well. Basically, interaction is the skill of using linguistic knowledge and motor perceptive skills together to communicate with others. Through interaction skills one can control their own language production and make their own choices as they speak.

The interactional aspect of speaking is emphasized by Hellgren (1982) as well. He uses the term 'oracy' for oral communicative proficiency, and by 'oracy' he means the ability to express oneself fluently in speech (Hellgren 1982). Expressing oneself fluently in speech naturally requires knowledge of such aspects of language as grammar, vocabulary, and the rules of pronunciation. However, speaking and oral skills cannot be seen as separate from other aspects of language. In fact, they are closely connected to other language levels. Hellgren (1982) points out that successful communication consists of verbal activity as well as non-verbal interaction which go hand in hand. Speaking cannot be fully understood without taking into account interaction, and non-verbal communication. Hellgren (1982) discusses speaking and interaction while pointing out the embedded non-verbal communication as well. Speaking skills are important for career success, but certainly not limited to one's professional aspirations. Speaking skills can also enhance one's personal life. The capacity to express one's thoughts, opinions and feelings, in the form of words put together in a meaningful way, provides the speaker with these advantages. The joy of sharing one's ideas with others is immense. When we speak to others, we come to have a better understanding of our own selves, as Robert Frost once said: "I am a writer of books in retrospect, I talk in order to understand, I teach in order to learn." Undoubtedly, the clarity in speech reflects clear thinking.

The collaborative approach to learning traced from the Vygotskian framework (1978) emphasizes the importance of social interaction and in knowledge construction and learning. This approach gives students the opportunity to interact in groups or pairs in completing learning tasks (Colbeck, Campbell and Bjorklund. 2000). Not considering students' different language proficiencies and personalities, students work better in groups or pairs as they can freely exchange more opinions and ideas as learners will feel less anxious when they work with peers. (Delucchi. 2006). According to the principles of communicative approach, learners do not concentrate on studying only grammatical rules but it stresses the importance of communication (Allwright, 1978; Cambell, 1972; Nunan, 1991; Rechards & Rodgers, 1995 and Savignon, 1991). According to Johnson (1981), students should try to communicate with peers during the learning process.

It is obvious that English speaking skill is an important skill needed to function in the society yet the skills are still deficient in Thailand (EF English Proficiency Index, 2019). Due to its necessity, this study will investigate students' English speaking problems, needs and how collaborative and communicative approaches can be used in enhancing students' speaking skills in Thailand classroom.

Objectives of the Study

1. To investigate students' English-speaking problems and needs
2. To study how collaborative and communicative learning approaches can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills

Research Methodology

Research Informants

The population of this study included ninth-grade students in Phitsanulok province, English teachers, and collaborative and communicative learning approach experts. From this population, a sample of 100 students was drawn from 5 different schools in Phitsanulok province, 20 English teachers and 8 experts. The student sample was selected using simple random sampling techniques while the teacher and experts were selected using purposive sampling techniques. The students provided information related to English-speaking problems and needs, and teachers provided practical information related to collaborative and communicative activities, learning steps while the experts provided theoretical and practical

information related to collaborative and communicative learning principles and important feature, learning activities and learning steps.

Research Instruments

Structured interview guides were used to study students' English-speaking problems and needs and how collaborative and communicative learning approaches can be implemented to enhance students' speaking skills. Three sets of structured interviews were specifically developed by the researcher for students, teachers and experts. The interview guide for the students concentrated on investigating students' views related to learning the English language and students' English-speaking problems and needs and consisted of 5 items while that of the teachers and experts concentrated on collaborative and communicative learning activities, principles and important features, and learning steps that can be used to enhance students' speaking skills. the interview guide for teachers and experts consisted of 4 and 3 items respectively. All three sets of structured interviews were validated by five experts to ensure content validity, clarity, and appropriateness of language use language.

Research Procedures and Data Analyses

This study employed a descriptive research methodology. The researcher went to various schools to interview the various parties involved. 100 ninth-grade students were selected for the interview (from Phitsanulok Pittayakom School, Triam Udom Sucksas School, Chalermkwan School Phitsanulok, and Teerada Phitsanulok School). 20 English teachers from different schools were interview to get information on collaborative and communicative learning activities, steps how they use them in class, while the 8 experts (university lecturers with at least a Ph.D. and having conducted research using either collaborative or communicative approaches to enhance speaking skills) were interviewed to get theoretical information on collaborative and communicative principles and important features, learning activities and learning steps that can be implemented in enhancing lower secondary students English-speaking skills.

Data Analysis

Content analysis was used to analyze data related to students' English-speaking problems and needs and information on how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills.

Research Results

1. The results of this study on the investigation of students' English-speaking problems and needs, and how collaborative and communicative learning approaches can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills are presented as follows:

1.1 The results of studying students' English-speaking problems and needs revealed that students face both linguistic and non-linguistic problems.

In terms of linguistic problems, students face problems such as inability to use correct grammatical structures, poor pronunciation, lack of vocabulary and inability to understand and use vocabulary in various situations, inability to express themselves fluently and inability to understand English accents. In terms of non-linguistic problems, the results revealed that students face problems such as teacher-centered methods which focus mostly on grammatical structure without any opportunity for students to interact and practice their speaking skills, instructors provide negative and offensive feedback to students when they make mistakes in class and also, instructors mostly give students the task to write or copy parts of their text books in their exercise books. The results of studying general problems include lack of confidence, shyness, and fear to speak and nervousness

1.2 The results of studying students' needs in relation to learning activities and content, instructional materials and others revealed as follows:

In terms of learning activities and contents, the results revealed that paired conversation, interesting interactive activities, and role-play activities were the activities that students expressed the need for in learning English-speaking skills. Based on the content, the results revealed that students need to study the correct rules of pronunciation. In relation to instructional materials, students expressed the need for teachers to use videos and audios during the learning process in order to reduce boredom and facilitate understanding and above all, students expressed the need for a tension free learning atmosphere, motivation and encouragement during the learning process. Based on other needs the students expressed the need for motivation and encouragement during the learning process.

2. The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches are implemented to enhance students' English-speaking from teachers and experts are presented as follows:

2.1 The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches are implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills from teachers revealed that

frequent use of interactive group or paired activities and dialogue, role play, face-to-face interaction, interactive games and presentations are collaborative and communicative activities that can be used in engaging students in the learning process in order to enhance their English-speaking skills.

2.2 The results of studying collaborative and communicative learning principles and important features that can be implemented to enhance students' English-speaking skills from experts revealed that collaborative learning involves active participation and interaction of learners, collaborative learning approach involves learning steps such as: explanation of task, grouping of students and task distribution, interaction in completing the task, motivation and monitoring students, practice and presentation of task and feedback and corrections. The finding revealed the collaborative learning principles that learning becomes effective when learners at various performance levels interact together in small groups or pairs towards the attainment of a common goal.

Constructivist Social Learning theory (collaborative learning approach): Learners learn successfully through the social interaction and communication they have with their peers, teachers, and other experts and also when they are guided and motivated by teacher or peers.

For the communicative approach, the results revealed that the communicative learning approach should involve the organization of learning activities that will enable communication of real meaning, communicative learning activities should focus on fluency without placing much emphasis on correct grammatical structures and accuracy, authentic practice that prepares students for real-life communication situations and that communicative learning approach has three instructional steps including presentation, practice and production. Learning a foreign or second language successfully comes through interactions and communication of real meaning among the students in groups or pairs with the existence of motivation and organization of interesting learning activities that generate feelings of involvement, urgency and excitement with the instructor as a facilitator.

Discussions

The results of studying students' English-speaking problems and needs and how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance lower secondary students' English-speaking skills are presented as follows:

1. The results of studying students' English-speaking problems and needs

The results of investigating students' English-speaking problems and needs revealed that students face linguistic problems, instructor related problems and general problems while an investigation of students' needs were revealed in terms of learning activities and content, instructional materials and a series of others as follows:

The results revealed that students face linguistic problems such as the inability to construct grammatically correct sentences, lack of vocabulary and inability to understand some vocabulary, poor pronunciation, the inability to understand different English accents and the inability to express themselves fluently.

The results of studying students' English speaking problems in relation to instructor revealed that instructors teach English-speaking skills using lecture methods and concentrating on grammatical rules with the absence of interactive speaking activities, insufficient or no opportunities for students to practice their speaking skills and continuous use of Thai in class as some teachers never use English language in class. It was also revealed that students have problems with teacher's attitude as teachers insult them in class making them reluctant to learn the language. A study of general problems revealed that students were afraid of being mocked by peers, they are shy to speak for fear of making mistakes and above all students lack the confidence to speak.

All these problems might have resulted from teacher-centered methods where teachers focus on teaching grammar structures and vocabulary items rather than teaching them how to speak. They concentrate on writing activities, paper worksheets with the absence of interesting-interactive activities for students to practice their speaking skills and due to the fact that the learning atmosphere is uncondusive as learners always receive negative feedback from teachers when they make mistakes in class. Phonics and correct rules for pronunciation have never been learned by the students, and students are not given the opportunity to interact and communicate with their friends in class in doing speaking task. The results were consistent with the research findings conducted by Taiqin (1995) about non-language factors affecting student's speaking skills, which revealed that ninety-five percent of students said that they had difficulty speaking because they were afraid of making errors in class, they had no idea what to say, lacked confidence and that they feel uncomfortable if they made mistakes, and they were not interested with the topics that are given by the lecturers and also consistent with Heriansyah, H. (2012) who studied speaking problems faced by the English

department students of Syiah kuala university and the results revealed that all students encountered linguistic problems such as lack of vocabulary, lack of grammar knowledge, and poor pronunciation and non-linguistic problems such as not being brave to speak, not being confident to speak, being afraid of speaking, being afraid of making errors, being afraid of being mocked by friends, being nervous to speak, not used to talking in class, difficult to express words or sentences, and confused on how to use appropriate words.

The results of studying student's needs in relation to learning activities and content, instructional materials and others revealed as follows:

In terms of learning activities and contents, the results revealed that paired conversation, interesting interactive activities, and role-play activities were the activities that students expressed the need for in learning English-speaking skills. Based on the content, the results revealed that students need to study the correct rules of pronunciation. In relation to English language learning instructional materials, students expressed the need for teachers to use videos and audios during the learning process in order to reduce boredom and facilitate understanding and above all, students expressed the need for a tension free learning atmosphere, motivation and encouragement during the learning process. Based on other needs expressed by the students, they need to be motivated and encouraged during the learning process. The needs expressed by the students is because they believe that learning activities that involve interaction with videos and audios to reduce boredom and facilitate understanding in a tension-free learning environment characterized by motivation and encouragement will enhance their learning and also because they believe that they will develop confidence their speaking skills will improve if they learn the rules of pronunciation as they interact with friends often. The results of this study were consistent with the research conducted by Chanisara. & Punchalee. (2013) on analyzing English language learning needs and problems of underprivileged children in a slum area in Bangkok metropolis and the results revealed that children need more motivation in the classroom, which could be increased through interesting activities and a fun atmosphere that supports their communicative skill development.

2. The results of Studying How Collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance Students' English-speaking skill

The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance lower secondary students' English-speaking skills are presented as follows:

2.1 The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance students speaking skills from teachers

The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance students' speaking skills from teacher revealed that teachers use pair or group dialogues/conversation, role play, jigsaw activities, communication games, discussion in pairs and group, acting from a script, question and answer practice, drilling and pronunciation practice. They always explain the task, provide them with prepared conversations, let students work in pairs to practice the conversation and present their task in class and the teacher corrects them after presentation.

The results of studying the problems of using collaborative and communicative approaches revealed that students have group or paired conflicts as students disagree on the role to take. The results also revealed that some students prefer working in isolation while others are impatient working with the weak students while others do not take their task seriously. They play with their friends instead of doing their task while others prefer not to work with people they are not used to and some students dominate the activities as they feel superior over weaker students.

2.2 The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches can be implemented to enhance students speaking skills from experts

The results of studying how collaborative and communicative approaches could be implemented to enhance lower secondary students' English-speaking skills from experts revealed that students should be given the opportunity to interact and communicate among themselves in authentic situations in groups or pairs with interesting learning activities that generate feelings of involvement, urgency and excitement. It also revealed that pair or group dialogues/conversation, role play, jigsaw activities, communication games, discussions in pairs and group, acting from a script and, question and answer practice can be used to enhance students' speaking skills.

The results of studying important elements of collaborative and communicative learning revealed that collaborative learning approach involves active interaction and dialogue among those who seek to understand particular concepts. Teacher should monitor and follow up students' activities, explain the task, grouping of students and distribution of task, practice and presentation of task, motivation and giving feedback and corrections. Additionally, collaborative learning activities that could be used in enhancing students' speaking skills include drama, roleplay, working together on a shared task, paired conversations, games, think-pair-share and listening triangles were revealed during the study.

For communicative approach, the interview results revealed that important aspects of communicative learning approaches are as follows:

- 1) Communicative activities provide authentic practice that prepares students for real-life communication situations
- 2) Communicative learning approach should involve the organization of learning activities that will enable communication of real meaning.
- 3) Organizing communicative learning activities should focus on fluency without placing much emphasis on correct grammatical structures and accuracy
- 4) The communicative learning approach has three instructional steps including presentation, practice and production

The results provided by both teachers of English and experts were consistent with the principles of collaborative (Vygotsky, 1978) and communicative approaches (Chomsky, 1979s) which states that social interaction and communication will enhance students' speaking skills. The results were also consistent with Colbeck, Campbell and Bjorklund (2000) who stated that learning techniques and activities that enable learners to work together in groups or pairs in learning tasks will enhance their learning and learning outcomes.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for Application

This research revealed that students face linguistic problems, instructor related problems and general problems. These problems can be overcome by placing more emphasis on speaking activities that will enable student to interact and develop their speaking skills.

Based on problems related to linguistic problems, teachers should be trained on how to select learning activities that will give students the opportunity to interact, speak and

develop their ability to use correct grammatical structures, pronounce well, practice the use of vocabulary, and also activities that students will practice and enhance their accent.

Based on the instructor related problems, teaching strategies and methods and teachers' attitude towards students, should to be trained on how to integrate speaking activities in the learning process in order to enable students to speak and also on the qualities of an effective teacher and how to give feedback and motivation to learners.

Teachers' awareness of how language is acquired and learned should be raised. Moreover, a training curriculum should be developed to enlightened teachers on the different teaching strategies, ways of organizing friendly and tension free learning environment, ways of encouraging and motivating students and enabling them to overcome fear, develop confidence and develop their speaking activities. Instructors should therefore take into consideration students' problems and needs before developing English speaking instructions.

2. Recommendations for further research

Base on this research results, further research should concentrate on developing an instructional model using collaborative and communicative approaches to enhance students' English-speaking skill.

This research was conducted only students, teachers, and experts in Phitsanulok province, the findings may not be generalizable to the English-speaking problems and needs of learners in different areas. Further research should be conducted in different areas with different conditions in order to generalized the results on students' English-speaking problems and needs.

Conclusion

This research finding revealed that students face linguistic problems, problems related to instructors and general problems. Students are unable to express themselves in English because they are unable to use correct grammatical structures as they lack the ability to construct correct sentences, lack the vocabulary, inability to pronounce correctly and inability to understand English accent. Students face problems related to their instructors such as such as their teacher's attitude as they insult students, teacher centered methods with the absence of activities for students to interact and develop their speaking skills and students also face general problems of shyness, fear of being mocked by friends and lack of confidence as they think that making mistakes during speaking is embarrassing, and this has resulted to students not being able to express themselves using English language. Students need interesting and

interactive activities such as communicative games, paired conversations and dialogues, role-play and drama that will enable them to practice and enhance their speaking ability. Students need to learn the correct rules of pronunciation, motivation and a tension free learning environment. The continuous use of social interactive and communicative activities such a drama; role-play, communicative games, question and answer sessions will play a great role in enhancing students speaking skills.

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