



DEVELOPING STUDENTS' ABILITY IN LISTENING AND SPEAKING ENGLISH USING THE COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH OF TEACHING

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In today's globalized world, the language used most often is English. In Thailand, the Thai language is a native tongue, whereas English is taught as a foreign language. The difference between Thais and English may cause some difficulties for Thais in learning English, especially in listening and speaking English. The communicative approach of teaching is believed to be one of the most effective approaches in helping learners to improve their listening and speaking skills. This paper aimed to (1) study the problems of students in learning English listening and speaking, (2) to study the students' ability in listening and speaking English before and after being taught using the communicative approach. The subjects of this study were 40 English major sophomores from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, who enrolled in the first semester of the academic year of 2013. The data were collected by using questionnaires and the standard test of English speaking and listening abilities. The statistics used in the data analysis were arithmetic mean ($\bar{X}$), standard deviation (S.D), and dependent t-test.

The research results revealed the following.

1. Student problems in English listening and speaking were caused by the outdated content, a lack of variety of teaching methods, the teacher making himself the center of class, and a lack of effective teaching devices in the classroom.
2. The ability in English listening of students was statistically, significantly higher after being taught using the communicative approach at .01 with mean pre and post test scores of 8.90 and 10.70 respectively. The ability in English speaking of the students was not statistically different before and after being taught using the communicative approach with mean pre and post test scores of 11.40 and 11.68 respectively. This implied that teaching by using a communicative approach alone might not be effective in developing the students' ability in listening and speaking English if a teacher did not provide the appropriate content and did not use a student-centered approach in teaching. It is important to provide enough time for students to practice speaking actively rather than passively listening to the teacher.

Keywords: Listening, Speaking, English, Communicative approach.

Introduction

In today's globalized world, the language used most often is English. In Thailand, English is taught as a foreign language. Thai and English are from different language families. This may cause problems in the teaching and learning process of English for Thai students. According to Supharatyothin (2012), listening

and speaking are difficult skills for Thai EFL students due to scarcity of opportunity for language experience with the target language. Many Thai university students face problems in sound discrimination when listening to native spoken English because of unfamiliarity with the English sound system and the inability to differentiate English pronunciation from Thai. Research on fourth-year English major students' listening ability in the Faculty of Education in universities in Bangkok, Jayawasu (1998) found that after listening to the spoken texts, they could neither give details nor could they give main ideas due to both inadequacy of listening practice and ineffective communicative listening activities.

Thai students have been studying English between 9 to 15 years on average. Additionally, some teachers teach only the textbook to prepare their students for the exams and have not applied technology and innovation in the teaching to motivate students in learning English. One of solutions in helping students increase their listening and speaking English skills is to have English native speakers teaching the course of listening and speaking so that the students might have a chance to communicate in English more often than they would if they were studying with non English native speakers. However, many students still show difficulties in listening and speaking English in spite of completing the listening and speaking course. Many teachers try to find a way to teach this course and one of them is the communicative approach. The communicative approach in teaching English motivates students to get involve with class activities rather than just sitting passively in a boring lecture class. According to Li Pei-long (2011), communicative approach was originally used in British language teaching in the late 1960s. Since then linguists from Britain have emphasized this fundamental aspect of language teaching—the communicative and functional potential of language. They have argued that language teaching should focus on communicative proficiency rather than on mere mastery of structures.

Rationale of the Study

The purposes of this study were

- (1) to study the problems of students in learning English listening and speaking
- (2) to study the students' ability in listening and speaking English before and after being taught using the communicative approach.

Significance of the Study

The findings of this study will be valuable as a preliminary study on factors causing Rajabhat University students' English listening and speaking problems. Moreover, they will serve as a data-base for English departments and it will be useful towards understanding students' problems in second language courses. In addition, the findings will be a guide for Thai teachers of English in teaching English listening and speaking skills to Thai students.

Review of Related Literature

The literature review mainly discusses three topics: 1. theoretical concepts of the terms concerning 'listening and speaking' 2. Factors influencing ESL/EFL students' low performance in listening and speaking, and 3. Communicative approach in teaching.

1. Theoretical Concepts of the Terms Regarding 'Listening and speaking'

Listening is receiving language through one's ears and it involves identifying the sounds of speech and processing these sounds into words and sentences that will be converted into messages that mean something to listeners.

Field (1998) mentioned that Listening Skills are related to the main process the teacher uses to train learners to be able to gain 'listening comprehension' in order to reach 'listening ability through sub-skills as follows: (1) Discrimination or a bottom-up level skill enables learners to distinguish minimally different words through ear training and the teacher's dictation, (2) Segmentation enables learners to identify words in continuous speech through the teacher's dictation, such as focusing on weak forms, (3) Exploration asks learners to work out the spelling of unrecognized words via the teacher's dictation and learners' guessing, (4) Anticipation or a top-down level skill requires learners to work out what came next via the teacher's playing half a sentence and the learners 'completing, (5) Reference enables learners to relate pronouns to the items they refer to, (6) Monitoring for information requires learners to monitor a long text for key words, and (7) Relevance asks learners to identify important points made by filling specific and general points in tables.

To become fluent speakers in English, learners need to develop strong listening skills. Listening not only helps learners understand what people are saying, it also helps learners to speak clearly to other people because it helps learners learn how to pronounce words properly, how to use intonation, and where to stress in words and sentences. Speaking is an interactive process of constructing meaning that involves producing *and* receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Its form and meaning are dependent on the context in which it occurs, including the participants themselves, their collective experiences, the physical environment, and the purposes for speaking.

In teaching speaking, teachers can follow the usual pattern of preparation, presentation, practice, evaluation, and extension. The teacher can use the *preparation* step to establish a context for the speaking task (where, when, why, and with whom it will occur) and to initiate awareness of the speaking skill to be targeted (asking for clarification, stressing key words, using reduced forms of words). In *presentation*, the teacher can provide learners with a preproduction model that furthers learner comprehension and helps them become more attentive observers of language use. *Practice* involves learners in reproducing the targeted structure, usually in a controlled or highly supported manner. *Evaluation* involves directing attention to the skill being examined and asking learners to monitor and assess their own progress. Finally, *extension* consists of activities that ask learners to use the strategy or skill in a different context or authentic communicative situation, or to integrate use of the new skill or strategy with previously acquired ones (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995) mentioned in <http://area.dge.mec.pt/gramatica/whatspeakingis.htm>

2. Factors Influencing ESL/EFL Students' Listening and Speaking Performance

Factors influencing ESL/ EFL students' low performance in listening and speaking are *learners, teaching methods, linguistic and non-linguistic elements of listening tasks, characteristics of the spoken language and classroom facilities*.

(1) Learner Factors contain many sub-factors. First, the learners' overall linguistic competence with respect to cognitive development: this implies that learners will have better listening skills when getting older. Other sub-factors creating difficulty in listening comprehension are that learners are not prompted to learn listening and speaking due to their personal problems. Moreover, they have low expectation in listening and speaking skills; because of low English proficiency, they do not seek any ways to solve their listening and speaking problems. Furthermore, they lack self-confidence and significant listening and speaking practice opportunities (Chetchamlong et. al., 1987).

(2) Teaching Methods Factor, according to Suk-kaew et al. (2005), Matayomsueksa six students of seven educational areas in Bangkok had low listening proficiency in English due to the teachers' traditional methods: grammar translation method (GTM). The focus of GTM was more on reading-writing and grammar practice through L1 instruction than listening-speaking via L2. In other words, Thai students had no opportunities to practice listening to Thai teachers of English, nor native English teachers; their problems in aural comprehension were chronic.

(3) Linguistic and Non-Linguistic Factors, Anderson and Lynch et al. (1988) discuss the way in which the information is organized, especially how the sequencing of events is described in the spoken

text. In other words, learners' ability in following the order of events in listening tasks will affect their listening performance. Their listening performance is also affected by the level of difficulty in listening tasks. If some complicated sentences and unknown words in spoken texts are simplified, learners will have better performance,

(4) Characteristics of the Spoken Language, Brown and Yule (1999) provide eight characteristics of the spoken language: clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, delivery rate, stress-rhythm-intonation, and interaction.

(5) Classroom Facilities or physical setting include noises, audio-visual aids and time. According to Yagang et al. (1993), because cassette-tapes or radios lacked visual and aural environmental clues, students could not see the speakers' body language and facial expression. Consequently, they experience difficulties in understanding the speaker's meaning. Moreover, if the classroom is noisy and contains poor quality equipment, students' listening comprehension decreases. Due to time constraints, listening activities are always integrated with other necessary skills such as reading, writing and lectures. . Thus the students are unable to fully develop their listening comprehension.

3. Communicative Approach of Teaching

Currently, a method for second language teaching that calls itself "Communicative Approach of Teaching" is popular among educators. According to Maley (1984) and mentioned in Supharatyothin (2012), the communicative approach is characterized by the following:

1) concentration on use and appropriateness rather than simply on language form, 2) a tendency to favor fluency-focused rather than simply accurately focused activities, 3) communicative tasks are achieved through the language rather than simply exercises on the language, 4) an emphasis is placed on student initiative and interaction, rather than simply on teacher-centered direction, 5) there will be a sensitivity to learners differences rather than a "lockstep" approach, and 6) there is an awareness of variations in language use rather than simply attention to the language.

The communicative approach in teaching English motivates students to get involve with class activity rather than just sitting passively in a boring lecture class. Passive learning discourages students from active learning. According to Bonwell & Eison (1991) and mentioned in Supharatyothin (2011), the opposite of passive learning is active learning. Students are involved in more than listening: less emphasis is placed on transmitting information and more on developing students' skills: students are involved in higher-order thinking (analysis, synthesis, evaluation): students are engaged in activities (e.g., reading, discussing, and writing), and greater emphasis is placed on students' exploration of their own attitudes and values.

Littlewood's (2000) suggested that in Communicative language teaching, learners need to develop the following skills: 1) The learners must attain a high degree of linguistic competence. That is, they must develop skill in manipulating the linguistic system to the point where they can use it spontaneously and with flexibility in order to express their intended messages; (2) The learners must distinguish between forms they have mastered and the communicative functions which they perform, and (3) The learners must develop skills and strategies for using language to get communicative meaning effectively in varied contexts and situations.

The theories in CLT emphasize that the learners should not only be taught the rules of grammar-linguistic competence; but also the use of the language in real life situations.

Research Questions

1. What are the students' problems in learning English listening and speaking?
2. What is the difference in the students' ability in listening and speaking before and after being taught by using Communicative approach of teaching?

Participants

The subjects of this study were 40 English major sophomores from the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Pibulsongkram Rajabhat University, who enrolled in the first semester of the academic year of 2013 and were taught by an English native speaker.

Data

There were 2 sets of data: (1) The data of 40 students' listening and speaking examination in listening/speaking course. These examinations were examined by 3 English teaching experts before testing students. There were two types of examinations (Listening test, and speaking test). (2) Survey questionnaire was used by the researcher. The questionnaire represents the assessments of CLT.

Instruments

1. Students listening and speaking examination
2. Survey Questionnaire

Procedures

Teaching Materials

Prior to the experiment, teaching materials were prepared based on communicative approach of teaching. Students were taught using the on communicative approach after the pretest. In class, teacher and students exchanged conversation. Teachers set the situation for students to have a chance in role play.

The Test

The test consisted of 20 items of listening and speaking. Survey questionnaire consisted of 8 items on content used in class, 8 items on teacher's teaching, and 6 items on classroom equipment. Both examination and survey questions were evaluated by 3 English teachers to find their reliability in this study. The exams were also checked for IOC to ensure that they were valid and reliable. These survey questionnaires represent the assessments of CLT strategies which were interpreted with the use of following scales: 5 = extremely agree 4 = agree, 3 = moderate, 2 = disagree, and 1= extremely disagree.

Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data

The following is a detailed presentation, analysis and interpretation of the data that were collected by the researcher to answer systematically the problems posed in this research.

Research question 1: What are the students' problem in learning English listening and speaking?

The first research question was to find out the problem of students in studying English listening and speaking. The results are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 shows; (1) the contents used in class are in moderate level which means they are neither up to date nor out of date. Some of the contents meet the students' need, while some do not; (2) The teacher's performance in class is in moderate level which means some manners of the teacher satisfied the students and some did not. The teacher is friendly; however, the teacher doesn't follow up the students' work; (3) Class equipment is in the moderate level which means the classroom is suitable for teaching, but still lacks appropriate teaching tools such as a poor quality microphone, and other visual and audio instruments.

Table 1. Factors That Affect Listening and Speaking English Learning.

Item No.	State of Learning/Teaching in English listening and speaking class	Mean (X)	S.D	Interpretation
1-8	Content used in class	3.13	0.67	moderate
9-16	Teacher's performance	3.26	0.73	moderate
17-22	Class equipment	3.22	0.71	moderate
	Overall	3.24	0.55	moderate

The problems the students experienced in English listening and speaking were caused by the outdated content, a lack of variety of teaching methods, the teacher making himself the center of class, and a lack of effective teaching devices in the classroom.

Research question 2: What is the difference in the students' listening and speaking abilities before and after being taught using the Communicative approach of teaching?

The second research question was to find out the difference in students' ability in listening and speaking before and after being taught by using Communicative Approach of Teaching. The differences were shown in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Comparison of the Students' Ability in English Listening before and after Studying with Communicative Approach.

Achievements in English listening	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	Sig
Pre-test score	40	8.90	3.622	8.473**	.000
Pro-test score	40	10.70	3.797		

**The statistic significance at .01 (t.01, 39=2.4258)

Table 2 shows that the ability in English listening of students was statistically significantly higher after being taught using the communicative approach at .01 with mean pre and post test scores of 8.90 and 10.70 respectively

Table 3. Comparison of the Students' Ability in English Speaking before and after Studying using the Communicative Approach .

Achievements in English speaking	n	$\bar{X}$	SD	t	Sig
Pre-test score	40	11.40	2.251	0.687	.496
Pro-test score	40	11.68	2.200		

**The statistic significance at .01 (t.01, 39=2.4258)
.01 (t.01, 39=2.4258)

Table 3 shows that the ability of the students to speak English was not statistically different before and after being taught using the communicative approach with mean pre and post test scores of 11.40 and 11.68 respectively.

Discussion

From the findings of students' opinions concerning the causes of their problems in learning English listening and speaking in Table 1, it was found that the students were least satisfied with the activities and the variety of the contents presented in class. Both these categories received a mean score of 2.95. This might indicate that if the content and activities provided in class meet the students' needs, then their learning might be made easier.

When asked about the teacher's manner of teaching, the students felt that the teacher did not always provide new, current knowledge relating to his/her teaching (mean score of 0.79), and that the teacher didn't give many chances for the students to participate (mean score of 0.84). This indicates that students did not have many chances to participate in class activities or that the teacher used himself as the center of the class. This way of teaching leads to poor English proficiency. These findings support Suk-kaew et al. (2005) who mentioned that students had a low listening proficiency in English due to the teachers' traditional methods: grammar translation method (GTM). The focus of GTM was more on reading-writing and grammar practice through L1 instruction than listening-speaking via L2. In other words, Thai students had no opportunities to practice listening to Thai or English teachers speaking English; their problems in aural comprehension were chronic.

With respect to classroom equipment, it was found that the factor that students agreed with least was "Does the learning equipment in the classroom suit the content?", This had a mean score of 0.79 and indicates that the lack of appropriate equipment can hamper the students ability to acquire listening and speaking skills. These findings support Yagang et al. (1993) who stated that if cassette-tapes or radios lacked visual and aural environmental clues, students could not see the speakers' body language and facial expression. Students, thus, face the difficulty to understand the speaker's meaning.

Based on Table 2, the English listening ability of students was statistically significantly higher after being taught using the communicative approach at .01 with mean pre and post test scores of 8.90 and 10.70 respectively. This indicates that teaching with communicative approach of teaching helps improve students' ability in listening. These findings support Breen and Candlin (1980) mentioned that in CLT the learners' ability would develop automatically if the learners were required to focus on meaning in the process of using the language to communicate.

Based on Table 3, the students' ability to speak English was not statistically different before and after being taught using the communicative approach with mean pre and post test scores of 11.40 and 11.68 respectively. This implies that teaching by using a communicative approach alone might not be effective in developing the students' ability in listening and speaking English if a teacher did not provide the appropriate content and did not use a student-centered approach in teaching. It is important to provide enough time for students to practice speaking actively rather than passively listening to the teacher. These findings support Brown and Yule (1999) who mentioned that to help learners acquire speaking skills; teachers should provide eight characteristics of the spoken language: clustering, redundancy, reduced forms, performance variables, colloquial language, delivery rate, stress-rhythm-intonation, and interaction. Therefore, providing enough time for students to practice speaking actively is better than having students passively listening to the teacher.

Conclusions

In the light of the above experimental research, the following conclusions were derived:

1. Problems in English listening and speaking of students were caused by the outdated content, a lack of variety of teaching methods, the teacher making himself the center of the class, and a lack of effective teaching devices in the classroom.
2. The ability in English listening of students was statistically significantly higher than before being taught using the communicative approach whereas the ability in English speaking of students was not statistically different between before and after being taught using the communicative

approach. This implied that teaching by using a communicative approach alone might not be effective in developing the students' ability in listening and speaking English if a teacher did not provide the appropriate content and did not use a student-centered approach in teaching.

Implications

The current study investigated the the problems of students in learning English listening and speaking, and the students' ability in listening and speaking English before and after being taught using the communicative approach. The outcomes of this research could be beneficial for classroom teachers when they engage in teaching listening and speaking courses. The research results showed that teaching by using a communicative approach alone might not be effective in developing the students' ability in listening and speaking English. Teachers may want to provide the appropriate content and use a student-centered approach in teaching.

Suggestions for Further Research

There should be research in comparing students' improvement in listening and speaking when studying with a Thai teacher and when studying with an English native speaker. The research shows that studying with an English native speaker does not guarantee that students will have a good command in listening and speaking English.

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