

Reviewing on a Model for Improving the English Language Ability of High School Students

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ABSTRACT

This purpose of this research was to construct a model to improve the English language ability of high school students. This research focused on high school students of 10 schools in Surat Thani Province.

The research found in this study was review of related literature on Communicative approaches, theory of language, second language acquisition / learning and related study; The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an English Department in a Lao Higher Educational Institution: A Case Study, Communicative Language Teaching and the ELT Journal: a Corpus-Based Approach to the History of a Discourse, Research on Language and Learning: Implication for Language Teaching, Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Contexts: Teachers Attitude and Perception in Bangladesh.

Keywords: model, English language ability

INTRODUCTION

English has developed over the course of more than 1,400 years. The earliest forms of English, a set of Anglo-Frisian dialects brought to Great Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers in the fifth century, are called Old English. Middle English began in the late 11th century with the Norman conquest of England. (Crystal, 2003). Early Modern English began in the late 15th century with the introduction of the printing press to London and the Great Vowel Shift. Through the worldwide influence of the British Empire, Modern English spread around the world from the 17th to mid-20th centuries. Through newspapers, books, the telegraph, the telephone, phonograph records, radio, satellite television, and the internet, as well as the emergence of the United States as a global superpower, English has become the leading language of international discourse and the lingua franca in many regions and in professional contexts such as science. (American Encyclopedia, 2015, online)

English has grown in contact with many other languages making it meet the demand of new cultures and communication needs. There are three main categories of English speakers: those who speak it as a first language, those who regard English as second language or additional language, and those who learn English as a foreign language or international language.

In some countries, English is dominant. English plays a dominant role in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland. In other countries, English is widely used, even though English is not the dominant language of the country. For example, English is widely used in Hong Kong, Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia. These countries often use it as means of communication between people who have different native languages. In some countries where English is not generally used as a medium of communication, English is also used as a foreign language, such as in Thailand, China, and Japan.

The English language is spoken in Thai schools is variable at best, unless parents can afford to send their children to more expensive education establishments. For poorer Thais (the majority), there may be some English taught, but it is often not an integral part of the curriculum. While the standard poor children may be able to repeat a set of standard words and phrases, they probably do not really understand them. The further away from large cities, like Bangkok or Chiang Mai, the less English you will find in the schools. The net result is very poor English skills in general but the middle classes will have some English language skills. The problem is exacerbated by teachers giving their students passing grades, no matter what their score. Hotel staff in major tourist areas will nearly always have passable basic English. Conversely, if you find yourself in rural Thailand, far away from any centre, your chances of being able to communicate in English are almost nil. Even when it is spoken, you will have to concentrate to understand the strange grammar, pronunciation and sentence structure, as Thai people struggle to pronounce English properly. When a street vendor or shop keeper needs to tell you the price of something, they will often simply type the amount into a calculator and show you the display without saying a word. In the business arena, you may often find Thai people communicating with each other in English, especially educated Thais, as they like to show off their high status in society. Like Kirk (2010) found that English is gaining importance in Thailand daily and Suwaree Yordchim (2018) stated that English is used as a *lingua franca* in Thailand and language is a systematic form of communication.

Crystal (1992) reports that non-native speakers of English comprise more than two thirds of its potential speakers. So, English is the most widespread language in the world. English plays a role as a global language. English is widely used by people of different nations and different cultures in order to communicate with one another. English is used as a library language, as the medium of science, technology, news and information, business,

international travel, trade diplomacy and as a contact language between nations and part of the nations. It seems that English is the language most frequently used by more people than any other language.

Although, English is a world language, the importance of English is not just in how many people speak it but in what it is used for.

According to Kitao (1993), “English is the major language of news and information in the world. English is the language of business and government.” English is a widespread and important language in the world today. English is used for everything from international academic, business, diplomacy to popular music and internet entertainment. English is used not only for communication between native speakers and non-native speakers of English but between non-native speakers. English is the most widely used language in the world and it will be used by more people in the future.

Globalization has changed the world of interdependence. No boundary of information and technology transferred causes the influx of goods, service, capital and business transaction between countries. Thailand is not excluded in this phenomenon. For Thailand, the government has tried to upgrade the country’s capacity in both economic structure and human resources to complete on the international playing field. At present, Thailand is ready to participate in the world economic forum.

The English Proficiency Index research had looked at adult English proficiency in 2014, found that Thailand was 48 of 63 countries. Thailand’s EF EPI score was 47.99 which meant very low proficiency levels (EF Education First Ltd., 2014). In Thailand, English has been accepted as an international foreign language. English is widely used as a medium throughout the different professional and vocational fields such as science, technology, news, and information, business, trade and diplomacy. However, the Ordinary National Education Test (O –NET) in the academic year 2014, found that the school level’s mean was less than nationality level’s one in 2 learning strands. They consisted of (1) Language for communication and (2) Language and culture. According to the Basic Education Core Curriculum A.D 2008, Thai students should understand and have the capacity to interpret what has been heard and read from various types of English language media, and the ability to express opinions with proper reasoning and ability to present data, information, concepts and views about various matters through speaking and writing.

The development of achievement scores of the Education Testing Service national basic (O-NET) in learning a foreign language of grade 9 students will help students having the highest mean. Students should be developed in learning of the language base with techniques and principles in language teaching when all of them have been evaluated by O-NET in both language for communication and language and language and culture. This study found that there are 4 parts: conversation, reading comprehension, grammar and vocabulary, and miscellaneous. From analysis of the results of O-NET in the academic year

2014, most teachers should bring the information from the test results to prepare teaching English lessons and lesson plans by teaching to cover all learning stands following the Basic Education of grade 9 students’ achievement in learning a foreign language. Lastly, most students will have the highest mean, followed by the teacher’s classroom management. This research could improve the English language and cultural competence of grade 9 students in Thailand. The analysis both of the result of O-NET and all learning strands are the first guides for planning in teaching and helping students make the highest mean of the result of O-NET. In addition, teachers will develop teaching and learning materials and technology.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

The objective was to review related literature on a model of improving the English language ability of high school students.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Related literature

Communicative approaches

The communicative approach had its origins in the changes in the British language teaching tradition dating from the late 1960s and more generally in the development of both Europe and North America. This approach varies from traditional approaches because it is learner-centered. Also, linguists state that there is a need to focus on communicative proficiency in language teaching and that Communicative Language Teaching: the work of the council of Europe in the field of communicative syllabus design; the theoretical ideas of the communicative approach found rapid application by textbook writers; and there was an overwhelming acceptance of these new ideas by British language teaching specialists and curriculum development centers.

Proponents of the communicative approach state that the goal of language teaching is communicative competence. Another aim is the development of procedures for the teaching of the four language skills (writing, reading, speaking, listening). Moreover, the four skills build the basis of the interdependence of language and communication (cf. Richards, Rodgers 1986, pp. 64–66). According to Littlewood, one of the most important aspects of ‘communicative language teaching is that it pays systematic attention to the functional as well as structural aspects of language’ (Littlewood, 1981, 1). One of the most important aspects is pair and group work. Learners should work in pairs or groups and try to solve problematic tasks with their available language knowledge. Howatt also distinguishes between a weak and a strong version of Communicative Language Teaching. The weak version, which seems to be standard by now, stresses the importance of providing learners

with opportunities to use their English for communicative purpose. The strong version claims that language is acquired through communication (cf. Howatt, 1984, 279).

As mention above, there was and still is a wide acceptance of the communicative approach. This approach is similar to the more general learning perspective usually referred to as ‘Learning by doing’ or ‘the experience approach’ (Richard, Rodgers 1986: [68]). Generally, Communicative Language Teaching focuses on communicative and contextual factors in language use and it is learner-centered and experience-based. There are many supporters, but also numerous opponents, who criticize this approach and the relatively varied ways in which it is interpreted and applied. Nevertheless, it is a theory of language teaching that starts from a communicative model of language and language use, and that seeks to translate this into a design for an instruction system, for materials, for teacher and learner roles and behaviors, and for classroom activities and techniques (cf. Richards, Rodgers 1986.69).

Theory of language

A central aspect in Commuicative Language Teaching is communicative competence. Hymes defines competence as what a speaker needs to know in order to be communicatively competence in a speech community. This includes both knowledge and ability for language use. In his book Teaching Language as Communication (quoted in Richards, Rodgers 1986:71), Widdowson (1978) presented a view of the relationship between linguistic system and their communicative values in text and discourse. Moreover, Canale and Sain (1980) (cf. Richards, Rodgers 1986:71) found four dimensions of communicative competence that are defined as: 1. grammatical competence; 2. sociolinguistic competence; 3. Discourse competence; and 4. strategic competence.

Theory of learning

Although there is little discussion of learning theory, there are still some elements that, according to Richards and Rodgers (1986), can be defined as communication principles, task principles and meaningfulness principles. The first one includes activities that involve real communication which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks which are also supposed to promote learning. The last one states that language that is meaningful to the learner supports that learning process. Of great importance is meaningful and authentic language use (cf. Richards, Rodgers, 1986, 72).

More recent revisions of the L2 Learning experience can best be described as communicative approaches. They are partially a reaction against the artificiality of ‘pattern – practice’ and also against the belief that consciously learning the grammar rules of a language will necessarily result in an ability to use the language. Although there are many different versions of how to create communicative experiences for L2 learners, they are all

based on a belief that the functions of language (what it is used for) should be emphasized rather than the forms of the language (correct grammatical or phonological structure). Classroom lessons are likely to be organized around concepts such as ‘asking for things’ in different social setting, rather than ‘the forms of the past tenses’ in different sentences. These changes have coincided with attempts to provide more appropriate materials for L2 learning that has a specific purpose, as in ‘English for medical personnel’ or Japanese for business people’. (Yule, G., 2006, p. 166)

Moreover, language competence is a board term which includes linguistic or grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic or sociocultural competence and what might be called textual competence. The specific learning outcomes under “Language Competence” deal with knowledge of the language and the ability to use that knowledge to interpret and produce meaningful texts appropriate to the situation in which they are used. Language competence is best developed in the context of activities or tasks where the language is used for real purposes, in other words, in practical applications.

The various components of language competence are grouped under four cluster headings (see illustration). Under each of these cluster headings, there are several strands (identified by strand headings on the left end of each row) which show the development flow of learning from level to level. Each strand deals with a single aspect of language competence.

Although the outcomes isolate these components, language competence should be developed through classroom activities which focus on meaningful uses of the language and on language in context. Tasks will be chosen based on the needs, interests and experiences of students. The vocabulary, grammatical structures, text forms and social conventions necessary to carry out this task will be taught, practiced and assessed as students are involved in various aspects of the task itself, not in isolation.

Strategic competence is often closely associated with language competence since students need to learn ways to compensate for low proficiency in the early stages of learning if they are to use language for authentic communication from the beginning. This component is included in the language use strategies in the “Strategies” section. (American Sign Language and Deaf Culture, 2009).

Second language acquisition / learning

Learning a second language differs qualitatively from learning a first language (L1). To see why, various factors – psychological, physical, and sociological – must be considered in addition to the linguistic structure of L2 and how it differs from the native language. Individuals who are self-conscious about making mistakes often find learning L2 difficult, which is not a problem for children, who are unconcerned or unaware that they are making mistakes.

A distinction is sometimes made between learning in a ‘foreign language’ setting (learning a language that is not generally spoken in the surrounding community) and a ‘second language’ setting (learning a language that is spoken in the surrounding community). That is, Japanese students in an English class in Japan are learning English as a foreign language (EFL) and, if those same students were in an English class in the USA, they would be learning English as a second language (ESL). In either case, they are simply trying to learn another language, so the expression second language learning is used more generally to describe both situations. (Yule, G., 2006, pp. 162-163).

Related study

The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an English Department in a Lao Higher Educational Institution: A Case Study.

In the research “The Implementation of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in an English Department in a Lao Higher Educational Institution: A Case Study”, it reported the importance and necessity to communicate in English. In recent decades many EFL countries, as well as Lao higher educational institutions, have shifted from traditional grammar-based teaching method to communicative-focused instruction. However, some research had reported that there was still has a gap between schools’ language policy and classrooms’ practices. This study explored the understanding and attitudes of English teachers in adopting a Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach into their classrooms. It investigates factors that promote or hinder EFL teachers’ implementation of this teaching approach into Lao higher educational institutions English classrooms. It also examines the syllabi that influence them in teaching communicative English.

This qualitative study investigated the perceptions of English teachers in a Department of English and a case study approach was applied in order to explore teachers’ understandings of CLT. Ten English teachers from one department in a Lao higher education institution were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. The study compares the literature about communicative English teaching with the findings of data collected from these ten one-tone, in-depth interviews in the same setting.

The findings indicated that the factors “that affected the implementation of CLT in the Lao context related to teachers’ factors include: misconceptions of CLT, traditional grammar based teaching approach, teachers’ English proficiency and lack of CLT training. The issues raised from students include: students’ low English proficiency, students’ learning styles and behaviors, and lack of motivation to develop communicative competence. Other difficulties caused by educational system were: the power of the examination, class size, and insufficient funding to support CLT and the last factors caused by CLT itself was: the lack of CLT interaction in society and school.”

The study also provides a range of practical recommendations for the faculty deans, senior managers at higher educational institutions, ministry educators and policy-makers to further improve implementation of CLT and to help ensure the success in implementing this approach in Lao higher educational institutions (Hongkham, V. 2013).

Communicative Language Teaching and the ELT Journal: a Corpus-Based Approach to the History of a Discourse

This research, “Communicative Language Teaching and the ELT Journal: a Corpus-Based Approach to the History of a Discourse,” reported that despite recent challenges, CLT remained influential and continued to be implemented in a number of contemporary ELT contexts. This project represented an attempt to investigate the history of CLT as a means of gaining a clearer understanding of its main principles and ideas. The investigation aimed to identify some key concepts in the discourse of the ELT Journal over the period when the communicative approach is believed to have emerged. Two consecutive periods were studied; an earlier (1973 to 1981) phase when the journal was edited by W.R. Lee, and a later (1981 to 1986) period under Richard Rossner. The project made use of two separate keyword “traditions” to examine words that play an important role in the discourse of the journal. Firstly, a machine-based, corpus procedure was carried out, using the collections of articles as a kind of corpus. Later, a more thorough, detailed keyword analysis was undertaken, borrowing from the techniques pioneered by Raymond Williams, in which the histories of individual words are traced chronologically across texts (Duncan, H. 2009).

Research on Language and Learning: Implication for Language Teaching

This research “Research on Language and Learning: Implication for Language Teaching,” reported that taking into account several limitations of communicative language teaching (CLT), this paper called for the need to consider research on language use and learning through communication as a basis for language teaching. It would be argued that a reflective approach towards language teaching and learning might be generated, which was explained in terms of the need to develop a context – sensitive pedagogy and in terms of teachers’ and learners’ development (Eva, 2004).

Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Contexts: Teachers Attitude and Perception in Bangladesh

This research, “Communicative Language Teaching in EFL Contexts: Teachers Attitude and Perception in Bangladesh,” reported that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) had been widely explored and studied by many countries in the field of English language teaching. This study first presented an overview of English language teaching in Bangladesh, and then investigates the definition and principles of CLT which was followed

by a brief history of CLT. In addition, a review of existing literature related to communicative competence, as well as how it functions in CLT is presented. A mixed method research design was used for this research. Participants for this study were thirty teachers of English teaching at primary and secondary levels. The main modes of data collection consisted of questionnaire and informal interviews. The results showed that English for foreign language (EFL) teachers, whilst aware of the achievements, observe many difficulties in implementing CLT in their classrooms. These difficulties stemmed from four directions, namely, the teacher, the students, the educational system, and CLT itself. The results suggested that despite showing keen interest in change and being eager to identify with CLT, teachers were not optimistic about the complete adoption of CLT, and thus feel that only by overcoming the difficulties from these four sources and by establishing more favorable conditions for the implementation of CLT, could they truly benefit from CLT in their English classrooms (Diana, 2012).

Metaphoric competence, secondary language learning and communicative language ability

This research, “Metaphoric competence, secondary language learning and communicative language ability,” reported that recent development in cognitive linguistics had highlighted the importance as well as the ubiquity of metaphor in language. Despite this, the ability of second language learners to use metaphors was often still not seen as a core ability. In this paper, they took a model of communicative competence that had been widely influential in both language teaching and language testing, namely Bachmen (1990), and argued, giving a range of examples of language use and learner difficulty, that metaphoric competence had in fact an important role to play in all areas of communicative competence. In other words, it could contribute centrally to grammatical competence, textual competence, illocutionary competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. Metaphor was thus highly relevant to second language learning, teaching and testing, from the earliest to the most advanced stages of learning (Littlemore, J. and Low, G. 2006t : Abstract).

These research reports had a lot of techniques and principles in language teaching. They were important to improve the English language ability and develop of achievement scores of the Education Testing Service national basic (O-NET) in learning a foreign language of high school students that would make students have the highest mean. The techniques and principles in language teaching help high school students to develop in learning of language when all of them had evaluated by O-NET in both Language for communication and language, and Language and culture.

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