

2016-07-01

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Recommended Citation

West, Andrew J. (2016) "Adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching Methodology to an English Textbook for English Language Learning of NIDA Students," *PASAA*: Vol. 52, Article 2.

DOI: 10.58837/CHULA.PASAA.52.1.2

Available at: <https://digital.car.chula.ac.th/pasaa/vol52/iss1/2>

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Adaptation of Communicative Language Teaching Methodology to an English Textbook for English Language Learning of NIDA Students

Andrew J. West

National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Thailand
Email: andrewj_west@hotmail.com

Abstract

In this paper, the researcher focuses on assessing the language learning benefits for students of adapting the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology to an English textbook, a methodology that, according to Richards (2006), Littlewood (2008) and others, is influential in shaping second language learning worldwide. This paper is intended to contribute to the understanding of the effectiveness of CLT when applied to a textbook and how the practical application of this methodology can lead to students' increased knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and target language of the textbook as well as assess students' attitudes and perceptions toward those communicative activities. The instruments used in the data collection included a pre- and post-test multiple-choice quiz to ascertain if there is a significant difference in the students' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter in the textbook before and after using communicative activities, and a five-point Likert scale

questionnaire with open-ended questions to measure students' attitudes and perceptions. The subjects of the study were two cohorts of students undertaking the LC4002 Integrated English Language Skills Development course conducted at National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) in 2016 (99 students total). The principal findings are that students' knowledge and understanding was higher in the post-tests than the pretests with a statistical significance below .05. Meanwhile, the mean scores of students' attitudes toward the communicative activities were at the high level for the first cohort and very high level for the second; and the mean scores of student's perceptions were at the very true level for both cohorts.

Keywords: Communicative activities, communicative language teaching (CLT), teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL)

Introduction

Rationale of the study

The communicative language approach to teaching English to second language speakers has a long history reaching back to the 1970s and has been influential in shaping language teaching worldwide (Richards, 2006). Several studies have been undertaken to investigate the effectiveness of the communicative language teaching (CLT) methodology in the classroom situation, both internationally and in the Thai context, the majority of which have yielded positive results. It appears, however, that no researcher has thus far investigated the effectiveness of applying CLT techniques to a textbook which has been written to teach English in a second or foreign language classroom. Therefore, in this paper the researcher investigates the effectiveness of communicative activities to ascertain if there is a significant difference in the students' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter in

the textbook before and after using communicative activities. Students' attitudes and perceptions toward those communicative activities are also assessed.

Through such investigation it is hoped that the researcher will benefit by quantifying whether or not the communicative teaching activities he has created for his students are effective or not and if effective to what degree and in which ways can they be improved. Likewise, the researcher will benefit from quantifying the students' attitudes and perceptions toward the communicative activities. Thus the researcher should be better equipped to improve the activities for future cohorts of students undertaking the same course (described below). Furthermore, other pedagogues who are in a similar position of attempting to apply CLT techniques to their own textbooks which have been written to teach English in a second or foreign language classroom may also benefit from the sharing of this research.

Context of the study

The participants were selected by convenience sampling as the students under study were from the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA) undertaking the course LC4002 Integrated English Language Skills Development, which the researcher has been teaching since October, 2010. The course, which is conducted by the Graduate School of Language and Communication (GSLC), is a general English course for master's degree students from other post-graduate schools held for three hours per week. The research was conducted during the second semester of B.E. 2558 (January-April of 2016) with two classes being taught by the researcher, consisting of 32 students from Tuesday class and 32 students from Friday class. The research was conducted for a second time during the first semester of B.E. 2559 (June-December 2016) with one class being taught by the researcher, consisting of 35 students from Tuesday class. Thus the number of participants is 99 in total divided into two groups of 64 and 35.

The participants in these two cohorts of this course were regular master's students who did not meet the following qualifications: (a)

received more than 660 in score from NIDA's English language entrance examination; (b) graduated with a bachelor or master's degree from any academic programs where English is a medium of instruction within the last three years before the first day of their first semester at NIDA and who received no less than 2.75 in GPA (bachelor's degree) and no less than 3.25 in GPA (master's degree); (c) earned a TOEFL score of at least 550 (paper-based), 213 (computer-based – IBT) and 79 (Internet-based) and an IELTS score of at least 6.0 with the score must having been obtained within the past two years up until their first semester of enrollment; or (d) speak English as their mother tongue and have permanent residence in a country where English is a dominant language. The prerequisite for the LC4002 course is having successfully passed the LC4001 Reading Skills Development in English for Graduate Studies, which students not exempted under the above criteria must also complete.

The English language proficiency level of the majority of students enrolled in LC4002 can be characterized as early intermediate as they scored less than 660 in NIDA's English language entrance examination; did not graduate with a bachelor or master's degree from any academic programs where English is a medium of instruction with sufficient GPA scores within the last three years; did not meet the above TOEFL and IELTS scores within the past two years up until their first semester of enrollment; or did not speak English as their mother tongue with permanent residence in an English-speaking country.

The textbook used is *Academic Encounters, Life in Society, Level 3: Listening and Speaking* (Sanabria, 2nd edition, 2012), with supplementary reading material drawn from *Academic Encounters: Reading, Study Skills, and Writing* (Brown & Hood, 2009), both of which are published by Cambridge University Press. These texts focus on developing the four skills through listening, note taking and discussion in *Academic Encounters, Life in Society, Level 3: Listening and Speaking*; and reading, study skills and writing in *Academic Encounters: Reading, Study Skills, and Writing*. The cover of *Academic Encounters: Reading, Study Skills, and Writing* states that the text is intended for use with

“Intermediate to High Intermediate” students, and although the listening and speaking textbook makes no such assertion, it can be inferred that it too is also aimed at this intermediate to high intermediate group, which does not match the early intermediate skill level of the majority of the students participating in the LC4002 course.

The researcher has, however, in the duration of his teaching this course at NIDA over the last six years, developed and refined a range of CLT activities based on the work of Richards (2006), Littlewood (1998) and others. These include task-completion activities, information-gathering activities, opinion-sharing activities, information-transfer activities, reasoning-gap activities and role plays based on pair, project work and group work models which are cooperative more so than individualistic (Richards, 2006) and used these activities repeatedly with students over each semester. These additional activities and exercises are intended to build upon and reinforce the target language, knowledge and concepts contained within these textbooks. Therefore, the aim of the researcher in this paper is to investigate and quantitatively measure the effectiveness of these communicative teaching activities and assess the students’ attitudes and perceptions toward them by answering the following two research questions:

RQ1 What is the effectiveness of the communicative teaching activities?

RQ2 What are the students’ attitudes and perceptions toward the communicative activities?

Literature Review

As English has grown in importance over the past few decades worldwide, the need to improve the quality and appropriateness of English language teaching, especially in the context of the English as a second language (ESL) and English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom, has concomitantly grown. Within this context, CLT has been increasingly influential in shaping language teaching since it was first proposed as a methodology in the 1970s (Richards, 2006). Communicative activities can be any type of ESL activity which

motivates and demands that the students interact with other students in the target language. This task-based teaching methodology encourages the authentic use of language and meaningful communication by providing students with scope for interactions amongst learners (Moss & Ross-Feldman, 2003).

CLT activities can include: task-completion activities, information-gathering activities, opinion-sharing activities, information-transfer activities, reasoning-gap activities and role plays based on pair and group work models (Richards, 2006). Furthermore, Moss and Ross-Feldman (2003) found, based on a comprehensive study of the extant literature on the subject, that the research supports these types of classroom practices, providing students with the chance to interact through meaningful learning activities.

Studies conducted within classroom contexts of countries across Asia have found positive outcomes and benefits for students resulting from the application of CLT methodology to teaching in ESL and EFL classrooms. For example, In China, Jin, Singh and Lee (2005) found, based on student feedback and examination results, that the CLT approach was advantageous, aroused student interest in English learning, and developed their learning autonomy more so than the traditional grammar-translation methodology. Moreover, Hu (2002) found that this traditional grammar-translation method “failed to develop an adequate level of communicative competence (i.e., the ability to use the target language for authentic communication) in millions of Chinese learners of English” (p. 93). In Indonesia, Meizaliana (2009) reported that games in the classroom facilitated senior high school students’ learning of English grammar structure while being enjoyable and exciting within a relaxed and interesting environment, and also enhanced students’ learning outcomes.

Within the Thai context, several studies have been conducted. Sayuen (2011) examined the effectiveness of five communicative tasks in improving the English speaking proficiency of Mattayomseuksa 6 students in Nongbuapittayakarn School and demonstrated that the five communicative tasks can improve students’ English speaking

proficiency. Similarly, Domesrifa (2008), who researched whether the communicative English speaking ability of Mattayomseuksa 1 students was enhanced by using oral communicative activities, concluded that the students' English speaking ability improved significantly after oral communicative activities were employed in the classroom. Noom-ura (2008), who studied students from the lowest ability group of Thammasat University first year students, found that by adding variety to the academic routine through activities such as educational games, puzzles and other techniques as much as possible was key to improving the skills of slow second language learners. The researcher stated that important factors in building a non-stressful environment in the classroom is to use role plays, games, and songs. Phisutthangkoon (2012), who researched the effectiveness of communicative activities with 32 first-year diploma students at Intrachai Commercial College, concluded that communicative activities were effective in improving the speaking ability of the students. Finally, Oradee (2012) investigated the speaking skills of Grade 11 students in Udon Thai before and after using communicative activities and found that their speaking abilities after the activities were significantly higher than before their use. She also studied their attitude toward the activities and found that they rated their attitude as good.

In the current study the researcher investigated the effectiveness of the application of a similar task-based teaching methodology as Moss and Ross-Feldman (2003) which included CLT activities similar to those devised by Richards (2006) (these activities will be explained in detail in the next section on methodology). The intention was to ascertain whether the activities improved the English proficiency as found by Domesrifa (2008), Sayuen (2011) and Oradee (2012) and were thus effective (RQ1). Furthermore, the intention was to ascertain whether the activities were enjoyable and exciting within a relaxed and interesting environment as found by Meizaliana (2009) and thus the students' attitudes and perceptions toward the activities were positive (RQ2).

Methodology

Overview

An empirical approach was taken and the research instrument was a pre- and post-test multiple-choice quiz. Once the students completed the activities covering one topic from the textbook (pp. 45–46), they undertook the pretest which consisted of ten multiple-choice questions. After the pretest was completed, they engaged in CLT activities, as this is the usually appropriate stage to conduct such activities (Gao, 2008). Once the pair, group and class communicative activities were concluded, they undertook the post-test, which consisted of the same ten multiple-choice question quiz. The process was repeated a second time (pp. 47–49). Finally, participants were asked to answer an attitudes questionnaire and a perceptions questionnaire. The entire process took approximately three hours, which is the length of a single class.

Textbook

The three classes worked through the first two Getting Started activities of Unit 2, Chapter 3 (titled “Gender Roles”) of the *Academic Encounters, Life in Society, Level 3: Listening and Speaking* textbook. This part of the textbook consists of a short reading introducing the topic of gender roles on page 45, which the students read and answered three questions about. The second activity on page 46 consists of a vocabulary-building exercise on the subject of personality traits, listing nine vocabulary items (e.g., mischievous, timid) that students matched with their definition and decided whether they were mostly innate or acquired. This first group of activities will hereafter be referred to as Section 1. The students were then pretested, then participated in two communicative activities, after which they were post-tested.

After that, they worked through the third activity on page 47 which consists of summaries of three fairy tales and listened to a listening of three people discussing the fairy tales, answering questions

about what they heard. The fourth activity on pages 48 to 49 is intended to introduce the concept of gender stereotypes by asking students about the kinds of behavior they believe parents expect from young children (e.g., “Who do parents expect to play with trains and trucks?”). This second group of activities will hereafter be referred to as Section 2. The students were again pretested, then participated in two communicative activities, after which they were post-tested.

Activities

The first activity administered on page 46 consisted of a survey that required each member of the class to ask their classmates a single question about personality traits, e.g., “Which gender do you think the trait mischievous belongs to?” with answers being either “men” or “women” as well as being either “mostly innate” or “mostly acquired,” thus a student might answer “I think men are more mischievous and it is mostly innate.” The questioner would then mark the appropriate box. After the students completed asking the other students their question and answering the questions of the other students, several students were selected at random to report their findings to the class.

The second activity was a “hot seat” type activity where the class was divided into two groups, with an X team and an O team, with one student from each group sitting at the front of the class with their back to the overhead. Upon the overhead was placed a selection of nine vocabulary items from the text (e.g., “mischievous,” “timid”) in a tic-tac-toe 3x3 grid with boxes numbered from one to nine. Each group then took turns picking a number and attempting to explain in English (without using their native language) the corresponding word or words to their representative at the front, who attempted to give the answer. The winner was the first team with three correct answers in a vertical, horizontal or diagonal row. If there was no winner, both teams were declared winners as both representatives had mastered the vocabulary sufficiently to block the other.

For the third activity the class was broken up into small groups (typically of four students each). The activity consisted of a board

game-type activity intended to encourage students to practice speaking about the corresponding material in the textbook. It contained several numbered boxes each with a question (14 in total) for the students to discuss (e.g., “Which fairy tale in the book shows a lot of male stereotypes?”). The students each placed a counter in the start box at the top left corner as the teacher distributed a die to each group. The students each took turns throwing the die, moving their counter and answering the questions upon which they landed using whole sentences. Once the last student reached the “end” box, the activity was completed. Subsequently, each group selected one question and one person from each group reported to the class, standing up and repeating their question and answer to the whole class.

The fourth activity was a card-type activity intended to practice the target language encountered in the target activities of the textbook. Another small group activity, the class was broken up into groups of approximately eight students and a deck of cards created by the teacher distributed to each group. Six cards were then dealt to each student and the remainder placed in the center of the group. Each card had a question on the top and a question on the bottom (e.g., Top: “Did you do the chores?” Bottom: “Did you take out the garbage?”) with a related picture in the middle. While there are several cards with matching top questions, there are only two matching bottom questions in each deck. Therefore, the goal of the activity is for each student to take turns in a clockwise direction selecting one other student and asking them the top and bottom question respectively. If the student gives a negative answer to either, the asking student picks up a card from the center; however, if a positive response is given to both questions, the answerer must give the asker the card, who places them both down in front of them and is credited with one point. The next student takes their turn. The activity continues until all cards have been matched together and the student with the most points declared the winner.

Instruments

The research instrument was a pretest and post-test which were identical and consisted of ten multiple choice questions each with four answers, only one of which was correct. The question related directly to the material the students had just encountered in the textbook (e.g., from Section 1: “What does ‘timid’ mean? (a) nice; (b) kind; (c) indecisive; (d) shy” and from Section 2: “What are ‘overalls’? (a) clothes; (b) toys; (c) games; (d) privileges”). As noted above in the overview, once the students completed the activities covering one topic from the textbook (pp. 45–46), they undertook the first pretest. After the first pretest was completed, they engaged in two CLT activities, then undertook the first post-test, which consisted of the same ten multiple-choice question quiz. Next, the students completed the activities covering another topic from the textbook (pp. 47–49), and then undertook the second pretest. After the second pretest was completed, they engaged in two more CLT activities, and then undertook the second post-test, which consisted of the same ten multiple-choice question quiz. The multiple-choice test tool was selected for this current research to measure the knowledge of the students as it is widely used and can be objectively scored and statistically analyzed for valid, reliable and unbiased diagnostic information about the learning of students. Nevertheless, the method has several drawbacks such as students having the possibility of selecting a correct answer that they do not know by making a random choice (The University of Texas at Austin, n.d.).

After the testing was completed, participants were asked to answer an attitudes questionnaire and a perceptions questionnaire which consisted of a Likert-type five-point scale rating system adopted from Phisutthangkoon (2012). There is a body of literature supporting the use of attitudes and perceptions with ESL learners, including the important work on the subject, *How to Measure Attitudes* by Henderson, Morris, and Fitz-Gibbon (1987), and the measuring of attitudes and perceptions has been conducted by an extensive number

of researchers across a wide range of fields; however, it is outside the limited purview of this paper and thus an exposition of such research will not be undertaken here. Finally, the students were asked seven open-ended questions intended to help students relate their point of view about communicative activities without limitation. Henderson et al. (1987) argued that open-ended questions stand out in contradistinction to checking off items on a set list as participants might feel that possible answers and their attitudes do not match and that open-ended questions allow participants to provide exact responses.

The data collected in the pre- and post-tests were statistically analyzed using SPSS to ascertain if there was a significant difference in the students' knowledge and understanding of the subject matter in the textbook before and after using communicative activities to measure the effectiveness of the communicative teaching activities (RQ1). Likewise, the attitudes and perceptions questionnaires were statistically analyzed to measure the students' attitudes and perceptions toward the activities developed by the researcher (RQ2). The data from the two classes of the second semester of B.E. 2558 (hereafter referred to as Cohort 1) were combined so results can be presented as one data set; while the data from the first semester of B.E. 2559 (hereafter referred to as Cohort 2) is presented separately to facilitate a comparison between the two cohorts.

Results

Pretests and post-tests

The mean scores of the two pre- and post-tests were analyzed using the paired *t*-test to measure the effectiveness of the communicative activities in terms of students' understanding and knowledge of the subject matter and target language of two sections of the textbook. As can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2 relating to Cohort 1, the results demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test mean scores in both cases.

Table 1 Comparison of overall mean scores of Section 1 pre- and post-test of Cohort 1

Section 1	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>	P-value
Pretest	64	5.83	1.454	-3.938	.000*
Post-test	64	6.72	1.647		

*sig. <0.05

In relation to Cohort 1, Table 1 shows a significant difference between the pre- and post-test of the students' understanding and knowledge of Section 1 (pp. 45–46). The mean score of the post-test (Mean = 6.72, S.D. = 1.647) was higher than the mean score of the pretest (Mean = 5.83, S.D. = 1.454).

Table 2 Comparison of overall mean scores of Section 2 pre- and post-test of Cohort 1

Section 2	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>	P-value
Pretest	64	5.13	1.579	-10.644	.000*
Post-test	64	7.09	1.094		

*sig. <0.05

In relation to Cohort 1, Table 2 shows a significant difference between the pre- and post-test of the students' understanding and knowledge of Section 2 (pp. 47–49). The mean score of the post-test (Mean = 7.09, S.D. = 1.094) was higher than the mean score of the pretest (Mean = 5.13, S.D. = 1.579).

As can be seen in Table 3 and Table 4 relating to Cohort 2, the results demonstrate that there is a statistically significant difference between the pre- and post-test mean scores in both cases.

Table 3 Comparison of overall mean scores of Section 1 pre- and post-test of Cohort 2

Section 1	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>	P-value
Pretest	35	5.43	1.632	-5.164	.000*
Post-test	35	6.06	1.798		

*sig. <0.05

In relation to Cohort 2, Table 3 shows a significant difference between the pre- and post-test of the students' understanding and knowledge of Section 1 (pp. 45–46). The mean score of the post-test (Mean = 6.06, S.D. = 1.798) was higher than the mean score of the pretest (Mean = 5.43, S.D. = 1.632).

Table 4 Comparison of overall mean scores of Section 2 pre- and post-test of Cohort 2

Section 2	N	Mean	S.D.	<i>t</i>	P-value
Pretest	35	4.31	1.778	-8.131	.000*
Post-test	35	5.31	2.153		

*sig. <0.05

In relation to Cohort 2, Table 4 shows a significant difference between the pre- and post-test of the students' understanding and knowledge of Section 2 (pp. 47–49). The mean score of the post-test (Mean = 5.31, S.D. = 2.153) was higher than the mean score of the pretest (Mean = 4.31, S.D. = 1.778).

Attitudes and perceptions

Students' attitudes toward the communicative activities used in class were assessed based on a five-point Likert scale rating system questionnaire (in which 1 is "very low", 2 "low", 3 "average", 4 "high", and 5 "very high").

Table 5 Students' attitudes toward communicative activities of Cohort 1

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D.
1. The communicative activities are interesting.	64	3	5	4.27	.570
2. The communicative activities are varied, enjoyable, and fun.	64	3	5	4.20	.596
3. The content of communicative activities and the activities themselves are suitable for your proficiency level.	64	1	5	3.83	.788
4. The procedure of using communicative activities is clear.	64	2	5	3.92	.650
5. The topics and the content of communicative activities suit your needs.	64	1	5	3.83	.767
6. The pictures provided in the communicative activities help you understand the activities.	64	2	5	4.13	.745
7. The communicative activities are challenging.	64	1	5	3.95	.765
8. You understand the purpose of the communicative activities clearly.	64	3	5	4.08	.719
9. Communicative activities motivate you to speak English.	64	1	5	3.95	.862
10. Communicative activities are appropriate for use in English class.	64	2	5	4.08	.650
OVERALL MEAN SCORE 3.99 / S.D. 0.711					

In relation to Cohort 1, Table 5 summarizes student attitudes regarding the communicative activities and their use in the classroom. Items 1, 2, 6, 8, and 10 rated in the very high range; while items 3, 4, 5, 7, and 9 rated in the high range. Overall the mean score was 3.99, which falls just outside the very high range; while overall standard deviation was 0.711.

Students' perceptions toward the communicative activities used in class were assessed based on a five-point scale Likert rating system questionnaire (in which 1 is "very untrue", 2 "untrue", 3 "uncertain", 4 "true", and 5 "very true").

Table 6 Students' perceptions toward communicative activities of Cohort 1

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D.
1. Learning through communicative activities provides a relaxed atmosphere and you are happy to learn English.	64	2	5	4.50	.617
2. Learning through communicative activities helps you to improve your speaking ability.	64	2	5	4.02	.701
3. Learning through communicative activities increases your self-confidence in speaking English.	64	2	5	4.03	.689
4. You understand the procedure of doing the communicative activities clearly.	64	2	5	3.83	.703
5. Communicative activities encourage learners' classroom participation.	64	2	5	4.41	.684
6. Learning through communicative activities promotes good relationships among learners as well as between learners and the teacher.	64	2	5	4.39	.726
7. Learning through communicative activities activates learner's needs and interests.	64	1	5	4.06	.710
8. You realize that English is important after learning through communicative activities.	64	2	5	4.36	.675
9. Learning through communicative activities encourages you to think and increases your self-confidence.	64	2	5	4.20	.717
10. Learning through communicative activities helps you learn English naturally.	64	3	5	4.14	.639
11. You like to learn English using communicative activities.	64	2	5	4.37	.701
12. You can apply the knowledge in the classroom to use in your daily life after learning through communicative activities.	64	1	5	4.08	.719
OVERALL MEAN SCORE 4.26 / S. D. 0.690					

In relation to Cohort 1, Table 6 summarizes students' perceptions regarding the communicative activities. Items 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 rated in the very true range; while only item 4 rated in the true range. Overall the mean score was 4.26, which is in the very true range; while overall standard deviation was 0.690.

Students' attitudes toward the communicative activities used in class were assessed based on a five-point Likert scale rating system questionnaire (in which 1 is "very low", 2 "low", 3 "average", 4 "high", and 5 "very high").

Table 7 Students' attitudes toward communicative activities of Cohort 2

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D.
1. The communicative activities are interesting.	35	3	5	4.29	.622
2. The communicative activities are varied, enjoyable, and fun.	35	2	5	4.46	.780
3. The content of communicative activities and the activities themselves are suitable for your proficiency level.	35	2	5	4.14	.692
4. The procedure of using communicative activities is clear.	35	3	5	4.03	.785
5. The topics and the content of communicative activities suit your needs.	35	3	5	4.14	.692
6. The pictures provided in the communicative activities help you understand the activities.	35	3	5	4.37	.731
7. The communicative activities are challenging.	35	3	5	4.15	.657
8. You understand the purpose of the communicative activities clearly.	35	3	5	4.17	.785
9. Communicative activities motivate you to speak English.	35	3	5	4.20	.632
10. Communicative activities are appropriate for use in English class.	35	3	5	4.26	.701
OVERALL MEAN SCORE 4.22 / S. D. 0.701					

In relation to Cohort 2, Table 7 summarizes student attitudes regarding the communicative activities and their use in the classroom. All 10 items rated in the very high range. Overall the mean score was 4.22, which falls within the very high range; while overall standard deviation was 0.701.

Students' perceptions toward the communicative activities used in class were assessed based on a five-point Likert scale rating system questionnaire (in which 1 is "very untrue", 2 "untrue", 3 "uncertain", 4 "true", and 5 "very true").

Table 8 Students' perceptions toward communicative activities of Cohort 2

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D.
1. Learning through communicative activities provides a relaxed atmosphere and you are happy to learn English.	35	3	5	4.43	.698
2. Learning through communicative activities helps you to improve your speaking ability.	35	3	5	4.11	.758
3. Learning through communicative activities increases your self-confidence in speaking English.	35	3	5	3.97	.707
4. You understand the procedure of doing the communicative activities clearly.	35	3	5	4.11	.718
5. Communicative activities encourage learners' classroom participation.	35	2	5	4.18	.716
6. Learning through communicative activities promotes good relationships among learners as well as between learners and the teacher.	35	3	5	4.37	.690
7. Learning through communicative activities activates learner's needs and interests.	35	3	5	4.06	.725
8. You realize that English is important after learning through communicative activities.	35	3	5	4.23	.690
9. Learning through communicative activities encourages you to think and increases your self-confidence.	35	2	5	4.20	.719

Item	N	Min.	Max.	Mean	S. D.
10. Learning through communicative activities helps you learn English naturally.	35	3	5	4.31	.676
11. You like to learn English using communicative activities.	35	3	5	4.23	.808
12. You can apply the knowledge in the classroom to use in your daily life after learning through communicative activities.	35	3	5	4.11	.718
OVERALL MEAN SCORE 4.19 / S. D. 0.719					

In relation to Cohort 2, Table 8 summarizes students' perceptions regarding the communicative activities. Items 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, and 12 rated in the very true range; while only item 3 rated in the true range. Overall the mean score was 4.19, which is in the very true range; while overall standard deviation was 0.719.

Open-ended questions

It is the open-ended questions that perhaps provide the greatest insight into the attitudes and perceptions of the students. The participants were asked seven questions: (1) Do you like learning through the communicative activities? Why?; (2) Do you gain any benefits from learning through the communicative activities?; (3) Do you have any problems while doing the activities?; (4) Do you agree with using communicative activities in the classroom?; (5) Do you improve yourself after learning through communicative activities?; (6) Do you think you can apply the knowledge in class to use in your daily life?; and (7) Do you have any suggestions?

Cohort 1

Regarding question 1, do you like learning through the communicative activities? Why? 63 of the 64 students of Cohort 1 responded in the affirmative, that they like learning through the

communicative activities and gain benefits from learning through them. In response to question 1, a student wrote: “Yes, because learning through communications motivates us to speak more fluently, and in the meantime, it also helps us to consider the correct grammar we should use while speaking as well.” One student responded in the negative.

Regarding question 2, do you gain any benefits from learning through the communicative activities? Again 63 of the 64 students responded in the affirmative (the same student who responded in the negative to question 1 also responded in the negative here). In response to question 2, a student wrote: “I can remember some vocabulary I have never heard before. I can get along with other friends.” In answer to question 3, a question intended to elicit answers about difficulties with the activities, although 20 students responded that they did not have problems, 39 students did comment on difficulties they had experienced, while the remaining five did not comment. The three most reported problems were to do with difficulties either understanding instructions (10 students), communicating in English (nine students), or understanding vocabulary (eight students). For example, a student wrote in regards to understanding instructions: “Yes, I confuse for order and rule in activities.” Another noted in regards to communicating in English: “Yes, I do. My problems is I afraid to speak English.” Finally, another student noted in regards to understanding vocabulary: “Sometimes I have problems about the words that I don’t understand clearly.”

In response to question 4, 56 students from Cohort 1 agreed with using communicative activities in the classroom, seven students did not respond, while one student responded negatively (the same student who responded in the negative to questions 1 and 2 also responded in the negative here: see discussion below). A student wrote: “Yes, I agree with using communicative activities because I think it is a good way to learn English because when student feel enjoy, relax and fun, they will want to speak and that is help them improve English communication.” In response to question 5, 57 students agreed with

using communicative activities in the classroom, six students did not respond, while again the same student responded negatively to the question about improving themselves after learning through communicative activities. A student wrote: “Yes, I do. I get confident to speak English and express my thought in order to communicate with others.” To question 6, 52 students agreed that they think they can apply the knowledge learned in class to use in their daily life, while eight students did not answer the question, three students were unsure, and the same student as mentioned above disagreed. For example, a student wrote: “Yes, I do because I can use the conversation in the class with other people in my life.”

In response to question 7 soliciting suggestions, 20 students from Cohort 1 made comments, while 44 students left the space blank. Twelve of these comments were in fact not suggestions, but positive comments regarding communicative activities, e.g., “I support communication activities.” Of the other eight, two were in relation to making vocabulary easier to understand, two suggested increasing the use of communicative activities, two suggested reducing activities that required them to walk around the class and to focus instead on group work, one suggested reducing the number of students in the class, while the final negative suggestion (from the same student who responded in the negative mentioned previously) was to “don’t do a lot of communication activities.”

Cohort 2

Regarding question 1, do you like learning through the communicative activities? Why? 30 of the 35 students of Cohort 2 responded in the affirmative, that they like learning through the communicative activities and gain benefits from learning through them, while five did not respond to the question. In response to question 1, a student wrote: “Yes, I really like it. It make me feel good, enjoy, laugh and want to study English.”

Regarding question 2, do you gain any benefits from learning through the communicative activities? Twenty-nine of the 35 students

responded in the affirmative, while five did not respond to the question. In response to question 2, a student wrote: “I get many benefits from learning through the communicative activities is vocabulary.” In answer to question 3, a question intended to elicit answers about difficulties with the activities, although 20 students responded that they did not have problems, 13 students did comment on difficulties they had experienced, while the remaining two did not comment. The three most reported were to do with difficulties either understanding instructions (five students), listening in English (two students), or understanding vocabulary (two students). For example, a student wrote in regards to understanding instructions: “Sometimes don’t understand the direction of activities.” Another noted in regards to listening in English: “Sometimes listen uncarfully.” Finally, another student noted in regards to understanding vocabulary: “Yes, I have a little bit problem with vocab I don’t remember.”

In response to question 4, 24 students from Cohort 2 agreed with using communicative activities in the classroom, while 11 students did not respond. A student wrote: “Yes, it’s great activities in the classroom.” In response to question 5, 24 students agreed with using communicative activities in the classroom, while 11 students did not respond. A student wrote: “Yes, I can improve myself and enjoy in the class.” Another wrote: “Yes, after class I can study vocabulary for self-study and interest.” To question 6, 26 students agreed that they thought they could apply the knowledge learned in class to use in their daily life, while one student was unsure and eight students did not respond. For example, a student wrote: “Yes, I can speak with foreigners well.”

In response to question 7 soliciting suggestions, eight students made comments, while 27 students left the space blank. Six of these comments were in fact not suggestions, but positive comments regarding communicative activities, e.g., “I love this class. Makes me happy and laugh every class. Thank you teacher.” Of the two actual suggestions, one suggested using more communicative activities in class, and the other suggested other teachers should use them.

Discussion

Textbook

Having taught the LC4002 course for 18 semesters for up to three classes per semester using the textbook, it is the view of this researcher that the textbook is suitable for this course with students that are typically at early intermediate level, despite the fact that the texts are intended for use with intermediate to high intermediate students. In the view of this researcher, the text is beneficial for students as a result of the diverse yet cohesive range of subjects they cover in each of the four units (Unit 1, “Belonging to a Group”; Unit 2, “Gender in Society”; Unit 3, “Media and Society”; and Unit 4, “Breaking the Rules”), and because of the inclusion in the listening/speaking text of high quality listening activities (and, in the reading text of which sections are used, the inclusion of readings with a thematic content which is of interest to the students). In the view of this researcher (based on the feedback from the students and the researcher’s own observations), the text is also successful as it introduces students to American sociological issues which broadens the outlook of the students, encourages them to express themselves and their opinions freely, and introduces them to a wide range of vocabulary which is unfamiliar to the majority but which is stimulating for them to learn.

However, it is also the view of the researcher that the note-taking sections of the text tends to be beyond the grasp of the majority who, as previously mentioned, can be characterized as being mostly at the early intermediate level, whereas the texts are intended for intermediate to high intermediate. Moreover, although the text does include some teaching activities which could be described as communicative, for the most part, the activities are not. Therefore, although the textbook is on the whole appropriate for the students, to follow it without flexibility would not meet the language needs of the students, and in all probability the majority would quickly lose interest, particularly those with weaker English skills.

RQ1 What is the effectiveness of the communicative teaching activities?

As the two pre- and post-tests demonstrate for both cohorts of students with significant differences in understanding and knowledge

at the .05 level, the follow-up communicative activities that were specifically designed to work in tandem with the textbooks and reinforce their content did result in increased understanding and knowledge of the content of the subjects covered by the textbook. The mean score of the post-tests were all significantly higher than the pretests for both cohorts, but were particularly high in regards to the results for Cohort 1, with Section 1 increasing from a mean of 5.83 (S.D. of 1.454) to 6.72 (S.D. of 1.647) and Section 2 increasing from a mean of 5.13 (S.D. 1.579) to 7.09 (S.D. 1.094). Meanwhile, the results for Cohort 2 were also significant, with Section 1 increasing from a mean of 5.43 (S.D. 1.632) to 6.06 (S.D. 1.732) and Section 2 increasing from a mean of 4.31 (S.D. 1.778) to 5.31 (S.D. 2.153). Therefore, the communicative teaching activities can be said to have been effective. This contrast highlights the benefit of employing communicative activities that build on a textbook; which, if employed alone, may not be as effective.

RQ2 What are the students' attitudes and perceptions toward the communicative activities?

The results from the attitudes and perceptions questionnaires clearly demonstrate that students found the communicative activities created a relaxed atmosphere which encouraged participation in the classroom and promoted good relations among learners who found the activities to be interesting, enjoyable, and motivating – at the high to very high level for attitudes and the very true level for perceptions. Regarding attitudes, Cohort 1 had an overall mean score of 3.99 (overall S. D. 0.711), which is just below the very high range; while Cohort 2 had an overall mean score of 4.22 (overall S. D. 0.701), which is in the very high range. Regarding perceptions, Cohort 1 had an overall mean score of 4.26 (overall S. D. 0.690), which is in the very true range; while Cohort 2 had an overall mean score of 4.19 (overall S. D. 0.719), which is also in the very true range. Therefore, the communicative teaching activities can be said to have been well perceived by the students and that they had a high to very high

attitude toward them. Furthermore, the comments made by students in response to the seven open-ended questions were overwhelmingly positive and in support of using communicative activities in the classroom.

However, the results also revealed some problems with the use of communicative activities in the classroom, particularly regarding instruction on how to conduct the activities and the complexity of the vocabulary included in them. Therefore, the researcher should spend more time before beginning each communicative activity to explain clearly to students how to go about the activity at hand. Also, the researcher should find a way to assist students in their understanding of the more difficult vocabulary, such as by placing definitions for the higher level vocabulary items on an overhead for the class so that they can readily comprehend and learn them, perhaps including images. The researcher could also spend more time pronouncing difficult target language vocabulary clearly for the students.

There was only one anomalous student in Cohort 1 who consistently gave low attitudes and perceptions ratings and who commented negatively about the use of communication activities in class in the open-ended questions, stating that “I expect from this class it’s not just the communicative activities but I expect to learn how to present in formal type.” However, the course outline for LC4002 clearly states that instruction is “task-based, student-centered and participative.” Also, from the outset of the course, the teaching approach was made abundantly clear. It is difficult to know how to address dealing with a single student with different expectations from those of the overwhelming majority. However, if more students in future were to have the same miss-match between expectation and delivery – for whatever reason – it would be necessary to consider adjusting the course to accommodate them.

Limitations

A limitation of this study was the number of students (only 99) that participated in it, drawn from only three classes spread over two

semesters, as well as the study's short duration, with the research taking place in three, three-hour classes. A further limitation of the current study was that it was conducted in class 5 of the 15-class course, thus the students had only been exposed to a limited range of different communicative activities. Had the research been undertaken in a later class, after a greater variety of activities had been employed, the attitudes and perceptions results may have been different.

Recommendations

Despite the limited scope of this study, the following recommendations are made. Teachers using textbooks such as *Academic Encounters*, *Life in Society*, *Level 3: Listening and Speaking* with second or foreign language students should be flexible in their approach and not restrict themselves only to the text. Teachers should consider adapting the text to meet the needs of the students by creating original communicative activities that are specific to the textbook being used as these can increase the understanding of the students and create an enjoyable and relaxing learning environment which encourages learners – factors which as Richards (2006), Littlewood (1998) and others have argued are key to improving learner language acquisition.

However, teachers should be careful to ensure that instruction is clear and new vocabulary is introduced in such a way as to be readily learned by the students. Also, the activities developed by each teacher should be continually refined and improved to meet the needs of each cohort of students, while adjusting the communicative activities as necessary to match the level of the students. Other helpful practical advice that can be drawn from this research and proffered for other pedagogues is to continually encourage all students to participate in communicative activities by offering constant positive feedback to students, to be vigilant to encourage students to speak as much as possible in the target language, and structure activities to include a high level of guidance on correct grammar structures for the students to follow. Lastly, a wide range of different types of activities should be employed by teachers and applied to enhance the material in

their textbooks, which should help to maintain the attention and interest of students over the duration of a course.

The Author

Andrew J. West has been teaching at NIDA for the past six years, before which he taught at Ramkhamhaeng University and Thammasat University. He has also written extensively about Thai art and been a guest lecturer in art criticism at Silpakorn University. He studied writing and journalism at Western Sydney University (WSU), graduating with an MA (Writing).

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