HOW TO HELP ESL G.1 STUDENTS IMPROVE COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS WITH COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

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ESL Grade 1

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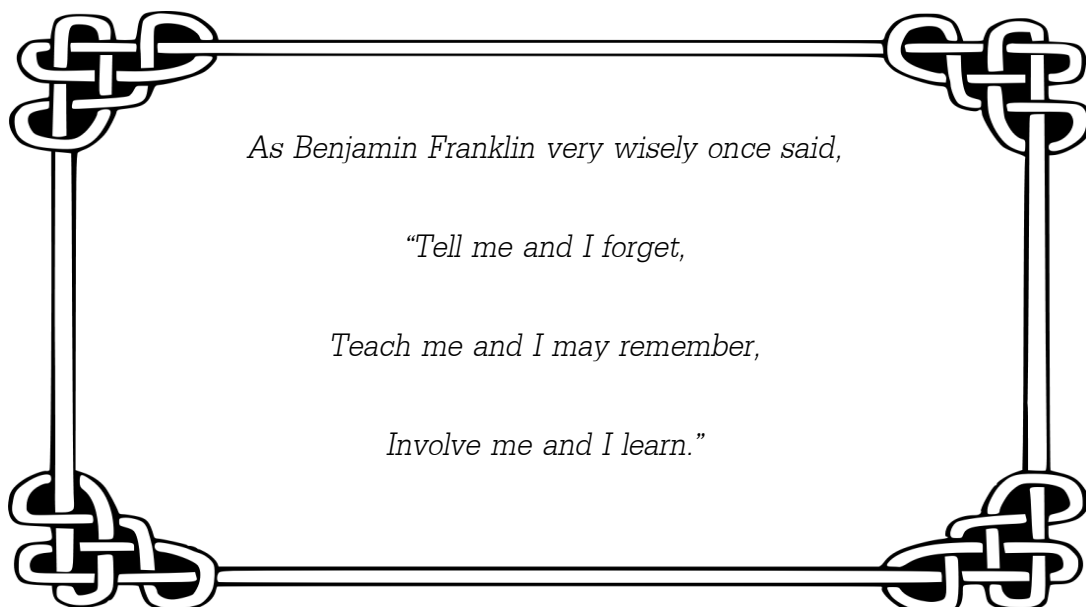
HOW TO IMPROVE ENGLISH SPEAKING?

HOW TO HELP ESL G.1 STUDENTS IMPROVE COMMUNICATIVE SKILLS WITH COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

By Kunlatida Luangthep (T.Por)

Abstract

This paper provides a simple investigation into the application of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context in Plearnpattana School, and G.1 in particular. It reveals that CLT has started to be acknowledged and espoused by English language teachers at the classroom level (it is applied only in the last term of 2018 semester). Additionally, it shows the result of students speaking ability through the communicative approach. This paper also argues that effective communicative approach needs an effective evaluation tool and a frequency of real life communication practice rather than speaking on academic purpose (grammar based knowledge). Also it is suggested that to reduce class size with the help of technology and provide safe environment for speaking would help increase G.1 students' English speaking performance.

Introduction

As Benjamin Franklin very wisely once said,

"Tell me and I forget,

Teach me and I may remember,

Involve me and I learn."

Since kindergarten to elementary, G.1students are surely not able to communicate well in English. Since term 1, they are learning to endure longer time of learning English, sit properly at their seats, to do the workbook exercises, and recognize the English letters and their sounds. Then they learn how to read short words (CVC) to begin their reading skill. And in term 3-4, they start to read books at their level and learn to construct sentences. However after 3 terms, students show an improvement in their English and they began to speak some English in their daily routine as greeting, asking some permission and answering patterned questions. Then in term 4, the academic team discovered that the emphasis is mainly on the reading skill, our English teaching overlooked the speaking skill which is another key factor of the language learner. Therefore a decision was made to adapt the lesson plans in term 4 to help students practice speaking with their friends more often than the previous terms.

1. EFL vs. ESL

In recent decades, the terms EFL and ESL are the most commonly used in the academic field. As a major world language, in addition to being spoken as a native language by many throughout the world, English is acquired as a second language by a greater number of people, and learned as a foreign language by an even larger population. **The basic difference between EFL (English as a foreign language) and ESL (English as a second language) lies in the language environment in which the non-native speakers learn English (Judd, 2007). A non-native English speaker who studies English in an environment where the majority population speaks a language other than English is studying EFL, whereas if the majority population speaks English, he/she is studying ESL.** In EFL context, classroom is the

predominant source of learning English. Exposure to English and using English for any purpose outside the classroom are very limited. In contrast, in ESL context, non-native speakers communicate primarily in English, thereby all language skills—listening, speaking, reading, and writing—can be practiced in a variety of registers when using English to meet a variety of life demands.

2. The context of Plearnpattana school

In Plearnpattana school context, students learn English as foreign language (EFL) which mean classroom is the predominant source of learning English. Without an English-speaking environment, exposure to English and using English for any purpose outside the classroom are very limited. Then to help students in this context apply more English in their speaking, it is recommended to implement communicative approach in the lesson plan. However this idea was implemented in term 4 of 2018 semester so the data that has been collected for this research is at the prior state and it would need further observation and evaluation to gain more accurate result and precise judgment for the future adjustment of the curriculum. Therefore this research is written based on a data collected from 2 classes (1/1&1/4) from plan 101 to 701 of Grade 1 lesson plan in term 4. This mini research aims to examine how application of Communicative Language approach in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context can help improve the ability to speak English of G1 Students, 1/1 and 1/4 class in particular.

3. The method

According to Plearnpattana lesson plan, it is consisted of 6 steps of teaching and learning which are:

Step 1 Readiness and Inspiration

Step 2 Preparation for Learning (Input and Unfold)

Step 3 Formation of Situational Language Problem

Step 4 Language Creation or Problem Solving

Step 5 Interaction of Knowledge

Step 6 Conclusion/ Synthesis / Creation of New Knowledge

The communicative approach is implemented in step 3-5. In step 3, teacher will give instruction and explain about the activity of the lesson then in step 4 students do the activity and in step 5 they share what they have learned. Likewise they would be given a situation and communicate in English to solve the problem which would combine step 4&5 together.

In this term students learn about the Dream House. Term main objectives are reading stories, using preposition correctly, generating idea and writing target sentences correctly, speaking with confidence and proper pronunciation. The communicative approach has been applied to help students achieve speaking with confidence and proper pronunciation in the conversation about house, furniture and toy.

In plan 101, the communicative learning was used in the activity 'Jigsaw Puzzle' game. Students helped each other to arrange the jigsaw puzzle and each group shared what pictures they have got by saying "This is a (parts of a house)." The result showed that each group could acknowledge parts of the house vocabs

after the input and exercise. They were able to answer automatically with the previous

knowledge about sentence structure from last term.

Pictures for Plan 101

In plan 102, students played 'Look for fun game' in groups of 6. Each group

chose a volunteer to look inside the picture of a house in the box and tell their friends

to color accordingly. They would say ('I can see a (parts of a house). It is (color).'

From this activity, volunteer students are mostly type A students, who are fast

learners so they have no problem to speak it out as instructed. However, type B

students can also say out the sentence with some helps from teacher. For the type C

students, some are more than happy to just listen to their friends rather than be the

one who dictate their friends in front of the class. But some who are extrovert have

tried to play this game with guidance from teacher because they still struggle to

recall the vocabs. For the listening, it seems that all students can listen well and color

quite correctly.

In plan 103, students played "guessing game" where students choose a part

of the house to draw and color without letting their friends know. Then they pair up

with their friends and come in front of the class to guess the picture. The first person asks question 'what can you see?' and open half of the paper to his friends. Then his partner will guess and answer "I can see a _____." The first person will answer 'yes' or 'no.' If it is correct, the next person starts his turn. But if it is not correct, they will continue asking and answering until they get the correct answer. This activity is quite challenging for students as they have to communicate to achieve the mission but it stimulates them to have a conversation in English with each other. From the teacher observation, there is no problem with type A students, but for type B they need more help to speak fluently while type C, they lean on teacher's assistance heavily to guide them to complete the sentence and adjust their audibility.

Pictures for Plan 103

In **plan 201**, there is no communicative activity. Only practice saying the words about rooms in the house.

In **plan 202**, students played game "**Passing the ball**." The first round each student would pass the ball to the person next to him/her and say the words about room. Then the second round students would pass the ball and say the words about

furniture. Finally the third round the students would pass the ball and say the room then the next person would say the furniture in the room. From the observation, students enjoy this game and most of them can recall the words in round 1 and 2 quite easily. However for round 3, some students were confused and took quite some time to recall the words in different categories. Though this activity is not very communicative but at least it helps students to say out the words in a fun and creative way.

Pictures for Plan 202

In plan 203, there is no communicative activity as it is a reading day plan.

In plan 301, there is no communicative activity as it is a writing focused plan.

In plan 302, there is no communicative activity as it is a quiz plan.

In plan 303, there is no communicative activity as it is a reading day plan.

In plan 401, there is no communicative activity. Students make a robot from a tissue core.

In plan 402, students play game "fun drawing." Students are divided into 3 groups and each group would send a person who can read well to read a sentences provided by teacher (ex. The robot is small.) The rest of the students will take turn to draw a picture accordingly to what their friends read. The team that can finish drawing and draw correctly gets the point. From the observation, typed A student are the one their friends choose to read and student are more attentive to their friends' reading. Most of them can draw a picture correctly. Only some students are too excited and draw wrongly or some are confused with the words 'in on under so they make a mistake'.
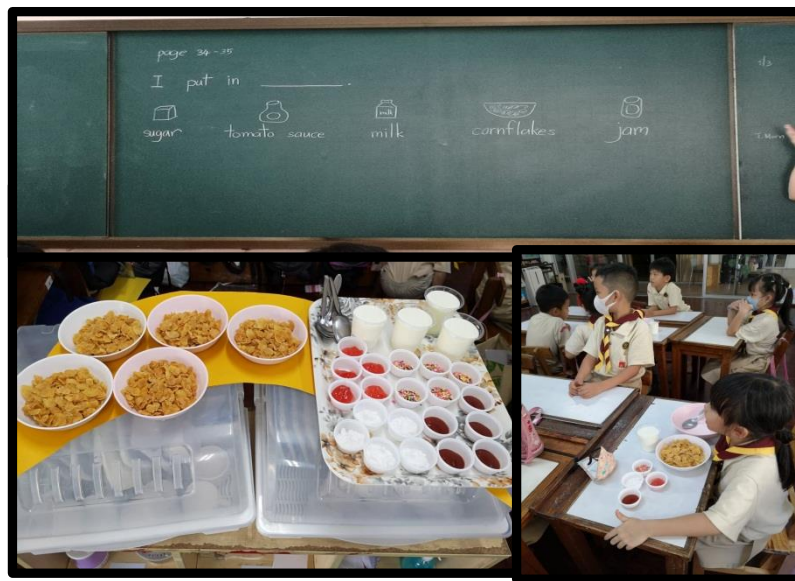

Pictures for Plan 402

In plan 403, students use their listening skill and the preposition comprehension to do the exercise. They have to draw a robot according to teacher. Teachers say the robot is under the sofa, the robot is on the bed and the robot is in the bath. All students can draw correctly.

In plan 501, student practice speaking through the activity: 'mix and eat'. As a group students have to mix all ingredients from the ORT books 'the toy party' which is

cornflakes, milk, sugar, sprinkles and tomato sauce in a bowl and tell their friends in the others group what they have put in a bowl and finally the student will eat their food. During the cornflakes cooking, they have to say each ingredient in a sentence: 'I put in the _____'. From this activity, students can recognize vocabs from the ORT books and speak in English in a fun way. From observation, even type C students are willing to speak out as they are anticipated to eat the food.

Pictures for Plan 501

In plan 502, there is no communicative activity as it is a witting practice.

In plan 503, students learn to practice their speaking to the presentation of my favorite toy. Each student comes in front of the class to present the picture of their favorite toy and says my favorite toy is a (doll, train, robot and etc.). It is (color) and (color). From observation to the improvement of type c students, they are more confident and their voices are more audible which mean that they are quite familiar with the speaking activity. Through they are not fully accurate but their fluency is improved.

In plan 601, there is no communicative activity as it is a writing practice.

In plan 602, there is no communicative activity as it is a reading day plan.

In plan 701, it is term test and sadly there is no proper test that can identify their speaking level. However the result of the term test is satisfactory. There are 15 students from 1/1 class can get full score which is half of the class. And only one student fails the test with missing of 0.5 score. Also there are 13 students gotten full score and only 2 student fails the test. This shows that students' comprehension in this tern is high and it can imply that the speaking activity might have some effects to their learning competency.

From this data, we can see that the application of Communicative approach for grade one in this term is present in the lesson plan and it becomes a mean to help enhance the comprehension of English to students. However we cannot expect that students would be able to have a conversation in English through such limited practices. From the lesson plan we can see that the quantity of communicative activity is minimal compared to the overall lesson plans and the objective of speaking activity is not for a real life communication but focused on academic purpose. Also the lack of effective assessment in alignment with communicative skill makes it difficult to evaluate the progress of students. It would be good for the future that the evaluation tool would be designed to enhance the ability to use the language for communication rather than structurally based knowledge about English as a linguistic system.

4. Other factors:
   •Class size

Apart from the communicative approach used during the term to enhance the speaking performance of the students in EFL environment, class size and safe environment to practice speaking foreign language are to be considered as well. Due to my observation, 30 students per 1 EFL teacher creates a high ratio student teacher. It means the number of students is too much for a teacher to give enough support and care within one teaching period. Especially when comes to speaking practice. This skill requires close attention and interaction from teacher to make a proper formative assessment. From my experience I struggle a lot to regularly help 8 students from 1/4 class to understand the instruction of the activity and I also needs to pay attention to the rest of the class. It is also the similar case with 1/1 class. Through this class is plenty of fast learners but there are 4 slow learners who feel very discourage when left without help from teacher. At that time I really wish the class size would be smaller to 15 students per 1 teacher so that I could give enough care and attention for them and able to help the slow learners more effectively. Through this changes is beyond my control but I also want to find a creative way to solve this problem.

It would be good if we can bring innovation and technology such as a language lab (student computer's room) or Ipad reading time with headphone to divided half of the class to practice listening and reading by themselves while the others half spent time interacting with teacher. These would help minimize time for

class management and teacher supervision so that teacher can pay enough attention to the class.

   • Safe environment to practice speaking English

This factor is what I determine to create in my classroom next semester. After sometime of reflection, I think young learners as grade 1, they have no personal reason to learn English. It is simply another subject that they have to study at school or that their parents have told them they need to learn. At this point in their lives, they may not know or comprehend how important these classes can be. They might view my classes as simply another thing to do at school and that is just fine. But my responsibility is to encourage them to develop an interest in learning English which will stay with them long after they have finished my classes. Form the previous term, I think I try to pursue them to speak English through proper plan and strategic communicative method but what I miss is the regular fun and entertainment for them (it doesn't mean no fun activity but fun character). I think I am quite focus on class and time management so when time constrain I am quite rush to finish the class and spoil the atmosphere. I also may focus on the correct sentence and correct their saying which might make them feel intimidate to speak especially the introvert.

Therefore what I think I want to do create more safe and supportive environment for them by encouraging students to try their best and create a constructive learning environment where students do not need to worry about making mistakes. Focus less on grammatical form and more on meaning. Try to create activities and exercises that are entertaining. Constantly review and avoid introducing too much new vocabulary

at a time. Provide more repetition for slow learners as they may not remember material from one day to the next.

5. Conclusion:

To help student in EFL environment speak in English, communicative approach is a way to increase their speaking performance and overall learning. However it also require effective evaluation tool to measure their progress and real life topic that help foster the conversation rather than achieve academic propose. Also to set an environment of low student teacher ratio with the help of technology will increase attention and frequency of speaking for students which leads to better oral performance. Lastly the safe and supportive environment provide by teacher will also create happy learning place for students to excel.

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