ABSTRACT

This study investigates the effectiveness of the two communicative activities, Information-gap and Role-play, in developing students’ speaking proficiency in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. It also provides an understanding of the dynamics of the learning process in the language classroom which resulted in students’ progress in speaking. The study comprises a piece of reflective practice in the teacher-researcher’s own practice, drawing on an integrated set of qualitative methods to gather data from all involved.

This study was conducted in a normal language classroom of thirty-eight students in Thailand, and nine participants were targeted: 3 High, 3 Medium and 3 Low, based on language proficiency levels.

Three research questions guided the study: (1) Can Thai students be assisted to use communicative activities, Information-gap and Role-play so as to overcome their weaknesses in speaking English?, (2) What most assists in the creation of meaningful situations?, and (3) What assists with the breaking down of affective barriers to participating in the two communicative activities?

Data were gathered from four sources: Speaking Tests as Pretest and Posttest, student diaries, teacher’s journal and ethnographic interviews. The Speaking Test used as both Pretest and Posttest was analysed by using mean, standard deviation and t-test. Dependent measures to test the difference in students’ English speaking proficiency between before and after the two communicative activities program.

Results of this study reveal that using the two communicative activities, as an innovative program had a significant impact on improving EFL students’ speaking proficiency. Meaningful situations were established using pairwork and group work, both important features of Communicative Language Teaching in the language classroom. This novel classroom organisation created a positive atmosphere, reducing affective barriers to language learning. Moreover, the dynamic classroom initiated a cycle of student progress in the language learning process which formed the basis of their progress in speaking English competently. Quantitative and qualitative data mutually supported the positive conclusions of the study.

Based on the findings, recommendations have been provided for teachers in arranging the EFL speaking classroom. The Information-gap and the Role-play, are
highly recommended as effective methods in the improvement of students’ speaking proficiency. Additionally, this study attempts to conceptually establish a hierarchy in the relationship of these two activities that will be the most effective for assisting EFL learners in Thailand, at least, to achieve proficiency in spoken English.

This study also proposes key factors that teachers must take into account in their attempt to achieve the goal of successfully teaching speaking skills in large EFL classrooms. In particular, it suggests that when teaching materials designed for the two named activities are introduced to EFL teachers at all levels of education in Thailand, they may achieve success.

There is a great deal the teacher must and can do to bring about success in this field. These include designing the materials carefully and arranging the classroom in new and challenging ways, ways which are, nonetheless, compatible with the realities of modern Thailand. Most particularly the teacher must be able to support the learners in their initial endeavours, as they begin to work in very different ways to those they have been used to, within themselves about their own spoken English; in how they work with their friends and classmates; and, especially, in how they relate and work with their teacher. Encouraging them to get through the challenges this offers by taking the time to consciously reflect on what is going on, was shown to be one way this could be done successfully.