

COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN ELT CLASSROOMS IN CHINA

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Date: April 26, 2010_

COMMUNICATIVE ACTIVITIES IN ELT CLASSROOMS IN CHINA

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science

in

Education

by

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2010

Abstract

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The problem presented in this paper is how to use communicative activities effectively in English Language Teaching (ELT) classrooms in China. In order to address this question, the paper contains a review of the literature that focuses on two aspects: the effectiveness of communicative activities in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and the use of communicative activities in ELT classrooms in China. Through a review of literature on the first aspect, it is evident that the effectiveness of communicative activities is largely influenced by the design of communicative teaching procedures in the ELT classroom. Many difficulties related to integrating communicative activities into teaching procedure have been identified through an examination of studies related to the second aspect. These studies were conducted in a Chinese context, such as the case study suggested by Sun and Cheng (2000), the theoretical exploration made by Ye (2007), and the practical teaching plan invented by Liu (2003). At the end of the literature review, a relevant example of using communicative activities effectively in the ELT classroom in China is provided. Liu's study shows how to use communicative activities flexibly as a part of teaching procedures through designing a teaching aim oriented curriculum, which guides teachers to explore new methods of using communicative activities in ELT classrooms. However, the review also shows that more researches need to be done on the design of a practical and effective communicative curriculum for ELT classrooms in China.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) emphasizes teaching communicative competence as both the means and the ultimate goal of teaching a second language (Liao, 2000a). This approach suggests that “language should be learned through use and through communication” (Liao, 2000b, p. 3). In classroom teaching, CLT suggests language learners should cultivate the ability to use the target language appropriately in a variety of practical social interactions (Liao, 2000b). Based on this notion, many English Language Teaching (ELT) teachers who want to apply CLT approaches in their classroom are inspired to design various communicative activities, including role-play, interview, games, language exchanges and pair work, in order to enhance the efficiency of CLT approaches (Hiep, 2007). However, when the original CLT approaches spread from the United Kingdom and the United States to non-English speaking countries, it caused numerous practical challenges to design communicative activities in ELT classrooms because of the country’s special social, cultural and political contexts (Hiep, 2007).

The CLT Approach was introduced to Chinese ELT classrooms in the early 1990s (Liao, 2000b). During these years, many Chinese teachers have attempted to use communicative activities in their ELT classrooms, such as, role play, group discussing, pair work and others. In these communicative activities, most teachers and learners meet with more difficulty than success, because of the Chinese students’ limited communicative skills in the target language, difficulties in curriculum innovation, classroom size and other physical hindrances (Sun & Cheng, 2000; Liao, 2000b; Ye, 2007). In recent years, with the progress of language teaching theory and practices, Ye (2007) and Liu (2003) have suggested a

methodology of adjusting communicative activities to better fit the Chinese context. Many Chinese ELT teachers like Liu (2003) suggest that it is possible to design a practical teaching plan for using communicative activities in ELT classrooms in China.

Statement of the Problem

The central concern of this paper is, “How can communicative activities be applied effectively in the ELT classrooms in China?” During the exploration of this question, the following relative question will be discussed: what kinds of classroom activities are communicative? This paper also explores the obstacles and difficulties in applying communicative activities to ELT classrooms in China and how can teachers design practical and effective communicative activities in an ELT classroom context?

Definition of Terms

Communicative Language Teaching: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach to the teaching of second and foreign languages that emphasizes interaction as both the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language. It is also referred to as a “communicative approach to the teaching of foreign languages” or simply as the “Communicative Approach” (CLT, 2003).

Communicative Competence: Communicative Competence refers to language learners’ ability to use the target language successfully in real world communication. “Communicating successfully refers to passing on a comprehensible message to the listener” (Rababah, 2002, p.3). Cultivating language learners’ communicative competence is the ultimate goal of English language teaching. It includes four parts: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence (Rababah, 2002).

Communicative Activities: Communicative Activities refers to the classroom activities that

provide a genuine information gap and make it possible for language learners to communicate with target language in CLT approaches (Liao, 2000b). Some common forms of communicative activities are role play, interviews, information gap, games, language exchanges, surveys, pair work and learning by teaching. The aim of using these activities is to enhance learners' communicative competence.

Information Gap: In real-life communication, information gap is not the common messages that already known by a sender and receiver, but the information that a receiver needs to know from a sender. Information gap is one essential condition to make communication occur. In language teaching context, the term means the information that teacher or students convey in target language needs to be the message that other students don't know so that the conversation is meaningful and necessary (Liao, 1997).

ELT. English Language Teaching.

Delimitations of Research

The research will be conducted in the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville, about ninety days. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Wikipedia the Free Encyclopedia, and Google/Google Scholar as the primary sources. Key search topics will include "Communicative Teaching Approach," "Teaching Activities," and "ESL Classroom."

Method of Approach

A brief review of literature on the studies of the effectiveness of communicative activities in CLT employed by ELT teachers will be conducted. A second review of literature related to the use of communicative activities in the ESL classroom in China will be

conducted. The findings will be synthesized from the recent relevant studies and recommendations will be made.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Communicative activities in CLT

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is the most influential language teaching methodology in the world. CLT views language as a vehicle for communication, and communicative competence as its aim of teaching. As the central feature of CLT, communicative competence includes grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competence (Liao, 2000). CLT also holds the view that language learning should not only focus on the grammatical structure of the language but also on language use in real-life situations. In addition, in the classroom setting, CLT requires more than just attention to strategies for presenting the structure and the functions of language. Savignon (2001) suggests that CLT “requires the involvement of learners in a dynamic and interactive process of communication” (p. 237). Overall, CLT suggests that language should be learned through the use of target language and practical communication, especially, through the communicative activities.

Based on this notion, many ELT teachers have attempted to create real-life situations in their classrooms such as, adding role play, true-to-life interaction, and other communicative activities to classroom teaching procedures. However, sometimes these communicative activities are not as effective as these teachers expect. Take the role-play approach for example, although it is believed to be a very useful form for students to experience the communicative language learning, it is not favored by many ELT teachers. Scott Menking (2001) claims that though most communicative approaches are widely used (e.g. working in small groups and pairs and the use of authentic materials), role play was not universally accepted. He also suggests that students’ reactions and attitudes during pair and

small group work is the main obstacle for using communicative approaches effectively in class.

Therefore, in order to apply communicative approaches effectively in ELT classrooms, teachers need to examine and modify the effectiveness and limitations of communicative activities in a practical context of the typical ELT classrooms. Based on an analysis of the related literature, researches on communicative activities are generally related to three questions:

1. What kinds of activities are qualified as communicative teaching activities?
2. What types of communicative activities are effective in ELT classroom?
3. How do teachers apply communicative activities effectively in ELT classrooms?

The best way to analyze the effectiveness and limitations of communicative activities is to examine these three questions individually from first to last.

What kinds of activities are qualified communicative activities?

The first question is concerned with the nature of communicative activities. It's the most essential question; its misunderstanding has caused problems in designing qualified communicative activities. One claim is that "The problem at present is that some of the activities being introduced as communicative activities are not communicative at all but structure drills in disguise" (Savignon, 2001, p. 241). Thus, many ESL teachers may think that the activities they design and use in class are communicative, but these activities are actually not. Sylvia S. Mulling (1997) has identified nine activity types that suggest communication, but are not truly communicative. In order to figure out the nature of qualified communicative activities, the definition and the features of communicative activities need to

be discussed.

In the first place, within the communicative activities, the teacher plays the role of facilitator, not the dominant participant. Mulling (1997) concluded that in real-life language context communication requires at least a sender and a receiver, in which their conversation is made to serve meaning and their attention is focused on the message, not merely on achieving correctness of expression. Moreover, conversation is a means of communication, and conversational language is characterized not by perfectly complete sentences but by many incomplete sentences, which are described as “elliptical constructions lacking subjects or predicates” (Mulling, 1997, p. 2). From this notion, Mulling (1997) proposed that when teachers design communicative activities for their classrooms, they should not play the dominant role in the activities but should plan, structure, and guide communicative activities, and they should not correct grammar during communicative activities. What’s more, in the study, Mulling (1997) showed that nine activities were not truly communicative at that time, such as listening cloze, finding the Conversation, dyads, pictures or visual presentation, expected responses, oral reports that lead to classroom conversation, activities to develop conversational strategies, improvisations and completing plans, diagrams or maps. The reason for deleting these activities from the communicative ones is that these activities are not qualified enough to provide good examples of real-life communication. “They are so controlled that they bear little resemblance to real communication, and they may become so unstructured that they merely provide occasions to exchange ungrammatical utterances of [the student’s] own choice” (Mulling, 1997, p. 9).

In the second place, the briefest definition of communicative activities is that

they are used as activities aimed at improving language learners' communicative competence (Liao, 2000a). Communicative competence is generally known as the pragmatic ability to use the target language appropriately in a specific situation, which is essential for effective and successful communication and for various social interactions with the target language (Zhuang, 2007). Del Hymes, who proposed the concept of "Communicative Competence," was more concerned with the feasibility and appropriateness of language use than with grammatical rules. Based on this notion, Bachman thinks that communicative competence contains three components: organizational competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence (Zhuang, 2007). Zhuang further explains that organizational competence emphasizes the language meaning rather than a structure model. Thus, some activities such as "reporting, persuading, studying literature and other cognitively demanding texts, discussing, debating, reaching a consensus and relaying instructions" (Zhuang, 2007, p. 39) will be helpful to enhance a learner's Organizational Competence. For the other two competences, Zhang (2007) also explains their connotations and suggests some activities that will be useful to improve these competences. From this study, it is evident that some activities are contextualized and communicative, such as project work, role play, and informal drama; while, others, such as stimulations, reporting and distinguishing pictures, are not.

Thirdly, Liao (2000a) suggests that the fundamental definition of communicative activities comes after the introduction of the term information gap. Liao (2000a) defines an information gap as the information that is unknown to one participant when communication takes place between two people, and the purpose of communication is to bridge this information gap. "Since teachers want to create a real-life communication context in the

classroom, classroom activities should be instances of real communication and based on a genuine information gap” (Liao, 2000a, p.9). In this way, the communicative activities are separated from those activities of situational presentation, which Liao (2000a) regards as harmful because they lead students away from the use of the language for genuine communicative purposes.

Besides that, some researches also have identified concrete and essential features of communicative activities. Liao (2000a) describes their contributions to classroom learning: First, they contribute to language learning by providing whole-task practice, improving motivation, allowing natural learning, and creating a context that supports learning. Second, they contribute to group work. For example, when the teacher use the communicative activities in his class, students are more likely to get involved in cooperative learning process, which improves their abilities of organizing and participating in teamwork.

Sun and Cheng (2000) have collected many related views about communicative activity and summarized their three common features as follows:

1. Communicative activities are task-based. Task-based English teaching concentrates on communicative tasks that learners need to engage in outside the classroom (Sun & Cheng, 2000, p. 19).
2. Communicative activities are learner-centered. The emphasis of teaching activity is on students’ initiative and interaction. Students are expected to participate in the activities as real people and take responsibility for their learning (Sun & Cheng, 2000, p. 20).
3. Communicative activities emphasize the use of authentic language input. The

teacher's native or near native language competence and a true language milieu is necessary in order to produce communication in the classroom (Sun & Cheng, 2000, p. 20).

In conclusion, real communicative activities are instances of real-life communication based on a genuine information gap. They are helpful to enhance learners' communicative competence. Teachers need to recognize the above essential features to make the activity as communicative as possible. Only in this way will students have the chance to understand and experience the meaning of language in natural conversations, which is the real aim of using communicative activities in a CLT approach.

What types of communicative activities are effective?

The second question addresses the effectiveness of different kinds of communicative activities. In this field, many cases of using various kinds of communicative activities in ESL classroom have been studied. There are different perspectives on the question of the effectiveness of these communicative activities in ESL classrooms located in non-English speaking countries. As a foreign ESL teacher, Daniel W. Evans (2000) uses his own experiences of teaching English in South Korea and Japan to illustrate how to apply Communicative Humanistic Acculturation Techniques (CHAT) to facilitate learning in the CLT classroom. In his study, the CHAT theory is characterized by the use of communicative activities for a real purpose, in which students acted out the roles of advisor, facilitator, and counselor to help the foreign teacher to adjust to living in Korea. Evans (2000) states that these real-life activities enhanced learners' acquisition of English by "providing realistic, purposeful communicative encounters that motivated students to express themselves,

establishing a personal relationship between students and the foreign teacher, and fostering positive attitudes toward the language, culture, and people of the United States” (p. 3).

However, other studies show that some communicative activities are not widely used in non-English speaking countries because of various kinds of obstacles. In the survey of ELT instructors in Shimane, Japan, 65 percent of instructors agreed or strongly agreed to use pair and small group activities in their classrooms, but in reality, these activities were not used because of physical hindrances, such as the size of the classroom, or bolted down desks, that prevented free movement. These hindrances prohibit the pair and group work from being as effective as they could be. Besides that, many instructors indicate that class time for pair and small group work is limited and students do not use all their time to practice the target language but rather regress back to their native language (Menking, 2001). What’s more, there was some disagreement on using role-playing in the classroom. Only about 26 percent instructors agreed to use it, which indicated that role-play was not utilized by most instructors (Menking, 2001). From the survey, Menking (2001) also discovers that one hindrance in utilizing the CLT approach effectively is that the instructors failed to motivate their students to overcome psychological obstacles, such as a lack of confidence and a fear of making mistakes.

How do teachers integrate communicative activities into teaching procedures?

“[In order] to be effective, communicative activities must constitute an integral part of the classroom program” (Savignon, 2001, p. 240). The last question is about designing the communicative curriculum to use communicative activities as an integrated part of the teaching procedures.

Concerning the design of the communicative curriculum, Savignon (2001) suggests that teachers face a two-fold difficulty: “adequate descriptions of language functions and how they are realized are non-existent; and no workable guidelines have been developed as yet for selection and sequence of functions from among unlimited purposes” (p. 237). Savignon (2001) also held the view that the most effective class should be a combination of experiences that involves the learner in a physical, psychological, and intellectual sense. In an effort to present a solid communicative curriculum, Savignon (2001) characterizes the various kinds of activities that have their place in a communicative curriculum, and identifies five components in communicative activities. Each component represents a collection of activities that corresponds to a different part of the language learning process:

1. Language Arts
2. Language for a Purpose
3. My Language Is Me
4. You Be, I’ll Be: Theatre Arts
5. Beyond the Classroom (p. 238-241).

In addition, he also suggested that these five components can be profitably blended at all stages of instruction. “No language curriculum, any more than the language proficiency it promotes, should ever be thought of neatly divisible into separate tasks” (Savignon, 2001, p. 238). In his study, Savignon (2001) intended to highlight the range of options available in curriculum planning through showing the interrelatedness of these activities, rather than to sequence a whole program.

In recent years, with the trend of practicing constructive teaching theory, teachers

who wish to design a communicative curriculum are provided with another option: combining discovery learning activities with communicative activities. Saab, Joolingen, and Hout-Wolters (2005) state there are five factors that combine the communicative process and the discovery learning process. Saab et al. (2005) also found communicative activities are performed most frequently during generating hypotheses, experimental design and conclusion construction. Nevertheless, Saab et al. (2005) indicated that further research needed to be done on how to augment communicative and discovery activities, and how they were related to positive learning outcomes.

However, there is no ready teaching procedure that suits every ELT classroom. In fact, CLT is an eclectic approach, which means it accepts the best teaching techniques from different methods (Liao, 2000a, p. 19). Therefore, teachers need to study different teaching models and various types of activities, and consider the real teaching context very carefully before designing their own communicative activities. In order to effectively integrate these communicative activities, it should be the teacher's first priority to design a comprehensive and carefully planned teaching curriculum.

Communicative activities in ELT Classroom in China

This section examines the present state of adopting communicative activities in ELT classrooms in China. In order to acknowledge the complete context, this review includes not only recent developments, but also the historical background of CLT innovation in China. Communicative activities were introduced into China during the period of CLT innovation in the early 1990s. During the adoption of CLT in China, ESL teachers encountered considerable difficulties in implementing this approach (Liao, 2000b). In recent years, the

research indicates that the problems in using communicative activities were studied in detail and different solutions were suggested. Besides that, the case study shows the new trend of using communicative activities effectively in ELT classrooms in China. Therefore, a review of the use of communicative activities in ELT classroom in China should be introduced under three categories:

1. Background of implementing communicative activities in China
2. Factors to be considered when using communicative activities in the ELT classroom
3. A case study using communicative activities in the ELT classroom

The following review provides research findings on these three aspects, which shows the general development of using communicative activities in the academic field.

Background of Implementing Communicative Activities in China.

In 1992, China's State Education Development Commission (SEDC) introduced a new English teaching syllabus, which stated that the aim of teaching English is to develop students' communicative competence. In the same year, the SEDC cooperated with the British publishing firm Longman to publish a new textbook series, *Junior English for China* (Books I, II and III), which was designed for the development of students' communicative competence. All these actions marked the beginning of CLT innovation in China. After gaining approval to enhance the students' communicative abilities as the aim of English teaching from SEDC, the theory of CLT started to influence every aspect of the English teaching field in China (Liao, 2000b).

In China, the CLT approach was introduced by SEDC as a problem-solving

pedagogy into secondary schools in the early 1990s (Liao, 2000b). In the traditional ELT classroom in China, teachers tended to use grammar translation and teacher-centered pedagogy. This teaching practice is textbook-based and examination-oriented, which emphasizes linguistic ability to use English correctly in the examination rather than the pragmatic ability to engage in real-life communication. Consequently, many Chinese students who have been taught English through traditional pedagogy, although they had studied English many years, still failed to use English fluently in a real-life context and found English hard and frustrating to learn.

Liao (2000b) suggests that CLT differs from traditional teaching approaches in the following components. Firstly, CLT sets communicative competence as its teaching goal and suggests that language should be learned through use, especially through communication. Secondly, CLT holds the view that the conversations in classroom interaction should reflect instances of real communication, based on a genuine information gap. Thirdly, CLT stresses two-way communication; therefore, the way that a teacher encourages students to use the language is much more diverse than the way that people use it in real communication. Next, CLT ensures that students have sufficient exposure to the target language by providing opportunities for students to create and internalize language rather than requiring them to memorize grammar rules and vocabulary. Finally, CLT embraces all the four language skills. By integrating listening, speaking, reading and writing, students can not only develop these skills but also consistently combine them in real life situations.

In the last two decades, many Chinese ELT educators have tried to apply this approach by introducing various kinds of communicative activities into their classroom

teaching procedures. However, in the early 1990s, these communicative activities were not popular in Chinese classrooms because teachers met with many difficulties, such as teachers' partial understanding about CLT, negative influence of traditional teaching mode, and grammar-oriented examination system, which made the teaching outcomes undesirable (Liao, 2000b). Therefore, a majority of teachers would revert to the traditional approach rather than use the more innovative communicative approaches. Liao (2000b) suggested that these difficulties were primarily caused by teachers' lack of language proficiency and cultural knowledge, as well as by the negative influence of Chinese educational traditions and grammar-oriented examination pressure. In addition, Ye Jin (2007) stated that large class size and lack of teaching materials were also two large obstacles in adopting CLT in China (p.31). On the other hand, with China's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the long-awaited Olympic Games in Beijing, China has made learning English a national priority. As a result, in order to improve Chinese ELT learners' oral English for international communication as well as for business and academic purposes, ELT teachers need to flexibly adopt the CLT approach and decide what is appropriate to the Chinese situations (Ye, 2007). As a practical matter, using communicative activities in classroom is the most important and also the most difficult part of adopting CLT approaches. Although many teacher proclaims that "classroom activities such as role-playing, pair work and group discussions should be largely involved in English teaching" (Ye, 2007, p. 33), the practices of using or designing these activities are not always successful.

Factors to be considered in using communicative activities.

The literature of the past two decades provides many studies dealing with the problems and solutions involved in adjusting the CLT approach to the Chinese context. Because the studies included different regions and different class-types, the problems were diversified to some extent. However, some solutions, like balancing the teaching of grammar with the teaching of language use in ELT classrooms, have been suggested many times. Therefore, these factors, which are reflected in the common situations in China's ELT classrooms, include the following:

1. Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence
2. Accuracy and Fluency
3. Using First Language in the Communicative Activities.

These common factors have been mentioned most often in the research on using CLT approaches in China. Centered on the three factors, different perceptions are collected and introduced in this section.

Linguistic Competence and Communicative Competence.

“Linguistic Competence aims at Communicative Competence; however, communicative competence can't be gained without linguistic competence” (Jin, 2001, p.126). However, in many formal studies, this factor was suggested as the relationship of teaching grammar and communicative skills in classroom. Jin (2001) points out that linguistic competence refers to the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary that forms the structure of the language, while communicative competence includes language used in real life situations. Balancing the learning of linguistic competence with the learning of

communicative competence is the question that many Chinese ELT teachers face in their CLT classroom. The controversial topic about linguistic competence in applying CLT to the Chinese context is how to deal with the relation between grammar competence and communicative competence. One viewpoint maintains that grammar is a part of communicative competence and a tool for teaching. The relationship between grammar competence and communicative competence is that between “absorbing” and “practicing” in language learning (Li & Song, 2007). Most Chinese English teachers hold the view that, on the primary level, the teaching focus should be the linguistic competence in order to achieve the goal of using the target language freely in communication (Wang, 2002; Ye, 2007).

Accuracy and Fluency.

Many Chinese teachers are too concerned about the mistakes that students make in their communication activities, resulting in a conflict between accuracy and fluency in the classroom. They think that correcting students’ mistakes is the foremost responsibility of the teacher. However, in the CLT theory, the demand for fluency suggests that the teacher should not interrupt the students too often when they are speaking (Wang, 2002). According to some of the literature, there are two ways of handling the extent of accuracy in classroom. The first way is to control the mistakes flexibly during the communicative activities. Based on this notion, Wang (2002) suggests her way of dealing with the mistakes: when an obvious or serious mistake appears, the teacher may ask other classmates to point out or correct the mistake in the summary after the activities. Wang also states that the principle here is to set fluency as the priority in these communicative activities while demanding a higher level of accuracy in their writing assignments. Another way of handling accuracy is to deal with

learners of different levels by using different types of classroom activities. For example, it is advised that for teaching the beginners, a solid grammar foundation should be emphasized through building on accuracy (Ye, 2007). On the other hand, during teaching advanced level students, teacher needs to use more activities that emphasize fluency and contextualized situations, because the students have already build up a solid understanding of grammar knowledge on this level.

Using first language in the communicative activities.

Most local and foreign teachers consider the use of first language the most common problem that they are facing in ELT classrooms. Jeremy Harmer (2003) stated that using first language was one major obstacle in creating an English environment in the classroom. Although it is agreed that creating an English environment is very necessary if the teacher wants to enhance students' communicative competence (Harmer, 2003), it doesn't mean that using their first language should be forbidden in all classroom activities. Although the negative effect of using first language in ELT class is obvious, some ELT education specialists acknowledge that the first language also stimulates the understanding of the second language through the comparative studies between the two.

For instance, Jin (2001) suggests a balanced approach in which teachers should use English as often as possible while using the first language flexibly to deepen students' understanding of English language. "We need to encourage students to use English as often as possible to cultivate their thinking in English...; however, we don't need to reject using the first language flexibly as long as it promotes students' communicative skills in the second language" (Jin, 2001, p.127). In that case, the extent to which the first language should be

used in the ELT classroom depends on the teacher's understanding of how to use the first language to provide the best possible learning environment and to promote students' use of English.

A Case Study: using communicative activities in an ELT Classroom.

There is a case study that examines the use of communicative activities in the ELT classroom, which has proved that these activities are effective to some extent. As a college English teacher, Liu (2003) has studied the CLT approach and designed her own way of teaching extensive reading with communicative activities. In order to integrate these communicative activities effectively in her class, a comprehensive curriculum was designed.

In the curriculum for an extensive English reading class, Liu (2003) suggested that the following activities may work most successfully at the post-reading stage: Firstly, debate is used as a challenging form of communicative activity. Students are provided with reciprocal materials and topics, and they should be allowed a reasonable period of time for preparation. Secondly, role-play can promote the participation of the whole class by dividing the class into groups or pairs so that every student can seize the opportunity to speak. If situations are chosen which are relevant to the needs and experience of the students, they will be strongly motivated to succeed in the situation they are faced with. Thirdly, discussion is usually organized at the end of each subject taught. After mastering the information of the subject, the necessary vocabulary, and various forms of language expression, the students can discuss or argue about a related question. Next, Games are also a vital part of a communicative curriculum; they can be used at any stage of a class to provide an amusing and challenging diversion from other classroom activity. Games increase students' motivation

and wake up a tired class. What's more, they contribute to a relaxed atmosphere in the classroom (Liu, 2003). Therefore, according to the needs of every teaching stage, different Communicative Activities may work most effectively when their functions meets the teaching requirements of different stages.

In addition, before every teaching stage, the teacher should set the class's aims before designing the correspondent activities. For example, in the pre-reading stage, the teaching aims are described as "introducing the topic of the text; arousing interest in the topic of the text; and motivating the students to read the text by giving a purpose for reading; preparing the students for the context of the text" (Liu, 2003, p. 52). Besides that, Liu (2003) also suggests that these teaching aims should determine the function of these activities so as to lead the students into the topic area and arouse their interest. As long as the activity meets this function, it is appropriate to use. She also points out that students may predict the content of the activity from the title of the text. "It doesn't matter even if the predictions are contradicted; after all, they have started the students' thinking about the topic and made them involved, so they are very useful" (Liu, 2003, p. 52).

After observing today's ELT classroom teaching in China, it is safe to say that using different forms of Communicative Activities flexibly according to the teaching aims has become the first choice of many competent teachers. From my own experiences, I remember when I was in the University, my favorite English teacher liked to use the activity of conversation and discussion to introduce the topic of her class, which not only made us feel interested and relaxed but also made it easy to focus our thoughts on the topic of the class. Besides that, when I was studying the field of English Education for my master's

degree, I found that many of my classmates were experienced English teachers. When they presented their teaching plans, I noticed that many of them also liked to design some similar communicative activities, such as question-based discussion and conversation as the opening of their English class. This indicates that applying a certain form of communicative activities at a certain stage of the classroom teaching has been accepted by many teachers as a useful and effective teaching approach.

According to the study, the forms of these Communicative Activities are determined by the teaching aims at different stages. Liu's curriculum design shows a typical model for using communicative activities in the context of a Chinese ELT classroom, and it was proved to be "not only feasible but also productive" (Liu, 2003, p. 54). In her class, the students have apparently enhanced communicative competence at a remarkable speed, and their level in listening, speaking, reading and writing, though far from perfect, is quite impressive (Liu, 2003).

Chapter 3: Conclusions and Recommendations

As a vital part of communicative language teaching, communicative activities greatly influence the efficiency of applying the CLT approach. In order to use these communicative activities effectively in the ELT classroom, teachers need to consider whether the classroom activity is really communicative, which types of activities are best suited to their classroom, and how to integrate the activity into their teaching procedures. From the research, we can see that real communicative activities should be based on a genuine information gap, and that the types of communicative activities will vary according to their different functions and features. Besides that, the model of using communicative activities also enlightens us on how to design a comprehensive and communicative curriculum to involve these teaching activities as a whole unit.

Since the early 1990s, the Chinese ELT field has experienced the CLT innovation, which makes the communicative activities more and more popular in ELT classrooms. However, many Chinese ELT teachers also face difficulties in applying communicative activities to Chinese situations. Liu's teaching procedure is a good example; though it is not perfect, it has achieved many successes in improving students' communicative competence. From Liu's teaching model, we can see that a teaching-aim-oriented curriculum design, which balances the content and form, is an ideal way of using these activities effectively in ELT classrooms.

What's more, by examining the existing literature, we may conclude that there are some limitations inherent in communicative activities. Among the factors to be considered in using communicative activities, we see the difficulties that many teachers face

are not only caused by the teachers' own limitations, but are also caused by the CLT approach itself. On the other hand, recent research on applying CLT approaches to the ELT classroom teaching in China shows that not only do more effective forms of communicative activities need to be developed, but also that more practical Communicative Curriculums of ELT still need to be invented. Consequently, more studies need to be done on the practical design of effective communicative curriculum in ELT classrooms in China.

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