

Increasing Vocational Senior High Students' Motivation for Learning

English through Communicative Activities

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Introduction

Motivation has long been recognized as vital in language learning. As Brown (2007, p.168) suggested, motivation is “probably the most frequently used catch-all term for explaining the success or failure of virtually any complex task.” In the field of second language acquisition, the importance of motivation can be revealed by plenty of efforts devoted to probing into the related issues (Brown, 2007; Dornyei, 2005). Wu (2006) in her study examining Taiwanese junior high students' liking for either Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) or Chinese traditional approach, indicated that students preferred CLT activities with a project and group-activity orientation; in addition, motivation was found to be the only predictor of students' liking for both types of teaching.

The emergence of CLT signposts a paradigm shift from a structure-based orientation to a function-based one in the language learning/teaching profession. CLT is widely embraced by researchers and teachers immediately given that language learning is thought to focus on studying the uses of language rather than studying language itself nowadays (Hadley, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Richards and Rodgers (2001) contended that CLT is best regarded more as an approach addressing basic principles of language learning and teaching than as a method stipulating specific teaching designs and learning procedures. They summed up several principles of the classroom procedures based on CLT approach:

- Learners learn a language through using it to communicate.
- Authentic and meaningful communication should be the goal of classroom activities.
- Fluency is an important dimension of communication.
- Communication involves the integration of different language skills.
- Learning is a process of creative construction and involves trial and error (p.172).

Based on the features of CLT listed above, a typical CLT classroom is supposed to consist of a variety of activities like games, information gaps, role-plays, problem-solving tasks, and group activities, which provide learners with chances to use the target language to engage in the learning tasks. Besides, the class should be learner-centered and the teachers function more like facilitators that help trigger and assist the learning processes. Since fluency is given more attention (but not at the expense of clear communication), grammatical error correction is rare or even absent in a CLT class (Richards & Rodgers, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Rao (2002) surveyed 30 Chinese university students' perception about their preference for the communicative activities and the non-communicative ones. It was found, however, that the participants did

not particularly prefer the communicative activities over its counter-part. They even doubted the effectiveness of CLT on helping them with passing grammar-based examinations. Nevertheless, the participants in Rao's study picked small group work or pair work as their favorite activities for they offer more student-interaction in class without realizing this is considered characteristic of a CLT activity. On the other hand, Wu (2006), investigating 344 junior high students in Taiwan about their liking for either Chinese traditional approach, i.e., grammar-translation method in nature, or CLT, found that the students liked CLT more and that the motivation was the only predictor for both Chinese traditional approach and CLT. Also, as a first-line vocational senior high English teacher, the author has observed that, more often than not, many students do not achieve their expected English learning outcomes mainly because of their lack of motivation instead of ability. Thus, it is a must for practitioners to try to work on arousing students' learning motivation for learning English.

This plan was aimed at increasing students' motivation for learning English through incorporating into class various communicative activities¹ that appeal to students. With the plan incorporating the activities interactive in nature, the teacher intended to make the teaching more communicative and motivating. Students were expected to:

1. enhance motivation intensity.
2. get more involved in class.
3. formulate their own learning preference, which aids their academic learning.

¹ The activities adopted in this plan are all the communicative activities introduced by the teacher trainers at Queensland University of Technology, Australia, where the author learned and participated in TESOL Teacher Education Program for Vocational Senior High School English Language Teachers sponsored by Ministry of Education and National Taiwan Normal University.