Twelfth graders' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroms in Bac Ly High school = Nhận thức của học sinh lớp 12 về các hoạt động giao tiếp và phi giao tiếp tại trường Trung học phổ thông Bắc Lý. M.A Thesis Linguistics: \ Nguyễn Thị Thu Hương ; Supervisor : Dr. Tô Thị Thu Hương

This study investigates the perceptions of 200 twelfth grade students in order to better understand the appropriateness and effectiveness of communicative and non-communicative activities in their English as a Foreign Language classes in Bac Ly high school. Using mixed methods, data were collected by means of a questionnaire, semi-structured interview and group discussion. Quantitative data complement qualitative data to provide more valid and reliable results. The research reveals that the majority of the students expressed strong interest in non-communicative activities rather than communicative activities in term of preference and usefulness. Perceptions of these students sometimes surprised their teachers, and that the learners' perceived difficulties in taking part in communicative activities had their source in learners' low proficiency, low motivation for communicative competence, traditional learning styles and habits, and EFL settings. Recommendations for overcoming these difficulties including a need for closer co-operation between students and teachers in the way, which helps students develop their communicative competence, are made to the study.

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NGUYEN THI THU HUONG

PART A- THE INTRODUCTION

1. Rationale of the study

The field of second or foreign language teaching has undergone many paradigmatic shifts and methodological trends over the last few decades. We have seen the Audiolingual Method, Cognitive-based Approaches, the Total Physical Response, the Natural Approach, Communicative Language Teaching and many others. Within the debate on English teaching methodology, the study of Vietnamese students' response to CLT, especially classroom activities deserves particular attention. Do they enjoy activities involving communication and real use of language? Do they agree that real language activities emphasizing language content are more effective than non-communicative activities that stress formal correction? Do they believe that such activities are helpful to them as language learners? Do they face with any difficulties in practicing these activities?

According to Kumaravadivelu (1991, p. 107) "the more we know about the learner's personal approaches and personal concepts, the better and more productive our interactions will be." We as teachers should be aware of our students' perceptions and beliefs about language learning in order to facilitate desired learning outcomes in the classroom. As suggested by Bada and Okan (2000), there is a need for closer cooperation between students and teachers. It is important to remember that learners already critically evaluate what they do (Breen, 1989). Teachers can use different strategies to build learners choices into their lessons. Teachers and students can have a dialogue and negotiate alternatives, which would definitely lead to more learner involvement and could, therefore, lead to more positive attitudes towards language learning. As teachers, at every single moment, we should observe our students' reactions and consider their attitudes and preferences in order to promote a more inclusive climate that will enhance learning. In order to deepen our understanding of how students react to communicative and non-communicative activities, Barkhuisen (1998:86) has called for "teachers to discover their learners' feelings and beliefs about their language learning experiences and consequently to review and possibly change their teaching process".

Moreover, Vietnamese high school syllabi now keep promoting CLT in an attempt to enable the students to use the target language for communicative purposes instead of

mastering its grammatical rules and structures. Vietnamese twelfth graders in upper secondary school had five-year experience studying English "communicatively" as English is among the compulsory subjects at secondary schools. However, the fact is that after those years of learning English, not many pupils have a clear cut purpose of learning English in their mind and they are likely passively motivated to learn English basing on the textbooks and teachers' method of delivery. Consequently, most of pupils find themselves unable to use English for day-to-day communication after having passed the English national examination as a requirement for the General Education Diploma.

In brief, all of the reasons mentioned above have inspired the present study on: *"Twelfth graders' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classrooms in Bac Ly high school"* as the title for the thesis in the hope that I can contribute a small part in helping my students and my colleagues to improve their learning and teaching English.

2. Aims and objectives of the study

With the above-presented rationales, the specific aims and objectives of the study are the followings. Firstly, the study carries out an investigation into twelfth grade students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in terms of preference and usefulness. Secondly, through the investigation the research will find out the difficulties the students encounter in practicing communicative activities. Thirdly, the study will provide possible solutions to these difficulties, thereby improving the quality of English language education in the context of an urban high school.

3. Research Questions

1. *What are twelfth graders' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classrooms?*
2. *What are students' perceived difficulties in practicing communicative activities?*
3. *What are the possible solutions to these difficulties?*

4. Scope of the study

Due to time constraint, the study limits itself to the investigation on twelfth graders' perceptions of non-communicative and communicative activities in EFL classroom in the

context of an urban high school, Bac Ly high school. Therefore, subjects of the study were teachers of English and students in the twelfth form at Bac Ly high school in Ha Nam province. Within the scope of the study, the following issues were addressed:

- Students' preference of communicative and non-communicative activities (Research question 1)
- Students' opinions of the usefulness of communicative and non-communicative activities (Research question 1)
- Students' difficulties in participating in communicative activities (Research question 2)
- Implications and recommendations for overcoming these difficulties (Research question 3)

5. Methods of study

In this study, a mix of quantitative and qualitative methods were utilized. A questionnaire survey was conducted on a sample of students to find answers to research questions 1 and 2. Furthermore, in order to address the limitations of the questionnaire in exploring students' perceptions, and to find out their constraints and possible solutions (research questions 3), student semi-structured interviews and teacher group discussions were conducted following the analysis of the questionnaire data. Questionnaire data were analyzed quantitatively for descriptive statistics while the interview and discussion data were processed qualitatively following an "interpretive model" (Hatch 2002) for recommended solutions. The answers to three research questions provided a picture of students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities as well as their difficulties in doing communicative activities in EFL classrooms and possible solutions.

6. Significance of the study

English is used more and more to communicative throughout the world. MOET have provided a series of new textbooks in order to develop students' communicative competence. It is said that the textbooks are more useful than the older version, but most of students hardly communicate in English after graduating from high schools and that teachers and authors should adapt and revise these books. In such a circumstance, the findings will hopefully aid teachers in their choice of classroom activities and in deciding

how learning activities should be arranged and implemented in the classroom while waiting for MOET to make some changes in these books.

Although the study is intended to investigate students' perceptions of non-communicative and communicative activities in EFL classrooms in an urban high school, which is not researched adequately in the context of Ha Nam-based high schools, the outcome of the study can contribute significantly to our understanding of the issue in high schools with a similar context. As such, this study will serve as a reference material not only for teachers of English in Bac Ly high school but also for teachers elsewhere who wish to continually improve the quality of teaching and learning English.

7. Structure of the Thesis

This paper is divided into three main parts:

Part A is the **INTRODUCTION**. In this part, the rationales of the study, the aims, research questions, the scope of the study, methods of the study and also its design are presented.

Part B is the **DEVELOPMENT** which includes 4 chapters.

Chapter I, Literature Review, deals with a theoretical background about the definitions of CLT and its characteristics; definitions, characteristics, roles, types of communicative and non-communicative activities in the process of learning and teaching; the roles of the teacher in communicative and non-communicative types of communicative activities, and previous studies on students' perceptions about classroom activities.

Chapter II, Research Methodology, describes the situation where the study was conducted and the informants involved in the study. It includes the teachers of English, the students, and the textbook. The data collection instruments, procedures of data collection and data analysis were also presented in this chapter.

Chapter III, Results and Discussion, presents and discusses the results finding out the students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities and their difficulties in participating in communicative activities.

Chapter IV, Implications and Recommendations, presents some pedagogical implications of the study and suggestions for overcoming difficulties in practicing communicative activities in the way, which helps students develop their communicative competence in Bac Ly high school.

Part C is the **CONCLUSION** which summarizes the main points of the study, limitations and suggests for further research.

REFERENCES and **APPENDICES** are presented in the last pages of the study.

PART B DEVELOPMENT

CHAPTER I: LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter reviews the literature on Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and previous studies on students' perceptions of non-communicative and communicative activities. First, it presents definitions and the main characteristics of CLT that is followed by a discussion of con-communicative and communicative activities in language teaching and learning process. Finally, it presents previous studies on students' perceptions of non-communicative and communicative activities.

1.1. Theoretical background of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

1.1.1. Definitions of CLT

1.1.2. Characteristics of communicative language teaching

1.2. Communicative and non-communicative activities in language teaching and learning process

1.2.1. Definition of communicative activities and non-communicative activities

1.2.2 Characteristics of communicative and non-communicative activities

1.2.3 The roles of communicative and non-communicative activities in language teaching and learning

1.2.4 The roles of teachers in communicative and non-communicative activities

1.2.5 Types of communicative activities

1.3. Students' perceptions of non-communicative and communicative activities

1.4. Summary

In this chapter, the researcher tried to provide a brief description of the theoretical knowledge relating to the study. Included are CLT and its characteristics. Most of the linguistics agree that CLT is directly connected to developing communicative competence and its characteristics will be the principles for teachers to choose appropriate techniques as well as activities in class to improve the students' communicative competence. This

chapter also included a discussion of communicative and non-communicative activities in language teaching and learning. Definitions, characteristics, roles are discussed in order that distinguishing the characteristics and roles of these activities can make the best use of communicative and non-communicative activities in the process of learning and teaching. The role of the teacher in communicative and non-communicative activities is also mentioned in order to point out teacher's importance in organizing classroom activities. Moreover, types of communicative activities are grouped according to the classification of Littlewood (1981). Other previous studies on students' perceptions about classroom activities which have suggested that the dominant trend among learners is a preference for non-communicative activities.

In this study, the combination of Harmer's (1981) six distinctive characteristics and Littlewood's (1981) classification of classroom activities is used as the methodological framework for data analysis. Harmer's (1981) six distinctive characteristics of communicative and non-communicative activities are used as criteria to distinguish these two kinds of activities. In addition, Littlewood's (1981) classification of classroom activities is taken as a gauge for communicative classroom procedures, which is the continuum of pre-communicative and communicative activities. Furthermore, the term "non-communicative activities" of Harmer's (1981) is considered as "pre-communicative activities" in Littlewood's (1981).

CHAPTER TWO: METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, the writer provides some information about research approach, the basic settings for the study. The following section describes in details how the data for the research were collected and analyzed to answer the three questions set for this research, namely:

1. *What are twelfth graders' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classrooms?*
2. *What are students' perceived difficulties in practicing communicative activities?*
3. *What are the possible solutions to these difficulties?*

2.1. Research Approach
2.2. Research setting
2.3. Subjects

2.3.1. Selection of subjects:

2.3.2. Students

2.3.3. Teachers

2.4. The Textbook English 12

2.5. Research instruments:

2.5.1. Survey Questionnaire

2.5.2. Semi-structured Interviews

2.5.3. Group Discussions

2.6. Procedures of data collection:

In the beginning of the second semester, the researcher issued questionnaire to 200 students and received the 200 answered questionnaires back at the same day. The respondents were also required to indicate their position in the class list in order to guarantee that the chosen samples truly reflected the random sampling procedure. All students returned the questionnaire. Information from the questionnaire was then summarized and presented in the form of statistic information (tables and charts) for analysis to make implications and recommendations on the most applicable ways to develop communicative competence for students.

After analyzing the questionnaire, the researcher chose randomly 15 students in the sample for interviews. After that, group discussions with eight teachers of English were made to ensure validity and reliability of the collected data. All interviews and group discussions were audio taped and transcribed. The transcripts of discussions were later given to the subjects for verification.

2.7. Procedures of data analysis:

The data collected were both quantitative and qualitative ones as they could throw light on the insights of each other (Wallace, 1998, p.38) to help answer the three research questions set for the study. For qualitative analysis, text rendering was used. For quantitative analysis, tables, percentage, charts were produced. Interpretations were then made with regards to the research questions. The framework for analysis of collected data, thus, is made up of three themes. They are:

- The students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities

  ➢ Students' preference of communicative and non-communicative activities

➢ Students' opinions of the usefulness of these activities

- Students' perceived difficulties in practicing communicative activities

    ➢ Low English proficiency

    ➢ Little motivation for communicative competence

    ➢ Traditional learning styles and habits

    ➢ EFL settings

- Possible solutions to help students overcome these difficulties, thereby improving the quality of English language education

By reading through the completed questionnaire and the interview and discussion transcripts over and over again, I discovered the students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities and identified difficulties that students had encountered in taking part in communicative activities.

CHAPTER THREE: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents the findings and discussions of the study.

3.1. The students' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in the EFL classroom

3.1.1. Students' preference of communicative and non-communicative activities

All the 200 subjects showed interest in the methods their teacher used in the English classroom. The survey results suggest that the students favored a variety of classroom activities, but that they liked non-communicative activities more than communicative ones as in table 1 and table 2.

After making group discussions with teachers on their perceptions of students' preferences, the results indicate that, in non-communicative activities, there is a significant difference between students' preferences and teachers' perception of those preferences. It conveys that students' preferences for non-communicative activities were significantly higher than their teachers' beliefs and that teachers are not highly aware of students' preferences in this regard. Some activities which were given very high priority by students such as pronunciation practice and error correction were marked low by teachers. There is

no significant difference between students and teachers for communicative activities, which implies that in contrast with non-communicative activities, in communicative activities, the instructors are more aware of their students' preferences.

3.1.2. Students' opinions of the usefulness of communicative and non-communicative activities

Students thought that just some communicative activities are useful to their language learning outcome, all non-communicative activities are helpful for their current learning situation. In non-communicative activities, ten out of ten items were claimed to be important by more than two thirds, while of ten communicative activities, seven were thought to be useful by most students.

The result indicates that most of students were aware of the usefulness of classroom activities. This was not considered as a surprise to their teachers. When asking teachers if which communicative activities or non-communicative activities their students think are helpful to their language learning, all teachers reached an agreement of non-communicative activities. According to them, the main reason for their opinions was their difficulties in taking part in communicative activities. These difficulties prevent them from realizing the enjoyment and the usefulness of communicative activities in EFL classrooms.

3.2. Students' perceived difficulties in practicing communicative activities

To meet their current needs in English learning, all the subjects unanimously agreed that a combination of communicative and non-communicative activities was a best way. However, most of the subjects reported having encountered difficulties caused by communicative activities. Some of the subjects pointed out that these difficulties made them unwilling or unable to participate in dynamic classroom activities.

3.2.1. Low English proficiency
3.2.2. Traditional learning styles and habits
3.2.3. Little motivation for communicative competence
3.2.4. EFL settings

CHAPTER 4. IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1. Suggestions to MOET, DOET

4.2. To teachers

4.2.1. Balancing the relationship between linguistic competence and communicative competence

4.2.2. Educating students about classroom activities

4.2.3. Making full use of the textbook and any materials available

4.2.4. Managing speaking turns

4.2.5. Building cooperative atmosphere

4.3.   To students

4.3.1. Cooperating with peers

4.3.2. Cooperating with teachers

4.3.3. Taking risks

PART C. CONCLUSION

1. Conclusion on the major findings and discussion

Knowledge of what students think about activities in their language class is very valuable. It helps teachers and course administrators decide whether and in what directions the teaching methodologies and/or content need to be improved. Teachers, curriculum planners, and others who want to be sensitive to the needs of the students they serve cannot always rely on their unaided intuitions (Rudduck, 1991). By using the present instrument, in which the students expressed their personal opinions about communicative and non-communicative activities, the researcher has discovered whether the subjects see certain kinds of activities as more effective and useful than others. Giving this type of survey to the students has also helped the researcher identify their difficulties in doing communicative activities in classroom.

2. Limitations of the study

Although the researcher while conducting the research has made great effort, the shortcomings and mistakes are inevitable. Due to the limitation of time, in as sense, anecdotal reflected the perceptions of students of classroom activities in terms of their preference and usefulness of those activities as well as constraints in participating in

communicative activities. The study did not touch upon the teachers' perceptions in using these activities and evaluation of the effectiveness of those activities thoroughly. Despite all the mentioned limitations, the researcher hopes that this exploratory research will contribute to the better situation of teaching and learning English at Bac Ly high school.

3. Suggestions for further study

1) This research focused on the students' perception of communicative and non-communicative activities in terms of their preference and usefulness as well as difficulties in doing communicative activities, further studies can focus on writing, reading, listening or speaking class exclusively.

2) Teachers' perceptions of communicative and non-communicative activities in EFL classroom is also considered for further studies.

3) Bridging the gap between learners' learning needs and expectations and teacher's expectation is worth taking into account.