

Diagnostic Approach to Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High School Students*



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Abstract

This research on diagnostic approach for Thai high schools in Thailand aimed: (1) to study high school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence, (2) to diagnose high school students' English-speaking problems, and (3) to develop remedial speaking lessons to improve Thai high school EFL students' speaking skills basing on teachers' and high school students' questionnaire results. This research was classified to be a research and development. The constructed speaking diagnostic test was to remedy the students' speaking weaknesses, give corrective feedback, and develop remedial learning instruction for the students' speaking fluency. The goal of the speaking diagnostic test was to help the students enhance their ability to use English in various situations, in school, community and society, and in the world community for exchange of knowledge as a basic tool for further education, career, and livelihood. The samples were 99 teachers and 176 high school students in Surat Thani, by stratified random sampling and the sample sizes were used by the criterion of the research objectives. The obtained data from instruments were analyzed by the application of frequency and percentage. Results showed that a teacher survey by questionnaires identified high school students' English-speaking skills and problems basing on components of English communicative competence in six aspects. To find remedial strategies, the results of the high school students' English speaking problems were analysed using questionnaire results. The diagnostic test for English language teaching and learning, therefore, could fulfill the goal of remedial teaching and learning through the developed remedial materials by its

* Received April 8, 2020; Revised July 19, 2020; Accepted July 22, 2020

direct and effective strategies to meet the needs and demand of individual students in solving their pronunciation problems.

Keyword: Diagnostic Approach; Communicative Competence; English Speaking

Introduction

The English Proficiency Index research had looked at adult English proficiency in 2018 and found that Thailand was 64 of 88 countries/regions. Thailand's EF EPI score was 48.54 which meant low proficiency level and Thailand's position in Asia was 16 of 21 (EF EPI EF English Proficiency Index, 2018). As, Thailand was found that student scores of the English rational Education Testing Service national basic (O – NET) tests have been consistently low (The National Institute of Educational Testing Service, 2018).

In addition, students' English speaking skills are unsatisfied when students use it in real communication in the classroom. They are unable to use English speaking communication in an effective manner.

A diagnostic test can help locate the precise areas of difficulty encountered by a class or by an individual student. In this way the teacher can assist their students through appropriate teaching and the students should be able to learn from their identified weaknesses, in turn promoting the quality of teaching/learning (Heaton, 1988). Moreover, selected English diagnostic tests help motivate EFL students to improve their English oral communication skills.

Therefore, it is urgent that Thai students' English language problems are to be diagnosed and corrected for improvement. To alleviate the problems, diagnostic and remedial English language programs need to be carefully developed. In addition, the textbooks prescribed by the Ministry of Education for use in Thai high schools should be carefully analyzed to find key phonetic and phonological elements for remedial material development to improve the situation.

Objectives of the research

- 1) to study high school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence
- 2) diagnose high school students' English-speaking problems.

3) develop remedial speaking lessons to improve Thai high school EFL students' speaking skills basing on teachers' and high school students' questionnaire results.

Research Methodology

This research and development project employing the mixed methods of quantitative and qualitative research (Tashakkori, and Teddlie, 1998) by with the researcher has formulated the research process as follows:

1. Compilation of high school students' errors at functional levels and analytical level using the following procedures: Teacher surveys: 89 teacher participants answered the Survey of Teachers' opinion towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking of Thai High school students in Thailand concerning their opinion about their high school students' English speaking problems, English language learning and teaching in Thailand, and factors that affect Thai students' oral communication. Then, through teacher conferencing: 10 teacher participants using the CEFR Fundamental ongoing at B1 level (www.examenglish.com/CEFR/cefr.php) to identify the functions listed in McGraw Hill Education, New World (Manuel, 2016) and Express Publishing Upstream (Virginia and Jenny, 2016) teaching materials series in which the students had been using and been making most errors, and analysed test results by functions specified by CEFR, and error committed by the students at analytical level of sounds to identify the degrees of frequency of pronunciation errors. Approximately 70 % of teachers used the phonology or phonetics book of reference published by New World (Manuel, 2016), My World (Manuel, 2016), English Explorer (Helen, 2016) and Upstream (Virginia, and Jenny, 2016) while only 30% of teachers used the phonology or phonetics book of reference published by Oxford English Dictionary Online and Elementary English Pronunciation in use (Marks, 2007), and the Application of Phonetics to Teaching English Pronunciation (Ronnakiat, 2013). These coursebooks served a reference were used to identify the phonological errors made by the students and Student surveys: 83 student participants answered the Survey of Students' opinion towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High school students in Thailand to give their opinion about their high school students' English-speaking problems, English language learning and teaching in Thailand, and factors that affect Thai students' oral communication. Data from the questionnaires were analysed, checked, and double checked for completeness. Each item in the questionnaires was rated by three experts of English for index of item - objective congruence: IOC. The descriptive statistics such as frequency and

percentage were used for describing the demographic information about the samples, the Survey of Teachers' opinion towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High school students in Thailand, the CEFR Fundamental ongoing at B1 level and the Survey of Students' opinion towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High school students in Thailand.

2. Development of learning materials and a diagnostic testing instrument to investigate and improve the sampled 93 students speaking ability. Three experienced teachers from Suratpittaya school, Khiansapitthayakhom school, and Bannawittayakhom school helped review and commented on the materials series and back ward design (Wiggins, and McTighe, 2005). The learning materials were for two weeks of class. The teachers reviewed the developed diagnostic test to improve the test items. They also confirmed the face validity and content validity of the test by judgment and IOC analysis, effective test item analyses were performed to find item difficulty and discrimination, and test reliability. (Bachman, and Palmer, 1996; Sukamolson, 1981; Srisa-ard, 1980)

Research Results

The study offers a framework for understanding follows as: 1) Teachers' opinions towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High School Students in Thailand; 2) High school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence; 3) Diagnosing Surat Thani high school students' opinions about their English speaking ability; 4) Test blueprint for the diagnostic test of communicative competence in English speaking of Thai High school, and 5) Developing remedial speaking lessons to improve Thai high school EFL students' speaking skills as follows: According to the survey of Teachers' Opinions towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High school students in Thailand were answered in three terms as follows as: (1) English Language Learning and Teaching in Thailand, (2) Factors that affect Thai students' oral communication and (3) The English speaking problem. Then, the checking of CEFR Fundamental ongoing at B1 level by teachers were discussed, and specified the errors in two terms of functional errors and analytical pronunciation errors. Moreover, the Survey of Students' opinion towards Communicative Competence in English Speaking for Thai High school students in Thailand were answered in three following aspects:

English Language Learning and Teaching in Thailand, factors that affect Thai students' oral communication, and the English speaking problems. The communicative speaking competence was classified into two terms: Function and Pronunciation. The purpose of the diagnostic test was to identify functional levels, specific and analytical level of sounds of strength of weakness in English Speaking Ability so as to assign students and they were able to express themselves in a limited way in familiar situations, and to deal in a general way with nonroutine information. From analyzing the functional errors and analytical pronunciation errors analysed in terms of frequency of topics. Apart from the list of their speaking ability, the Thai Ministry of Education (2014). Language in Diagnostic test is developed from both speaking ability, the Flyer Speaking test's expected responses, the Office of Basic Education Commission's the English Speaking Test-Blueprint (O-NET M.6, 2018) and information obtained from focus group of English High School Teachers who discussed, and determined the common and frequent high school student' speaking errors together with the checklist the teachers in the focus group used to identify the errors.

The questionnaires of Surat Thani high school students' opinions yielded results about their English speaking ability. In terms of the English speaking problems - It was obvious that most students had the English speaking problem. Most students agreed on their common twenty English speaking problems. The results of the diagnostic test of communicative competence in English speaking for Thai high school students, constructed from the diagnostic test blueprint molded on the framework specified by results of the research conducted earlier in this study. The test blueprint was divided into two parts- function and pronunciation. The first, function, its descriptive are speak and present ideas clearly (accuracy) and fluently express ideas. (Consistency). The second, pronunciation, its descriptive are clear pronunciation, use correct sentence and word stress, produce clear sounds and pronounce key words correctly. The Developing remedial speaking lessons to improve Thai high school EFL students' speaking skills. There were 19 lessons concerning the functional errors and pronunciation errors, as illustrated in figure 1:

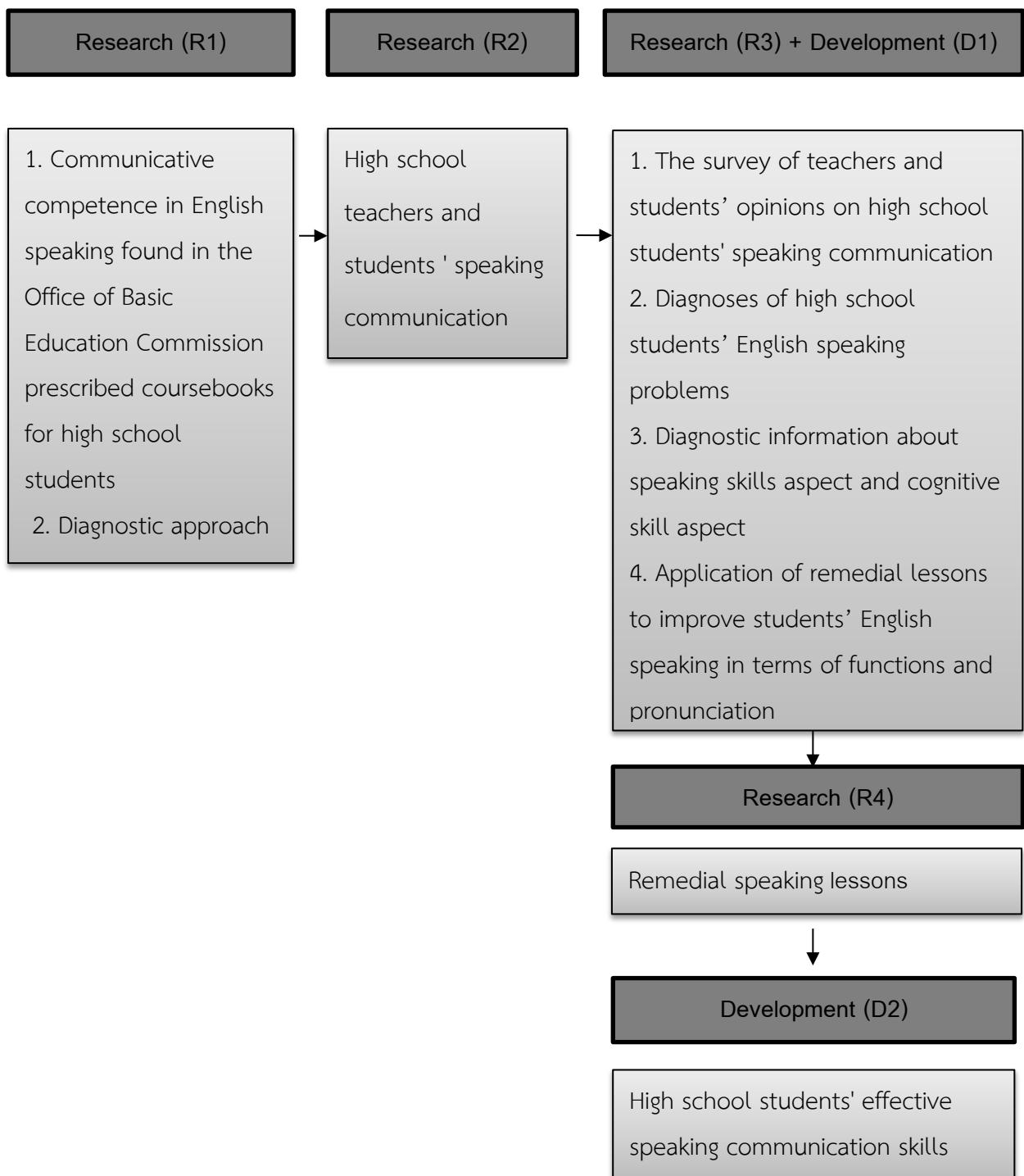


Figure 1: “Diagnostic Approach Model for Improving English Speaking Communication”

Discussion of research results

The English speaking skill components of communicative competence of high school students. First, English Language Learning and Teaching in Thailand - Teachers use English in their daily life for many reasons, communication, teaching, chatting or talking and

everyday greetings, with many groups of people, students, teacher friends and foreigners. Teachers exposed to English in their daily life for speaking to friends, teachers, more than 6 times a day to greet and to chat, listening to friends, teachers, more than six times a day for listening to music, film, TV, and mobile phone in English, writing to friends, colleagues, doing English homework and once a day, reading English books, lessons, homework friends, line messages in English more than six times a day, speaking with friends, colleagues, foreigners more than six times a day. The goals were four goals for learning English for Thai, namely to communicate, and to 'develop oneself in English', both at school or at university, and to prepare for a job or earning one's living. English should be instructed about four ways for teaching English well. There were present to using material or new methods, going to the movies or listening to English songs, practicing English, reading and writing skills. The content should be covered in English lessons. There was four contents that should be covered in English lessons. There was conversation or real life situations, vocabulary and grammar, English as an integrated subject, and English for culture. After each of their English classes, teachers have thought about what teachers have done well or what teachers should try to improve or change for better. Most teachers identified three things they had done well during their English classes. They were to solve the problem and to gain motivation, teach vocabulary and grammar and teach via games. Teachers thought it was important to do well and improve after every English lesson. There was to help students improve their English ability, to promote education effectively and avoid boredom. Teachers thought that the students and teachers should always work hard on choosing activities to improve the learning outcomes. During a lesson, teachers find it easy to see what is going well, okay, or bad. There were seven things that teachers should do. There was to monitor and assess students, use new techniques and methods, change activities, prepare lesson plans, use materials, give clear instructions and discipline control and give enough examples.

Second, factors that affect Thai students' oral communication. Most teachers agreed that the factors that affecting Thai students' oral communication: Students felt proud about the fact that Thailand had never been colonized. They knew that English was a very important language for international communication; therefore, they and try to learn English well. They preferred to listen to the teachers' lectures in Thai while they take note rather than practicing English listening and writing. They were afraid to ask questions, or even use English to communicate. They were shy to tell teachers that they do not understand the English being taught. They required their teachers to teach them using mimicry or "repeating

after me" and memorization methods. They felt awkward or embarrassed when practicing English speaking with teachers and friends. They lacked English proficiency. They liked to use English to communicate and were not afraid to make mistakes. They could speak English like native speakers.

Third, the English speaking problem. Most teachers agreed English speaking problem. Their students were able to talk digital media and technology such as YouTube and Facebook. Their students were able to respond to questions with short answers, and formed questions to elicit information. Their students were able to pronounce vowel sounds. Their students were able to talk about jobs. Students were able to offer help. Their students were able to talk about locations and directions. Their students were able to pronounce consonant and consonant cluster sounds. Their students were able to talk about festivals. Their students were able to pronounce content words and compound words. Their students were able to express probability or possibility about things in the future. Their students were able to pronounce short and long sentences in a paragraph such as a postcard, email, news, etc. Their students were able to pronounce intonation: exclamations. Their students were able to pronounce intonation: rising and falling in the statements and questions. Their students were able to pronounce unstressed and stressed words. Their students were able to express what products were made of, how and where that are made. Their students were able to respond to making arrangements. Their students were able to talk about safety. Their students were able to talk about regrets and missed opportunities. Their students were able to make a complain it about goods or services. Their students were able to respond to make incidents or events that have happened by chance.

Forth, the high school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence. The high school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence or language for communication such as function and pronunciation. Their descriptions were identified into 3 terms. Understanding of and capacity to interpret what has been heard from various types of media, and ability to express opinions with proper reasoning, endowment with language communication skills for exchange of data and information; efficient expression of feelings and opinions and ability to present data, information, concepts and views about various matters through speaking.

Fifth, the analysis of the functional and analytical enunciation errors. The purpose of the Diagnostic test was to identify functional levels, specific and analytical level of sounds of strength of weakness in English Speaking Ability so as to assign students who have been

admitted to the English I, II, III, IV, V or VI to specific courses or learning activities. These students were in the same CEFR level at B1 meaning that their ability to express themselves in a limited way in familiar situations, and to deal in a general way with nonroutine information.

Sixth, the Diagnostic Test Blueprint. Students' speaking ability, the Thai Ministry of Education (2014). Language in Diagnostic test was developed from both speaking ability, the Flyer Speaking test's expected responses, the Office of Basic Education Commission's the English Speaking Test-Blueprint (O-NET M.6, 2018), and information obtained from focus group of English High School Teachers who discussed, and determined the common and frequent high school student' speaking errors together with the checklist the teachers in the focus group used to identify the errors.

Then the diagnostic test-blueprint and the language construct for the diagnostic test items were revised. The diagnostic test identified 30 items concerning construct and objectives of language in Diagnostic test. Furthermore, the diagnostic test was synthesized a strand and 3 standards in order to design the diagnostic test for studying high school students' English speaking skills components of English communicative competence by the researcher.

Last, the diagnostic test items were evaluated for test item difficulty, discrimination level, and test reliability. Like, Bachman and Palmer used the diagnosis for identifying specific areas of strength or weakness in language ability so as to assign students to specific courses or learning activities such as the editing of sentence level grammar and punctuation errors. Their diagnostic achievement test was developed to determine whether the test takers have mastered specific material in the phone company's ESP program. For this achievement test, the following syllabus-based construct definition is used: 'knowledge of specific grammatical forms and punctuation marks in writing a formal business letter.' The following specific components are included in the construct definition as follows: grammatical forms and punctuation marks. (Bachman, and Palmer, 1996). As Sukamolson (1981) stated, the definition of achievement test as a tool constructed for measuring the teaching results or some course training while diagnostic test was for testing learning both in the past and for the future, and may serve as a tool in the remedial lesson planning. Diagnostic theory found that there were three different features of achievement test and diagnostic test as follows: function, content and test analytical methodology. Srisa-ard (1980) and Sukamolson (1981) stated that the construct of diagnostic test learning test

should cover learning objectives and all basic skills. Learning diagnostic test could search for and discover the weaknesses of learning and point out the student errors. The data found by learning diagnostic tests could be used as complementary to the difficulty diagnosis or the student English language problems. Organizing the test to follow the content areas will facilitate the diagnosis. Besides, each area should have at least 3 test items to assess student learning as they would help confirm the test accuracy or the test validity. The test result could be used to revise and correct high school students' English speaking problems speaking ability effectively. In the research, most students had the consensus on their English speaking problems. For example, they were able to talk about digital media and technology such as YouTube and Facebook. Some students discussed their favorite TV documentaries and show series. In addition, they discussed issues concerning new trends in computer because they used it for surfing the internet for news, shopping, food, health, etc., and watching the movies both Thai and English. Some students responded to questions about digital media and technology as follows:

Teacher: Which technologies do you use the most in your life?

Student: I use computer the most in my life.

Teacher: Why do you use it the most?

Student: Because it helps me to search for my interesting stories and practice English by listening to songs.

Some students employed phonological features such as /ə/ is realized as [ə] in word final syllable position, e.g., in 'computer'. Moreover, other phonological features include /ɔ:/ is realized as [ɔə], in vowel position e.g. in 'search' and /ɪ/ is realized as [aɪ], in initial vowel position e.g. in 'listen.'

Conclusion

The research results revealed that teachers identified high school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence in six aspects reported on students by basing on teachers' questionnaire. First, English Language Learning and Teaching in Thailand, factors that affect Thai students' oral communication, the English speaking problem and the high school students' English speaking skill components of English communicative competence, the analysis of the functional and analytical pronunciation errors and the Diagnostic Test Blueprint. Second, diagnosed high school students' English speaking problems based on high school students' questionnaire led to construction of a



diagnostic test for English language teaching and learning in order to fill the void of directly remedial teaching and learning materials to meet the needs and demand of individual students by developing remedial speaking lessons to improve Thai high school EFL students' speaking skills. A diagnostic test can help identify high school students' English speaking problems in two terms such as Function terms. Firstly, high school students were understanding of and capacity to interpret what has been heard from various types of media such as map and pictures, and ability to express opinions with proper reasoning. For example, students were giving the reason why students knew about Halloween festival when people wear scary costumes and masks. The second high school students could be endowment with language communication skills for exchange of data and information; efficient expression of feelings and opinions.

Suggestions

It is necessary to promote the diagnostic approach for teachers who could apply the diagnostic results of both high school and university students in order to improve speaking and pronunciation. Moreover, developing remedial speaking lessons to improve Thai high and university school EFL students' speaking skills in various situations in school, community and society and usage of English as basic tools for further education, livelihood and exchange of learning with the world community. The diagnostic approach should be integrated in diagnosing the students' studying problem in each subject in class in order to enhance their ability in studying and finally, it will help students get the higher learning achievement.

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