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Investigating Speaking Tasks in Relation to Communicative Goals: Possibilities and Obstacles

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Abstract

Enhancing students' communicative competence is crucial in teaching speaking in Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) classrooms. While relating elements focusing on curriculum, materials, and teachers pay attention to developing the students' communicative competence, obstacles hinder students' communicative skill development. This mixed-methods study aimed to analyze the communicative level of the speaking tasks presented in the teaching materials and how teachers used these tasks to enhance communicative competence. It also investigated teachers' perceived difficulties in teaching speaking in the classroom. The participants were three 11th grade teachers and 54 students from three schools in the southern border area of Thailand. Data collected from speaking task analysis and classroom observation were analyzed based on Littlewood's communicative continuum, and a semi-structured interview was analyzed with an inductive approach. This in-depth information illustrates the communicative level presented in the teaching materials and observed in the classroom, along with obstacles encountered. The findings showed that teacher-made teaching materials mainly focused on forms, while commercial textbooks explored forms and meaning-focused in Littlewood's communicative continuum. However, how teachers used the tasks did not always correspond to the original design presented through teaching materials. Many perceived difficulties in teaching English speaking were found, these include time limitations, students' English proficiency level, teachers' attitude toward the tasks, a lack of school

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facilities, and exam-oriented teaching and learning. The results of this study are expected to be a consideration for material developers in designing speaking tasks and for English teachers in engaging their students with communicative speaking activities.

Keywords: Classroom observation, communicative competence, mixed-methods, speaking tasks.

1. INTRODUCTION

To be able to communicate globally, learners need to learn speaking, which is believed as a crucial language-communication skill (Goh & Burns, 2012). That is why acquiring speaking skills in English is considered an essential part of learning a foreign or second language (Richards, 2008). However, speaking is complex (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2013) and arguably the most difficult skill to master (Dincer & Yesilyurt, 2017). Therefore, while we focus on improving our English-speaking skills, our goals have not been achieved, mainly due to some factors.

Two main factors, teachers and teaching materials tend to affect the improvement of speaking skills. First, a teacher plays different roles in teaching. For example, the teacher may play the role of a facilitator helping students learn skills and language that they cannot reach on their own (Goh & Burns, 2012). The teacher can also be a resource person presenting material, managing activities, and resources (Cunningsworth, 1995; Willis & Willis, 2007), as well as motivating students to be more responsible for their learning and comprehension (Snow & Campbell, 2017; Willis & Willis, 2007). The teacher can also encourage students to improve their speaking ability (Goh & Burns, 2012). While trying to accomplish the communicative speaking goal, teachers face problems commonly occurring in foreign language teaching for preparing their students to apply the target language (Bygate, 1987). As a result, one of the ways to facilitate teaching is that teachers need tangible materials, including textbooks, to teach (Dubin & Olshtain, 1986). Textbooks are also used by many English teachers (Cunningsworth, 1984). Many English textbooks are provided for schools because textbooks have become a commodity and are beneficial for education (Gray, 2013). However, selecting the right English Language Teaching (ELT) material is challenging (Razmjoo, 2007).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has expanded students' communicative skills and is a foundation for teaching materials and teachers' classroom roles. The Thai Ministry of Education has also recommended the CLT methodology in its English language policy in 2014 (Inprasit, 2016; Prasongporn, 2016). For EFL countries, attaining communicative ability is the primary goal of language education (Lim, 2019). However, Thai students apparently cannot speak English at a high level of proficiency, even though they began learning English from elementary school until the higher education level (Sasum & Weeks, 2018). Therefore, it is urgent to ascertain further details of English materials used and the ways teachers use them, along with the difficulties they experience during a speaking class.

1.1 Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) was introduced to emphasize developing learners' communicative competence (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Communicative competence is knowing a language and communicating with people in various situations and settings (Hedge, 2000), spontaneously and unrehearsed (Savignon, 1976). CLT has dominated foreign language teaching discourse for the last 40 years (Littlewood, 2013), focusing on the functional and structural aspects (Harmer, 2007; Littlewood, 1981). Task-based teaching (TBT) is an extension of CLT that focuses on tasks (Willis & Willis, 2007) in which the sequence of tasks organizes classwork and tasks generates language used in classrooms (Esaire & Zanon, 1994). The TBT method facilitates learning languages by engaging learners using real-world language (Harmer, 2007; Richards, 2008). TBT has been a part of teaching English because many English teachers rely on tasks in delivering lessons. Many scholars claim that TBT focuses on meaning-focused activities or tasks as a central role rather than grammatical rules (Ellis, 2009; Littlewood, 1981, 2004; Nunan, 1989). However, grammatical rules are still essential in TBT (Willis & Willis, 2007).

TBT materials, including textbooks used in classrooms, provide speaking tasks to improve communicative competence. In TBT, teachers may explore published materials and self-made materials (Hughes, 2011) with speaking tasks that engage students to use language to pursue a related objective of speaking (Luoma, 2004) and to achieve a higher level of fluency (Goh & Burns, 2012). A task gives activities to engage learners to achieve an objective (Prabhu, 1987; van den Branden, 2006). Ellis (2013) opined that tasks pursue a communicative goal rather than focus on linguistic terms. It makes a difference between a task and an exercise; a task focuses on communicative goals and an exercise focuses on linguistic terms. Esaire and Zanon (1994) defined them as communicative and enabling tasks, and Littlewood (2004, 2007) distinguished them as meaning-focused and forms-focused tasks.

Table 1. Littlewood's (2004) communicative continuum.

Focus on forms	← →			Focus on meaning
Non-communicative learning	Pre-communicative language practice	Communicative language practice	Structured communication	Authentic communication
Focusing on the structures of language, how they are formed, and what they mean, e.g., substitution exercises, 'discovery' and awareness-raising activities	Practicing language with some attention to meaning but not communicating new messages to others, e.g., 'question-and-answer' practice.	Practicing pre-taught language in a context where it communicates new information, e.g., information-gap activities or 'personalized' questions	Using language to communicate in situations that elicit pre-learned language, but with some unpredictability, e.g., structured role-play and simple problem-solving	Using language to communicate in situations where the meanings are unpredictable, e.g., creative role-play, more complex problem-solving, and discussion.
'Exercises'	(Ellis) ←		→	'Tasks'
'Enabling tasks'	(Esaire and Zanon) ←		→	'Communicative tasks'

Littlewood (2004, 2013) also introduced a communicative continuum with five communicative levels that can be used to investigate what communicative level is applied in delivering English-speaking tasks. It starts from focusing on forms without attention to meaning and develops to focusing on the communication of meaning. Littlewood's (2007) communicative continuum has been used to investigate the extent to which communicative competence tasks are present in English textbooks and teaching-learning classrooms. For example, Lim (2019) applied Littlewood's communicative continuum and pedagogical perspective to analyze speaking activities presented in English textbooks. Similarly, Ogura (2008) analyzed oral communication textbooks with Littlewood's communicative continuum. Both Lim and Ogura used the continuum to analyze textbooks without further inspection of classroom practices. On the other hand, Deng and Carless (2009) emphasized Littlewood's communicative continuum to observe teaching-learning English classrooms without analyzing teachers' textbooks. In addition, other studies (Chang & Goswami, 2011; Kalanzadeh et al., 2013; Li, 1998) investigated CLT obstacles faced by teachers without observing both what teaching materials were used and how teaching materials were delivered in classrooms. Therefore, the present study obtained richer data by observing teaching materials used, how teachers applied them to classrooms, and investigated barriers during the teaching of speaking.

1.2 Research Questions

While past CLT studies mainly collected data with only one or two methods, this study combines three methods: speaking task analyses, classroom observations, and interviews, to triangulate data. Furthermore, this research investigated the communicative competence level of the English-speaking tasks presented through teaching materials and in the classroom. Since commercial textbooks were produced based on public requests instead of students' needs (Khan et al., 2020), they are not suitable for all students. Therefore, teachers must ensure that the textbooks are suitable for their students' English proficiency levels (Mede & Yalçin, 2019). Teaching materials analysis helps teachers choose suitable textbooks for students (Suryani, 2018). In addition, the analysis benefits teachers to avoid a mismatch between authors' assumptions about learners' proficiency levels and actual learners' proficiency levels (Johnson, 1989; McDonough & Shaw, 1993). Finally, teachers' perceived difficulties during the teaching of speaking were also explored.

Drawing on the rationales above, this mixed-methods study aimed to answer two key research questions:

- To what extent do the English-speaking tasks presented through teaching materials and in the classroom focus on communicative competence?
- What barriers do teachers have in engaging students in speaking task activities?

2. METHODS

2.1 Participants

This current research was designed as a case study that used many sources to analyze a natural context thoroughly (Hancock & Algozzine, 2006) and investigated a

particular set of problems in an educational context (Grauer, 2012). The case study was conducted in a border area, Sadao District, Songkhla province, located in Southern Thailand, close to Malaysia. According to Timothy (2001), border tourism gives people more opportunities to contact foreigners, indirectly increasing global language demand. In selecting the participants of this study, a purposive sample was employed. Since there were three public schools in Sadao District registered under the Thailand Ministry of Education (EMIS) in 2019, all of them were approached for data collection. The teachers all graduated with bachelor's degrees. Teacher 1 is male, and Teacher 2 and Teacher 3 are females. The English teaching experience of Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and Teacher 3 were 27, 28, and 6 years respectively. Students' numbers differ between classes (School 1=29, school 2=25, and school 3=19), but not all students were always present. Therefore, 54 students (n=54) participated in this study. Furthermore, this study explored teaching materials used in the 11th grade from the three schools: teacher-made material, commercial Textbook A, and commercial Textbook B, respectively.

2.2 Research Instruments

Three instruments were used to triangulate the data: a speaking tasks analysis, a classroom observation, and an interview.

2.2.1 *Speaking tasks analysis*

A checklist to analyze the teaching materials was designed to investigate the communicative level of the speaking tasks presented in Grade 11 teaching materials. The checklist comprised items representing each level based on Littlewood's communicative continuum: non-communicative learning, pre-communicative language practice, communicative language practice, structured communication, and authentic communication. The measurement scale ranged from 1 to 3 nominal scales (scale 1 = goal not achieved, 2 = partially achieved a goal, and 3 = fully achieved).

2.2.2 *Classroom observations*

Similar to the textbook analysis checklist, the classroom observation checklist was constructed based on Littlewood's (2004, 2013) communicative continuum. The checklist was designed to rate the communicative level of the speaking tasks delivered in the classroom by asking if the tasks have met the goals, ranging from 1 to 3 nominal scales (1 = goal not achieved, 2 = partially achieved the goal, and 3 = goal fully achieved on the continuum). Observing teaching speaking in a classroom was crucial because it gave rich data from the classroom as an artificial environment to learn and use L2 (Littlewood, 1981). Besides, teachers play a significant role in how tasks' objectives can be achieved because the effectiveness of teaching materials also depends on how teachers emphasize them in classrooms (Ahmed, 2017).

2.2.3 *Interviews*

The interviews were employed in collecting qualitative data. For example, teachers might have reasons why they selected particular, extended, or modified tasks

(Goh & Burns, 2012). Moreover, researchers can investigate in-depth data about participants' motivations, thoughts, and feelings toward a topic through interviews (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). This post-observation interview aimed to investigate the rationale behind English speaking task-based teaching practiced in the classrooms and the challenges encountered by the teachers. Three teachers who participated in the semi-structured interviews responded to open-ended and closed-ended questions. These questions were designed based on the results from the speaking tasks analysis, and classroom observations, and adapted from Willis and Willis (2007), focusing on the issues related to task-based teaching.

2.3 Data Collection Procedure

Quantitative data was first collected. Here, the researchers and the three teachers collected two speaking tasks from the lesson and analyzed them based on the speaking task analysis checklist. The speaking tasks used in these lessons were different because the teachers from the three schools used different teaching materials. Next, the researchers observed the classroom to assess the communicative level of the speaking tasks presented in the classroom. Then, immediately after the lessons finished, the students used the classroom observation checklist to assess how the speaking activities were delivered in the classrooms. The number of observations ranged from two to seven teaching periods. Qualitative data was then collected through interviews with the three teachers, each lasting between 30 and 90 minutes. The interviews were conducted in English. All interviews were audio-recorded and then fully transcribed.

2.4 Data Analysis

Data from different sources were collected and analyzed as follows. First, data collected from the speaking task checklist by the teachers and researchers were grouped and analyzed for mean scores ($\bar{x}$). The mean ($\bar{x}$) showed the communicative level of the speaking task presented in the teaching materials. Second, data were collected from the classroom observation checklist. The mean ($\bar{x}$) classroom observation checklist results showed the communicative level of speaking activities delivered based on the students' and researchers' assessments. Third, data from the interviews were transcribed and analyzed with an inductive approach, in which the coding scheme was directly from the text (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). The transcriptions were codified based on the similarity of obstacles to teaching English speaking tasks experienced by the teachers.

3. RESULTS

This section presents how the speaking tasks presented in the teaching materials and delivered in the classroom meet the communicative level based on Littlewood's communicative continuum. In addition, the analysis of challenges encountered by the teachers in delivering speaking tasks in the classroom is also presented. School 1 used teacher-made material, while the participants from School 2 and School 3 used commercial textbooks (Textbook A and Textbook B, respectively).

3.1 School 1

3.1.1 *The communicative level presented in teacher-made material*

Teacher 1 created teaching materials by combining and selecting tasks from several sources such as textbooks, websites, and YouTube videos. He used a PowerPoint presentation to deliver task 1 and task 2. These tasks were designed with a list of questions and pictures of public figures. Each picture has a description as information to answer provided questions.

Table 2 shows that task 1 and task 2 in teacher-made material focused on forms over meaning. These two speaking tasks partially achieved pre-communicative and non-communicative goals ($\bar{x} = 2.33$ and 2.17 , respectively). Given these points, the two speaking tasks of the teacher-made material were forms-focused with a similar trend. This teaching material had low support for reaching communicative goals and was more concerned with linguistic terms.

Table 2. Mean value ($\bar{x}$) of speaking task analysis of teacher-made material.

Littlewood's Communicative Continuum	School 1	
	Task 1	Task 2
Non-communicative learning	2.17	2.17
Pre-communicative language practice	2.33	2.33
Communicative language practice	1.50	1.50
Structured communication	1.00	1.00
Authentic communication	1.00	1.00

3.1.2 *The communicative level presented in classroom teaching*

The result of Table 3 supports the idea that speaking activities delivered in School 1 focused on forms over meaning.

Table 3. Mean value ($\bar{x}$) of classroom observation checklist.

Littlewood's Communicative Continuum	School 1	
	Task 1	Task 2
Non-communicative learning	2.15	2.14
Pre-communicative language practice	2.67	2.62
Communicative language practice	1.94	1.87
Structured communication	1.94	1.71
Authentic communication	1.74	1.67

From Table 3, Teacher 1 followed speaking tasks on the PowerPoint by asking questions between students in task 1 and asking questions between teacher and students in task 2. The teacher delivered speaking task 1 and task 2, which partially achieved the pre-communicative goal ($\bar{x} = 2.67$ and 2.62 , respectively) as the most prominent objective. However, speaking task 1 and task 2 also achieved non-communicative objectives ($\bar{x} = 2.15$ and 2.14 , respectively). As a result, Teacher 1 delivered speaking tasks by engaging students mainly with non-communicative and pre-communicative activities, which had less support in communicative speaking development.

There were some reasons the teacher engaged students with low communicative speaking activities. One of them was the poor English proficiency level of students. This is as expressed by the teacher in the following excerpt.

- (1) As I told you, they are weak. Some of them are just slow, hesitant. At the beginning of every semester, I will speak English all the time in every class. But I have to [speak] less-less-less. (Teacher 1)

Moreover, the tasks created by the teacher might not be suitable for their current students since they relied on previous students' English proficiency levels, which differed from the current students.

- (2) I think some vocabulary is too difficult for this class. Maybe, it is easy for the last one [previous year class] but not for this [current class]. (Teacher 1)

The condition of schools' facilities improved or worsened the way teachers teach in a classroom. For example, a lack of school facilities triggered time limitations in delivering speaking tasks in a classroom.

- (3) Usually, we have a projector in our lab, but that is broken, so I have to combine this in one period to use that room. After the projector broke, I had to use some documents or something. And then, just some classes have time to practice speaking. (Teacher 1)

Two tasks in the teacher-made material served forms-focused objectives, which have less support in communicative competence development. As a result, the teacher delivered less communicative speaking activities using tasks from the teacher-made material following simple instructions. In addition, the students' poor English proficiency levels and lack of school facilities made teaching more challenging for the teacher.

3.2 School 2

3.2.1 The communicative level presented in Textbook A

Textbook A was a commercial textbook used by Teacher 2. As shown in Table 4, speaking task 1 in Textbook A focused more on meaning, while speaking task 2 focused more on forms.

Table 4. Mean value ($\bar{x}$) of speaking task analysis of Textbook A.

Littlewood's Communicative Continuum	School 2	
	Task 1	Task 2
Non-communicative learning	1.34	2.50
Pre-communicative language practice	1.50	2.17
Communicative language practice	1.34	1.67
Structured communication	2.17	2.00
Authentic communication	2.00	1.34

Task 1 had been designed with a sequence of reading and speaking. After reading a passage about Dick Summers, students acted out an interview between a journalist and Dick Summers based on the reading passage. Task 2 had two parts; an individual

speaking by answering a simple question and a pair-work conversation based on clues and samples provided in the textbook.

Speaking task 1 reached a partial structured and authentic communication ($\bar{x} = 2.17$ and 2.00 , respectively). The second task's objectives were ranked from the high level of non-communicative objectives ($\bar{x} = 2.50$), pre-communicative objectives ($\bar{x} = 2.17$), and a structured communication objective ($\bar{x} = 2.00$). Since these tasks had different objectives, Textbook A tended to combine both forms and be meaning-focused. It can be concluded that the textbook can be categorized as a communicative teaching material that can develop students' communicative competence.

3.2.2 The communicative level presented in classroom teaching

Both speaking tasks delivered in School 2 focused more on forms-focused activities. The teacher used another reading task instead of an interview stated in the textbook as speaking task 1. They asked students simple questions related to the reading task. The second speaking task in the textbook was modified with a speaking practice based on grammar rules and samples. Speaking task 1 achieved the pre-communicative objective ($\bar{x} = 2.20$) while speaking task 2 was delivered by achieving the non-communicative objective ($\bar{x} = 2.75$) (see Table 5). Therefore, the teacher emphasized non-communicative or pre-communicative objectives in delivering speaking activities. As a result, it can be seen that students were engaged with less communicative speaking activities in the classroom.

Table 5. Mean value ($\bar{x}$) of classroom observation checklist.

Littlewood's Communicative Continuum	School 2	
	Task 1	Task 2
Non-communicative learning	1.98	2.75
Pre-communicative language practice	2.20	1.85
Communicative language practice	1.43	1.58
Structured communication	1.49	1.83
Authentic communication	1.25	1.41

The teacher selected and modified tasks to be delivered in the classroom. She had several reasons to support this action as follows. There were many holidays and extra activities throughout the study that required the teacher to restructure her teaching schedule.

- (4) In my school, there are many activities. Moreover, there are many camps. So, I skip [the task]...I do not want to use much time. Because I know when the students must have a midterm examination, so, this is one reason why I combined [modified] it." (Teacher 2)

The teacher also mentioned to what level their students' English proficiency was. However, unfortunately, it was also a barrier to delivering speaking tasks.

- (5) I think it [task] is not hard, it is not difficult, but only a few students in our school can achieve good marks because most Thai students in the local area are rather weak in English. They do not understand the instruction that the teacher asked them. (Teacher 2)

Challenges might also come from the teacher herself. For example, task selection and modification might occur because the tasks were too complex and not interesting from the teacher's perspective.

- (6) If I begin with a strenuous activity like exercise number 7 [skipped speaking task], I think I must spend much more time and must be very tired ... Sometimes, for me as the teacher, I do not like this exercise [task]. It is not attractive. When I do not like it, I will change it. The reason for changing the item or the exercise [task] is because I am bored of reading and checking the same thing, the same items...the students do not know this exercise [task] before, but I have known it for many, many years." (Teacher 2)

Furthermore, Thailand has an O-NET (i.e., Ordinary National Educational Test, to test the knowledge and thinking ability of Grade 6, 9, and 12 students) and final examinations that indirectly influenced students' and teachers' attitudes toward teaching-learning English speaking. The main concern of both teachers and students was preparing students for the examination, which pays more attention to test-taking strategies. Therefore, learning speaking tasks were not deemed as necessary as learning for the examination, which determines students' graduation or going up a grade.

- (7) Thai students are taught to study for the exam. So, many teachers, including me, try to teach students how to do the test. The students must learn and memorize, and finally, they must answer questions in the test. (Teacher 2)

Less communicative speaking activities were given to the students by using the communicative textbook. In addition, the teacher selected and modified speaking tasks to be delivered in the classroom, causing changes in the communicative goals. The teacher found that task selection and modification were needed because of time limitations, students' poor English proficiency levels, teachers' attitudes toward the tasks, and exam-oriented teaching and learning.

3.3 School 3

3.3.1 The communicative level presented in Textbook B

Textbook B used by teacher 3 was a commercial textbook. Speaking task 1 was a pair-work speaking practice, i.e., playing a role. Likewise, in speaking task 2, students were assigned a pair-work speaking practice with correct grammar by using provided phrases.

Table 6. Mean value ($\bar{x}$) of speaking task analysis of Textbook B.

Littlewood's Communicative Continuum	School 3	
	Task 1	Task 2
Non-communicative learning	2.17	2.33
Pre-communicative language practice	2.33	2.50
Communicative language practice	2.00	2.17
Structured communication	2.34	2.17
Authentic communication	1.50	1.67

Similar to textbook A, textbook B also served a combination of forms-focused and meaning-focused speaking tasks. Two speaking tasks in textbook B used in the

third school served all communicative objectives except authentic communication. The objective of the first speaking task spread across Littlewood's communicative continuum levels ($\bar{x} = 2 - 2.34$) (see Table 6). The second task's objective was slightly different from the previous task's goal because of the higher scale achieved in the pre-communicative objective ($\bar{x} = 2.50$). As a result, this textbook focused on forms and on meaning that can be used to improve students' communicative competence.

3.3.2 *The communicative level presented in classroom teaching of school 3*

As can be seen from Table 7, the third school seems distinct compared to the first two schools since the tasks combined numerous communicative levels.

Table 7. Mean value ($\bar{x}$) of classroom observation checklist of school 3.

Littlewood's Communicative Continuum	School 3	
	Task 1	Task 2
Non-communicative learning	2.00	2.43
Pre-communicative language practice	2.42	1.99
Communicative language practice	2.03	2.36
Structured communication	2.25	1.96
Authentic communication	1.60	1.59

Teacher 3 followed speaking tasks presented in Textbook B to be delivered to the classroom. Speaking task 1 partially achieved all communicative levels ($\bar{x} = 2.00$ and 2.42), except authentic communication. Then, the teacher applied non-communicative and communicative language practice objectives ($\bar{x} = 2.43$ and 2.36, respectively) to deliver speaking task 2. The second speaking task had an uneven distribution of objectives; even so, both speaking tasks were delivered using a combination of forms-focused and meaning-focused activities. In addition, students were engaged in communicative activities that can efficiently develop students' communicative competence.

Teacher 3 engaged students with communicative activities using similar tasks provided in the textbook. This method appears to be in contrast with the previous two. However, the teacher also faced several challenges in teaching speaking in the classroom. Similar to the students in the two preceding schools, the students of School 3 had low proficiency levels in English.

- (8) I think beginners...they do not understand the words, the vocabulary. They do not know the meaning of most vocabulary. (Teacher 3)

Since it took many periods to wait for students to be ready for speaking performance in class, the teacher revealed that teaching communicative speaking tasks might cause a problem. The teacher's perspective was that the tasks took longer than expected:

- (9) Especially about time, it is the big problem. (Teacher 3)

The teacher created a pair-work practice by engaging students in speaking performances. One student was supposed to ask questions, and another answered. Two students performed multiple speaking to help other pairs by asking them questions,

which was a more challenging role. The response of the teacher about the way the students did speaking performance was:

- (10) It is not 100%, okay, but if not like that, I need so much more time. It was a waste of time for me. So, I let them do that. Better than they sit down. (Teacher 3)

In conclusion, the teacher adopted the speaking tasks from Textbook B and delivered those speaking tasks to the classroom. Even though the teacher also faced several obstacles in the classroom, such as time limitations and students' poor English proficiency levels, the teacher decided to deliver communicative speaking activities. As a result, more time was consumed than expected.

4. DISCUSSION

Teacher-made material focused on forms aiming at understanding structures rather than applying language communicative practice. This material was designed with flexible and straightforward instruction, leading to different teaching goals depending on how teachers delivered the tasks. Using the material, there is an opportunity to engage students to speak communicatively, e.g., by asking-answering questions in a random pair presentation with their own public figure choices by giving unpredictable questions. Eventually, students can produce questions-answers to communicate new information from pictures. On the other hand, the teacher could not fully deliver communicative speaking activities due to broad and straightforward design materials. Moreover, there were other factors like students' low English proficiency and a broken projector. These became barriers to achieving the learning expectations in the Thai curriculum. Moreover, less communicative teaching material created fewer opportunities for doing communicative activities in the classroom.

A classroom teacher and teaching material are combined to pursue communicative goals to improve students' communicative competence. Indeed, teaching material that can support communicative speaking is not the only key to developing students' communicative competence; it needs support from the teacher in the classroom. Textbook A served forms-focused and meaning-focused tasks as a part of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) material because the CLT tasks consist of language functional and structural aspects (Harmer, 2007; Littlewood, 1981). Instead of delivering speaking tasks from the CLT textbook, the teacher engaged students with forms-focused activities, which have less support for communicative competence development. A teacher can select and modify a task so that teaching speaking may be different from a guideline in the task of a textbook (Goh & Burns, 2012). In the current study, the teacher redesigned speaking tasks to be presented in the classroom. The task modifications and selections caused different speaking tasks' goals from those stated in the teaching material. The teacher's decision was based on students' English proficiency levels, time limitations, exam-oriented teaching objectives and learning, and teachers' attitudes.

The objectives of communicative activities in School 3 were achieved by using the CLT textbook. Instead of task modification and selection, Teacher 3 adopted the speaking tasks provided in the textbook in the teaching lesson. It also achieved similar expected goals to those stated in the textbook. The teacher's decision supported the idea of Cunningsworth (1995) that textbooks influence the way a course is delivered.

Aside from time limitations and students' poor English proficiency levels, the students also had low motivation to speak English. It was observed that they avoided playing a more challenging role in speaking practice. That is why two speaking activities took longer than expected. Thai students are EFL learners who lack the urgency to learn English, which differs from ESL learners who need to learn English since they use it beyond classrooms (Huang & Yang, 2018). Indeed, communicative tasks take longer time than expected (Chou, 2017), so the teacher decided to communicate with students individually outside the class rather than interacting (Chou, 2017).

Additionally, the current study shows that the result of the communicative level presented in the textbooks differs from the previous studies. Ogura (2008) and Lim (2019) found that the analyzed textbooks were forms-focused. Michaud (2015) did a comparison study between two groups of textbooks, revealing that one group focused on forms, but another was meaning-focused. Most speaking tasks in the textbooks in this study focused on both meaning and forms. Thus, the commercial textbooks serve communicative competence development without leaving forms-focused learning.

Classroom activities conducted in the study tended to vary. This study revealed that all speaking tasks in School 1 and School 2 were delivered by applying forms-focused activities. This result parallels Deng and Carless's (2009) study of classroom observations in an elementary school in Guangdong, China. Their study showed that classroom activities focused more on forms than meaning. Littlewood (2018) mentioned that many teachers attempt more forms-focused activities to teach the English language. In contrast, Teacher 3 emphasized both forms and meaning activities in delivering speaking tasks. The teacher applied the CLT method because the chosen activities focused on structural and functional aspects of a language (Harmer, 2007; Littlewood, 1981).

Based on interview data, the problems experienced by the teachers were students' poor English proficiency level, time limitations, exam-oriented teaching and learning, teachers' attitude toward speaking tasks, and lack of school facilities. However, the essential problem experienced by these three teachers was the students' low English proficiency, which was an echo of previous research; Li (1998) in South Korea, Chang and Goswami (2011) in Taiwan, and Kalanzadeh et al. (2013) in Iran. In this research, Teacher 1 adapted teaching due to the students' low English proficiency with more minor communicative speaking tasks and delivered less communicative activities in the classroom. Teacher 2 tended to adjust tasks delivered in the classroom to suit their students' poor English proficiency levels. It can be seen that even though speaking tasks in Textbook A met communicative goals, the tasks delivered in the classroom achieved less communicative goals.

On the other hand, Teacher 3 assisted students in doing communicative speaking activities based on the textbook regardless of their low English proficiency levels. As a consequence, the class time took longer than expected. Their low English proficiency level was the most prominent issue that influenced task selections and modifications and triggered a boundary in efficiently improving communicative competence.

Thailand's government has established an English curriculum for Grade 11 with the expectation that students can use the foreign language to communicate in informal and formal conversations in various situations (Ministry of Education Thailand, 2008). The student participants are expected to use English to communicate with anyone, in any situation, and at any location. However, it seems not in line with the final examination program held in schools. The O-NET in Thailand has been designed with

multiple-choice questions (Todd, 2019). It causes an unequal portion to teach and learn speaking, reading, writing, and listening skills in school because of students' and teachers' attitudes toward the test. Indeed, a test influences how teachers teach and students learn (Todd, 2019). Accordingly, instead of expanding language abilities and skills, teachers led students to accomplish tests (Imsa-ard, 2021). Brown (1996) suggests that a well-designed task may be targeted toward unpredictable data like real-life interactions that are unpredictable between speakers. Since there is no speaking part included in English tests (especially O-NET), it has less power to support students' communicative competence development.

5. CONCLUSION

The findings showed that teacher-made teaching materials mainly focused on forms, while commercial textbooks explored forms and meaning-focused as proposed in Littlewood's communicative continuum. However, how the teachers used the tasks did not always correspond to the original design presented through their teaching materials. Many perceived difficulties in teaching English speaking were found, these include time limitations, students' English proficiency level, teachers' attitude toward the tasks, lack of school facilities, and exam-oriented teaching and learning. It is suggested that these findings can positively contribute to material developers and English teachers, especially in Thailand. The actual condition of students' English proficiency level and the obstacles experienced by teachers might be helpful information for material developers before designing speaking tasks. For example, a material developer might evaluate speaking task sections if their target students were Thai, particularly in rural areas. Students in rural areas likely have poor English proficiency levels. Decreasing tasks' difficulty level to be more accessible and adjustable to rural students might reduce a gap of mismatch between students' English proficiency levels expected by a teacher in reality.

The communicative level presented in the teaching materials can enrich the teaching material selection for English teachers who implement the CLT methods. CLT material can support English teachers to engage their students to improve their speaking skills communicatively. However, communicative teaching material and a teacher's effort in creating communicative activities go hand-in-hand. They are necessary to go together to achieve communicative competence development successfully. However, time management is also urgently needed to avoid spending more extended periods than expected.

The number of speaking tasks in this study is limited, and it is recommended to analyze more speaking tasks in future related research. In addition, the participants involved in this study were from government schools, so it is recommended to gain more insight into the area by expanding the background of the study participants to different levels of teaching. Finally, another limitation is the small number of participants (i.e., three teachers) which hinders the generalizability of the findings, although the findings may be transferable to similar teachers and settings.

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APPENDIX A

Speaking Tasks Analysis Checklist

Please read speaking tasks 1 and 2 below.

Do speaking tasks 1 and 2 presented through the teaching material meet the following goals or not?

Please tick ☒ : 1 = goal not achieved, 2 = partially achieved a goal, and 3 = goal fully achieved.

No.	Goals of the speaking tasks	Speaking Task 1			Comments
		1	2	3	
1.	Learners can produce sentences with correct linked conjunctions, comparison, conditional sentences, or tenses.				
2.	Learners can substitute words/expressions right after being given an example.				
3.	Learners can learn speaking via pronunciation drills of words with emphasis on sounds, stress, and intonation.				
4.	Learners can answer common questions to which all learners know the answers.				
5.	Learners can answer common questions from a task that requires a particular form.				
6.	Learning speaking by describing visuals (pictures, maps, and graphs) or explaining word(s).				
7.	Learning speaking through doing a simple survey (includes survey amongst classmates) to complete a table or picture.				
8.	Learning through completing information gap (includes asking a partner) based on recently taught language.				
9.	Learners can answer 'personalized' questions like information about family and daily activities.				
10.	Learning speaking through a scripted role-play activity in which the situation has been structured and which uses existing resources.				
11.	Learners can give information to their pair or group member and get some new information from them.				
12.	Learning speaking by dealing with a daily or common problem and giving their opinion/solution.				
13.	Learning speaking in a group discussion.				
14.	Learners can practice speaking by dealing with a complex issue/problem (environment, politics, economy, etc.) and giving their solution.				
15.	Learning speaking via unscripted a role-play activity with unpredictable sentence forms created by students.				

APPENDIX B

Classroom Observation Checklist

Please read speaking tasks 1 and 2 below.

Does the speaking task 1 and 2 presented in the classroom meet the following goals or not?

Please tick ☒ : 1 = goal not achieved, 2 = partially achieved a goal, and 3 = goal fully achieved.

No.	Goals of the speaking tasks	Speaking Task 1			Comments
		1	2	3	
1.	The teacher instructs learners to produce a sentence based on a grammar rule such as clauses linked by conjunctions, comparison, conditional sentences, or tenses.				
2.	The teacher gives an example of a sentence and substitutes one or more words or changes prompts to lead students to produce a new structure.				
3.	The teacher guides learners to do speaking by practicing a pronunciation drill by saying some words with correct intonation and sound.				
4.	The teacher stimulates speaking practice by giving learners common questions that all learners know the answers to.				
5.	The teacher stimulates speaking practice by giving common questions that require a particular form.				
6.	The teacher guides learners to do a speaking activity by describing a visual task (picture, maps, and graph) or explaining word(s).				
7.	The teacher facilitates learners to do a speaking activity by doing a simple survey (including a survey amongst classmates) to complete a table or picture.				
8.	The teacher facilitates learners to do a speaking activity by completing information gaps (including asking a partner) based on recently taught language.				
9.	The teacher gives 'personalized' questions like information about family and daily activities.				
10.	The teacher manages the situation of role-playing for learners to do speaking activity within using existing resources.				
11.	The teacher assigns learners into a group or pair to exchange information from group members/partners by speaking.				
12.	The teacher facilitates learners to deal with a daily or typical case and express their opinion/solution.				
13.	The teacher assigns the learner to do a speaking practice in a group discussion.				
14.	The teacher facilitates learners to deal with a complex case (environment, politics, economy, etc.) and express their solutions.				
15.	The teacher asks students to do a speaking activity in a role-play without using form sentences.				

APPENDIX C

Interview Guides

The questions asked to the teachers could be classified into five:

1. First, what teaching material do you use in teaching English? Second, is that based on your selection or school decision?
2. Why did you ask students to do this activity? What is your expectation?
3. Why do students respond the way in the classroom?
4. Suppose you have a chance to teach again. Will you do the same or different? Why so?
5. What is your problem when teaching speaking in the classroom? Time allocation? English students' level? Pressure to prepare for exams that are not tasks based?