

Teachers' and Students' Perceptions of Classroom Activities Commonly Used in English Speaking Classes

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Abstract

Classroom activities, such as English dubs, role-play, brainstorming etc can be very useful for the teaching of oral English. In recent years, although considerable attention has been paid to the use of classroom activities in English speaking classes, the perceptions of teachers and students about such activities have been ignored. Therefore, this study aims to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions of the use of classroom activities in English speaking classes. Classroom observations were carried out as a preparatory work for a questionnaire survey which was conducted to examine the attitudes of English-major students and teachers towards 21 classroom activities. Data were analyzed and the results of the research showed that there were both similarities and differences between students' and teachers' perceptions about these activities and that the perceptions of freshmen and sophomores were not completely matched. The findings of this research can help teachers take students' perceptions into consideration while designing classroom activities for English speaking classes in the future.

Keywords: classroom activities, English speaking class, teacher and student perceptions

1. Introduction

Educational games are activities especially designed for the purpose of teaching for certain courses, for example, to expand concepts, reinforce development, and assist students in learning a skill as they play.

Classroom activities have been receiving broad attention as active learning strategy, which provides students with hands-on experience to practice their communication skills. A number of studies have shown the advantages of classroom activities. For example, Moore (2011) thinks that classroom activities can (1) engage students in learning activities, facilitate learning by doing, and practice communication skills; (2) provide many benefits, give immediate feedback to students, arouse a high degree of students' interest and enthusiasm, meanwhile allow teachers to work with a wide range of student capabilities, and allow experimentation with a model of the real environment.

Games or activities have been considered to assist students with their language learning. Firstly, they add interest to what students might not find very interesting. Thiagarajan (1999) thinks that sustaining interest can mean sustaining effort. Wright, Betteridge and Buckby (2005) claim that even if a game involves discrete language items, such as spelling game and miming, meaningful communication takes place as students attempt to understand how to play the game and as they communicate about the game before, during, and after the game. Games stimulate students' inner motivation and enhance the interest of the class. Secondly, the variety and intensity that games offer may lower anxiety (Richard-Amato, 1988) and encourage shyer learners to take part (Uberman, 1998), especially when games are played in small groups. It has been found that classroom activities with small groups have become more popular as ways of encouraging students to learn. In a small group, students can have more opportunities to involve themselves in face-to-face interaction, share group responsibilities, and enhance their co-operative relationships. In other words, incorporating such kind of social activities into the classroom may not only improve students' social skills (Jacobs & Kline, 1996; Ellis, 2005), but it may help students of lesser ability to learn from those who do not require as much instruction (Cohen, 2015).

Despite their advantages, the traditional sense of classroom games or activities is that they have commonly been

used as warm-ups at the beginning of a language class or fill-ins when there is still some time near the end of class or an occasional bit of spice stirred into the curriculum to add variety. In addition, such classroom activities are not often used in college English speaking classes. As a result, some students feel their speaking classes dull and lose their interests in opening their mouths, which will certainly affect the development of their communicative competence.

As has been mentioned above, games can play an essential role in language classes (Lee, 1979). On the one hand, games can spark interest in learning and increase motivation of learners. When facing challenges in class, learners would make their efforts to learn. On the other hand, unlike the traditional way of teaching, which regarded games as something to create a relaxing atmosphere in class, games can in fact make a difference in language learning.

Previous studies about classroom games or activities have mainly focused on how they were used, developed and how effective they were in English teaching. For example, Lu, Hou and Huang (2010) investigated the feasibility of the student-centred teaching model (including the use of some interactive activities, such as pair work, discussion and video-based role-plays) utilised in an English Audio-Video Speaking Class (EAVSC) in Computer-Assisted Language Learning (CALL) environments at the authors' university by carrying out two quantitative longitudinal case studies. Analysis of correlated data shows that this specific teaching model in general is both plausible and effective in improving students' communicative language abilities, especially in their speaking abilities (p. 101). By applying quantitative and qualitative research methods, the major findings of Wang, Shang and Briody (2011) demonstrate that students evidenced significant improvements in their learning motivation and vocabulary acquisition, and that their anxiety levels due to peer pressure were reduced when learning included games (p. 127). Lago and Seepho (2012) conducted an experiment on the effect of Brain-Compatible Activities (BCA) on vocabulary learning and retention. The results of their experiment show that the subjects significantly learned the target words while taking the tourism course using BCA. Zhu (2012) found out that using games, such as guessing games, picture games, sound games, mime, fact finding games, debates, jigsaw games and role play can improve students' communicative ability.

Studies can also be found on students' needs or opinions about the use of such games or activities (Mayrath et al., 2007). Using three communicative activities (discussion, problem-solving and role-play), Oradee (2012) compared the speaking skills of Grade 11 students and studied the students' attitude towards teaching English speaking skills using three communicative activities. Her research findings show: (1) The students' English speaking abilities after using the three communicative activities were significantly higher than before (Pretest = 60.80; Posttest = 85.63); (2) The students' attitude towards teaching English speaking skills using the three communicative activities were rated as good ($\bar{X} = 4.50$) (p. 533). Chanseawrassamee's (2012) research findings from a questionnaire survey and a follow-up informal talk also show that adult learners have positive attitude towards activities or fun games.

On the other hand, Al-Issa (2014) used a self-report questionnaire to elicit 18 non-native English speaking student teachers' reflections on 11 games used in their teaching at Muscat Intermediate Teacher Training College (MITTC). It was found that the use of games enriched the student teachers' command and understanding of "Professional English" and also resulted in a change in their perspectives on the nature of their work as ELT practitioners and in their beliefs about language teaching as well.

However, few studies, if any, have been found to focus on a comparison of students' and teachers' perception of commonly adopted classroom games or activities, particularly in English speaking classes. Any attempt to investigate students' and teachers' perceptions in question would be worthwhile, for if we know students' and teachers' attitudes towards classroom activities, we may make more reasonable designs for our speaking classes, get rid of dull and unattractive activities, and add more entertaining, educational and effective activities to facilitate students' learning of English.

So, the following are the research questions of this research:

- 1). What are teachers' and students' general perceptions of classroom activities commonly used in English speaking classes?
- 2). Are there any similarities and differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom activities commonly used in English speaking classes?
- 3). Are there any similarities and differences between freshmen's and sophomores' perceptions of classroom activities commonly used in English speaking classes?

2. Method

2.1 Participants

The participants of this study were English-major freshmen, sophomores, and teachers in the School of Foreign Languages of Beijing Forestry University (BJFU), totally 100 people, including 41 freshmen (5 males and 36 females), 39 sophomores (1 male and 38 females) and 20 teachers (2 male teachers and 18 female teachers). The freshmen were aged about 18, sophomores 19. For these students, English speaking was their required course. At the time of the research, the students were all taking two hours' English speaking classes each week taught by a foreign teacher. They seemed to have a great desire for more classroom activities though it was not clear what classroom activities they would prefer. The 20 teachers have been teaching various courses in the Department of English for many years, so they are familiar with the students and their English proficiency levels.

2.2 Instruments

A questionnaire was designed by synthesizing most commonly used classroom activities in various English speaking classes for the present research. The purpose of synthesizing was to cover as many classroom activities as possible so as to elicit a larger range of teachers' and students' perceptions. The questionnaire was designed in two versions, one for teachers and one for students. The questions of the questionnaire are the same in the two versions so that comparisons can be made between students and teachers and between freshmen and sophomores.

Before the questionnaire was designed, one month's classroom observations of English speaking classes were made by one of the authors in the School of Foreign Languages of Beijing Forestry University and a language centre. The purpose of observing classes was to see how English speaking classes were organized and what activities were used in the classes. The data (classroom activities) collected from the classroom observations were later included in the questionnaire.

In the questionnaire, firstly, students were asked about their perceptions of their English speaking class they are taking now, for example, "Is the class interesting or boring to you?" Then, both students and teachers were asked whether more classroom activities should be added to English speaking classes. The major part of the questionnaire was designed with a list of 21 classroom activities in which teachers and students were required to give opinions about these activities. To be more specific, the 21 classroom activities in the questionnaire were classified into 5 categories. They are *competitive activities*, *recreational activities*, *conversational activities*, *cooperative activities* and *simulation*, each with four or five items. Competitive activities refer to a competition between groups. These activities take full advantage of students' ambitious psychology and generate the enthusiasm of students so as to achieve the purpose of improving their language skills. Recreational activities are entertainment-oriented, aiming at helping students to practice English in a relaxing environment. Conversational activities are two-way or multi-way activities, which give learners an opportunity to communicate with their partners. Cooperative activities are undertaken through group efforts. Students develop their respective advantages and draw upon others' strengths to overcome their own weaknesses. Simulation is the imitation of a real-world situation or event that represents reality but removes risk to the individual in the activities. Simulation requires a model of what exists or might exist under manageable and controlled conditions (Moore, 2011). A detailed description of the 21 classroom games or activities is presented in the following Table.

Table 1. Description of the five categories of classroom activities and their constituent items

Categories	Subcategories	Description
1. Competitive Activities	(1) Taboo	This is a word-guessing activity. The words are from what you learn in the class. One student, who is the clue-giver, gives descriptive clues to his or her partner about a keyword printed on the card so that the partner can correctly guess the keyword.
	(2) Disordering Letters	This is a word-guessing activity. List a word in the disrupted alphabetical order and restore the word. The words are from what you learn in the class.
	(3) Simon Says	This activity requires one student to act as Simon and he or she is the clue-giver. Other students must make appropriate actions according to the instructions.
	(4) Discovering Me	This activity needs to select one student and makes him or her choose a person's name which is printed on the card. Other students can ask questions and guess the correct name of the person based on the answers.
2. Recreational Activities	(5) English Dubs	This activity needs to select a part of a film and dub the video clip.
	(6) Song Cloze	This activity needs to elect a part of an English song. Students take turns to write the lyrics on the blackboard
	(7) Role Play	In this activity, students play a role based on the topic they discuss in the class.
	(8) Short Play	In this activity, a group of students design their own play and perform it in the class.
3. Conversational Activities	(9) Debate	In this activity, students are divided into two sides and debate based on a given topic.
	(10) Mini Lecture	In this activity, students pick up one topic and make a mini lecture for 3 to 5 minutes.
	(11) Retelling a Story	In this activity, students listen to an English material and retell the contents after listening.
	(12) Presentation	In this activity, students use PPT and make a presentation in class.
4. Cooperative Activities	(13) Pair Work	In this activity, students practice a dialogue or topic in pairs.
	(14) Miming	In this activity, someone mimes an action and the others try to guess what it is.
	(15) Brainstorming	In this activity, students discuss a topic and collect as many ideas as possible.
	(16) Crazy Stories	In this activity, one student gives a beginning of a story and the others take turns to give their own plots.
	(17) Discussion	In this activity, students discuss a topic in a group.
5. Simulation	(18) Job Interview	In this activity, students make a mock job interview in a group.
	(19) Cooking Recipe	In this activity, students give a description of how a dish is cooked.
	(20) Show Game	In this activity, students make a mock show in a group.
	(21) Follow Me	In this activity, students act as a guide or give directions.

In addition, the questionnaire was designed by using five-point Likert scale. For the perception part, all the participating students and teachers were required to evaluate each of the classroom activities on the five-point scale in the Likert format (strongly disagree, disagree, undecided, agree, strongly agree). Because all the participants were Chinese, the Chinese version of the questionnaire was given so that the subjects could have a better understanding of the questions asked and answer them more accurately.

2.3 Data Collection

For the classroom observation, one of the researchers observed two English speaking classes every week and it lasted for one month. The duration of each class was two hours with a 10-minute break in between. It began from the end of March to the end of April. During this period, the researchers collected a variety of activities that were commonly used in English speaking classes. Then, other activities were also collected from published articles (Ellis, 2005; Roger, 2006; Emerta, 2009; Hsu, 2011; Liao, 2011; Ruchu, 2011; Zapalska et al., 2012; Cohen, 2015).

At the end of April, the questionnaire was administered to the 80 students (41 freshmen and 39 sophomores) of the School of Foreign Languages, Beijing Forestry University at the end of their class. For the teachers, they completed the questionnaire during their regular weekly meeting. In order that the teachers and students would give their true opinions, at the beginning of the questionnaire survey, they were clearly told that all the information would be completed in an anonymous way and used for research purposes only. The whole procedure took a week to finish and all data were collected at the beginning of May. Finally, 80 questionnaires from students (including 41 questionnaires from freshmen and 39 from sophomores) and 20 questionnaires from teachers were retrieved.

2.4 Data Analysis

After collecting the data, the percentage of students expressing their opinions of whether they liked English speaking class was calculated. The perceptions of teachers and students on whether they agreed to add more classroom activities in English speaking class were also treated as percentages. Then, the 21 classroom activities were divided into 5 groups and the teachers and students were asked about their perceptions of the five different types of classroom activities. Comparisons were made between two groups, respectively: one was a comparison between teachers and all students about the 21 activities; the other was between freshmen and sophomores.

In addition, the weighted mean (Griffiths, 2007) for each item of the questionnaire was calculated for the students' version and the teachers'. The purpose of doing so was to examine what classroom activities teachers and students regarded as attractive and effective for English speaking class. In order to make comparisons of their opinions about each item, the participants were divided into four groups: teachers, overall students, freshmen, and sophomores. The items whose weighted means were above 3 were considered to be favoured by the participants since according the five-point Likert scale, A (strongly disagree = 1 point), B (disagree = 2 points), C (undecided = 3 points), D (agree = 4 points), and E (strongly agree = 5 points) were assigned, while items below 3 were regarded as not favoured. The difference between group means for each item was also calculated and those above 0.5 were considered disparate in opinions.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 General Perceptions of Teachers and Students

The general perceptions of students (N = 80) about English speaking class they were having at the time of the research are listed in Table 2. It can be seen from the table that in response to the question of whether they like their English speaking class they were having, 52.5% of the students in the School of Foreign Languages could not decide whether the class was interesting or not, 36.25% found it interesting and 8.75% thought it was boring. Only 2.5% of the students regarded it as being very interesting. It is surprising to find that more than 50% of the students could not figure out whether their English speaking class was interesting or not, but only about 39% of the students regarded it as interesting. One possible explanation might be that they thought their speaking class was acceptable in term of gaining knowledge even though they did not find it attractive. Another explanation might be that some students chose this major not out of their own interest but were forced to do so according to their parents' will, which is not uncommon in China.

Table 2. The general perceptions of students about their English speaking class (percentage)

	A (Very boring)	B (Boring)	C (Undecided)	D (Interesting)	E (Very interesting)
Students	0	8.75	52.5	36.25	2.5

When it comes to the question of whether more classroom activities should be added to their English speaking class (See Table 3), most teachers (85%) and students (73.75%) reached an agreement. Specifically, 55% of the teachers and 45% of the students agreed to add more activities to the class. 30% of the teachers and 28.75% of the students strongly agreed to organize more activities in English speaking class. The percentage of people with undecided views was 15% for teachers and 22.5 % for students, respectively. Only 3.75% of the students disagreed with the idea. None of the teachers detested it. This is consistent with the previous question in which most students did not think that their English speaking class was interesting, so it is natural for them to think that more activities should be organized to arouse their interest. The teachers' desire to make their classes more interesting was even stronger than their students since most of them would like to be highly evaluated by their students.

Table 3. Teacher and student perceptions of adding more classroom activities to English speaking class (percentage)

	A (Strongly disagree)	B (Disagree)	C (Undecided)	D (Agree)	E (Strongly agree)
Teachers	0	0	15	55	30
Students	0	3.75	22.5	45	28.75

In Table 4, the 21 classroom activities are divided into five categories, which are competitive activities (*Taboo, Disorder Letters, Simon Says, and Discover Me*), recreational activities (*English Dubs, Song Cloze, Role Play, Short Play*), conversational activities (*Debate, Mini Lecture, Retelling a Story, Presentation*), cooperative activities (*Pair Work, Miming, Brainstorming, Crazy Stories, Discussion*), and simulation (*Job Interview, Cooking Recipe, Show Game, and Follow Me*). In the questionnaire, teachers and students were asked about their favorite activities. The most favorite category for teachers was conversational activities (55%), for students it was recreational activities (56.25%), including freshmen (60%) and sophomores (51%). The least favorite category for all teachers (4.5%) and students (5%) is simulation. This can also be seen in the last column where the mean percentages of perceptions of the five types of activities across teachers, all students, freshmen and sophomores were calculated (e.g., Recreational 48.06%, Conversational 28.75%, and Simulation 4.88%, respectively). It is evident that teachers favoured conversational activities because they would think of them from the perspective of teaching, while students liked recreational activities since they thought such activities would give them more fun.

Table 4. Teachers' and students' favorite activity types (percentage)

Categories	Teachers	All Students	Freshmen	Sophomores	Mean percentage
Competitive	5.5	8.75	6	13	8.31
Recreational	25	56.25	60	51	48.06
Conversational	55	20	17	23	28.75
Cooperative	10	10	12	8	10
Simulation	4.5	5	5	5	4.88
Total	100	100	100	100	100

Note. Competitive = Competitive Activities, Recreational = Recreational Activities, Conversational = Conversational Activities, Cooperative = Cooperative activities.

Table 5 is the result of the last question in the questionnaire which concerns the length of time that classroom activities should last. Most of the teachers (65%) agreed to have a 15 minutes' game activity, while only 25% of

the students agreed with these teachers. 35% of the teachers and 60% of the students thought 30 minutes was the most appropriate length of time. In addition, 7.5% of the students would like to have an hour classroom activities and another 7.5% of the students intended to have game activities for more than one hour. This also corresponds with the results of Table 4, which indicates that students not only preferred more fun-oriented activities, but also would like to have such activities for longer time, while teachers thought more about making use of the limited amount of time to provide knowledge rather than merely giving fun to students.

Table 5. Teacher and student perceptions about the time length of classroom activities (percentage)

	A (15 minutes)	B (30 minutes)	C (One hour)	D (More than one hour)
Students	25	60	7.5	7.5
Teachers	65	35	0	0

In addition to the general perceptions of teachers and students, statistical results of the questionnaire survey revealed that there were both apparent similarities and differences between their perceptions. So, discussion of the results will focus more on agreements and disagreements between teachers and students and possible reasons to explain them. To be more specific, comparisons will be made between teachers and students and between freshmen and sophomores.

3.2 Similarities of Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

Table 6 shows the results of teacher and student perceptions of the use of the 21 classroom activities in English speaking class. All the 21 classroom activities are listed in the table and the weighted mean was calculated for each question using the five-point Likert scale mentioned above.

Table 6. Teachers' and students' perceptions of the 21 classroom activities commonly used in English speaking class

Category	No.	Subcategory	Teachers	All students	Freshmen	Sophomores
Competitive Activities	1	Taboo	3.80	3.48	3.47	3.49
	2	Disordering Letters	3.50	3.38	3.32	3.44
	3	Simon Says	3.40	3.73	3.81	3.65
	4	Discovering Me	3.95	3.70	3.76	3.65
Recreational Activities	5	English Dubs	4.10	3.85	3.98	3.72
	6	Song Cloze	3.70	3.56	3.71	3.41
	7	Role Play	4.45	3.65	3.78	3.51
	8	Short Play	4.20	3.67	3.63	3.69
Conversational Activities	9	Debate	4.25	3.55	3.46	3.64
	10	Mini Lecture	4.20	3.44	3.49	3.38
	11	Retelling a Story	4.25	3.28	3.17	3.38
	12	Presentation	4.30	3.45	3.61	3.28
Cooperative Activities	13	Pair Work	4.30	3.54	3.51	3.56
	14	Miming	3.50	3.55	3.54	3.56
	15	Brainstorming	4.05	3.71	3.73	3.69
	16	Crazy Stories	3.95	3.84	4.00	3.67
	17	Discussion	4.20	3.59	3.61	3.56
Simulation	18	Job Interview	4.05	3.50	3.54	3.46
	19	Cooking Recipe	3.55	3.69	3.78	3.59
	20	Show Game	3.80	3.80	3.91	3.69
	21	Follow Me	3.85	3.59	3.51	3.67

Notes. High average levels of preference ascribed to classroom games or activities by teachers are in boldface, and by freshmen are in italic boldface for the contrast of differences. The difference between group means that is above 0.5 was considered real disparate in opinions.

It can be seen from the table that the weighted means for the 21 classroom activities are all above 3 for both teachers and students, indicating that in general they all (100%) preferred to have classroom games or activities of some kind (cf., Section 2.4 above) whatever the activities are. There is a total of 12 items that reflect similar perceptions of teachers and students about classroom games or activities, which are Item 1 (Taboo, $\bar{X} = 3.80$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.48$ for students), Item 2 (Disordering Letters, $\bar{X} = 3.50$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.38$ for students), Item 3 (Simon Says, $\bar{X} = 3.40$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.73$ for students), Item 4 (Discovering Me, $\bar{X} = 3.95$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.70$ for students), Item 5 (English Dubs, $\bar{X} = 4.10$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.85$ for students), Item 6 (Song Cloze, $\bar{X} = 3.70$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.56$ for students), Item 14 (Miming, $\bar{X} = 3.50$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.55$ for students), Item 15 (Brainstorming, $\bar{X} = 4.05$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.71$ for students), Item 16 (Crazy Stories, $\bar{X} = 3.95$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.84$ for students), Item 19 (Cooking Recipe, $\bar{X} = 3.55$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.69$ for students), Item 20 (Show Game, $\bar{X} = 3.80$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.80$ for students), and Item 21 (Follow me, $\bar{X} = 3.85$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.59$ for students).

The values for these items are generally between 3 and 4, which means that both teachers and students preferred to have an activity of some kind, to enliven class atmosphere perhaps, but their preference was not strong. In

other words, they might think that these activities are naïve, time-consuming and not effective enough to help learners develop their real life communicative competence since most of these games require action rather than communication. For example, in Item 3 (Simon Says), one student acts as Simon to give clues, other students make appropriate actions according to the instructions. In other words, in this activity only one student is speaking, while others are just making actions.

On the other hand, Items 4, 5, 15 and 16 gained greater acceptance than the other items by both teachers and students (with values close to 4). Perhaps these activities were thought to be able to provide more opportunities for students to communicate. Perhaps team spirit could be developed in such activities while students are making joint efforts to perform a task. For example, Brainstorming not only stimulates students to speak, but also inspires them to put forward new ideas. Cooperative activities as such can also help students to overcome psychological barriers when using a second language. As a result, a relaxing and pleasant atmosphere is created in the classroom, which further facilitates their language learning.

Within the same category, the perceptions of teachers and students were found to be similar. For example, in the category of recreational activities, both teachers and students prefer Item 5 to Item 6. Probably this activity was considered to be able to offer more opportunities to students to practice their oral English with regard to accuracy and fluency.

3.3 Differences between Teachers' and Students' Perceptions

The differences between teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom activities commonly used in English speaking class were mainly found to be associated with nine items: Item 7 (Role Play, $\bar{X} = 4.45$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.65$ for students), Item 8 (Short Play, $\bar{X} = 4.20$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.67$ for students), Item 9 (Debate, $\bar{X} = 4.25$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.55$ for students), Item 10 (Mini Lecture, $\bar{X} = 4.20$ for teachers and $\bar{X} = 3.44$ for students), Item 11 (Retelling a Story, $\bar{X} = 4.25$ for teachers and $\bar{X} = 3.28$ for students), Item 12 (Presentation, $\bar{X} = 4.30$ for teachers and $\bar{X} = 3.45$), Item 13 (Pair Work, $\bar{X} = 4.30$ for teachers and $\bar{X} = 3.54$ for students), Item 17 (Discussion, $\bar{X} = 4.20$ for teachers and $\bar{X} = 3.59$ for students), and Item 18 (Job Interview, $\bar{X} = 4.05$ for teachers, $\bar{X} = 3.50$ for students).

The differences between group means for these items range from 0.53 to 0.97, meaning that there is discrepancy between teachers' and students' perceptions of classroom activities used in English speaking class (c.f., Section 2.4 above). In other words, teachers regarded these items between "agree" (4 points) and "strongly agree" (5 points), while students perceived them between "undecided" (3 points) and "agree" (4 points), or almost "agree". Giving a close scrutiny of them, one may find that all these are traditional activities, which are Item 7 (Role Play), Item 8 (Short Play), Item 9 (Debate), Item 10 (Mini Lecture), Item 11 (Retelling a Story), Item 12 (Presentation), Item 13 (Pair Work), Item 17 (Discussion), and Item 18 (Job Interview). Teachers favoured them strongly probably because they thought though traditional, these items are useful and effective to promote students' linguistic development. For example, in Item 9 (Debate), students should not only organize ideas quickly, but also express their ideas logically and fluently using evidence. This is indeed a challenging activity for people who speak their own native language, not to mention people who speak a foreign language. That is why teachers valued these items highly.

A slight difference (d) were found in three activities: Items 8 (Short Play, $d = 0.53$), Item 17 (Discussion, $d = 0.61$), Item 18 (Job Interview, $d = 0.55$); while the gap is most prominent in six classroom activities: Items 7 (Role Play, $d = 0.80$), Item 9 (Debate, $d = 0.70$), Item 10 (Mini Lecture, $d = 0.76$), Item 11 (Retelling a Story, $d = 0.97$), Item 12 (Presentation, $d = 0.85$), 13 (Pair Work, $d = 0.76$).

As can be seen from Table 6, Items 8, 17 and 18, together with 13, were not very much preferred by students, but supported by teachers. One of the main reasons might be that students had had too many of such activities to arouse their interests any more. For example, Items 13 (Pair Work) and 17 (Discussion) are two similar activities of different grouping, aiming to engage students into conversations. They are very often used by teachers in English speaking classes. Students did not show high preference for them probably because they were tired of such repeatedly used activities and desired to have some newly designed classroom activities to add a sense of novelty. Another reason might be that students did not feel it really necessary to have such activities. For instance, a possible explanation for the different perceptions of teachers and students about Item 18 (Job Interview) would be that the students who took English speaking class at the time of the research were freshmen and sophomores, who possibly did not recognize the importance of finding a job yet. They might, therefore, think it was a waste of time to practice job interview. Whereas teachers were fully aware of the serious employment situation in China, so they had different views about "Job Interview", thinking that English speaking class was a good opportunity to prepare students for their job hunting.

The gap is even larger between teachers and students in their perceptions of Items 7 (Role Play), 9 (Debate), 10 (Mini Lecture), 11 (Retelling a Story), and 12 (Presentation). In addition to being traditional, these activities did not draw students' much attention probably because the tasks or topics set for these items did not accord with their interests. Take Item 7 (Role Play) for example. It is an activity widely used by teachers in today's English speaking classes. It requires students to act out roles in recreating events or imaginary situations. The role-playing students try to "become" another individual and, by assuming the role, to gain a better understanding of the person as well as the actions and motivations that prompted certain behaviors (Moore, 2011). If it is well-designed, this activity can arouse students' interest. However, based on the classroom observation of this research, it was found that "Role Play" was not put into full use by teachers. To put it another way, there was a lack of variety in designing role-playing for English speaking classes and clear guidelines and description of situation were not given to students though these are considered very important (Moore, 2011).

The main divergence lies in the category of conversational activities: Items 9 (Debate, $d = 0.70$), 10 (Mini Lecture, $d = 0.76$), 11 (Retelling a Story, $d = 0.97$), and 12 (Presentation, $d = 0.85$). Comparatively speaking, the category of conversational activities is the most challenging among all the categories. Teachers liked this category of activities probably because they can help develop students' communicative skills by putting forward ideas, elaborating them with evidence, and using speech delivery techniques and so on. By contrast, students might think these activities were too demanding. For example, as has been mentioned before, Item 9 (Debate) is a strong conversational activity, which requires debaters to present a positive or negative argument and find strong evidence to support it. Meanwhile, both sides need to consider how to defend their own argument and refute the argument of the opposite side. To prepare a debate, therefore, students learn to find evidence by collecting information and mock debates through constant practice so as to win the opposite side. The whole process involves much time and efforts. Items 10 (Mini Lecture), 11 (Retelling a Story) and 12 (Presentation) might also be considered painful by students. Item 10, for instance, not only requires students to have a good command of the foreign language, but also needs students to have speech delivery techniques. Item 11 (Retelling a Story) calls for a combination of listening and speaking skills. On the one hand, students have to listen to the material and get the message correctly; on the other hand, they must retell the listening material in their own words. This is probably why the evaluations of students are not very high.

3.4 Similarities and Differences between the Perceptions of Freshmen and Sophomores

In addition to the comparison between teachers and students regarding the 21 questions, the opinions of freshmen and sophomores were also compared in this research. In general, unlike the perceptions of teachers and students, there is a slight gap between freshmen and sophomores in their views about the 21 questions. In other words, their opinions are very similar. These are Item 1 (Taboo, $d = 0.02$), Item 2 (Disordering Letters, $d = 0.12$), Item 3 (Simon Says, $d = 0.16$), Item 4 (Discovering Me, $d = 0.11$), Item 8 (Short Play, $d = 0.06$), Item 9 (Debate, $d = 0.18$), Item 10 (Mini Lectures, $d = 0.11$), Item 11 (Retelling a Story, $d = 0.21$), Item 13 (Pair Work, $d = 0.05$), Item 14 (Miming, $d = 0.02$), Item 15 (Brainstorming, $d = 0.04$), Item 17 (Discussion, $d = 0.05$), Item 18 (Job Interview, $d = 0.08$), Item 19 (Cooking Recipe, $d = 0.19$), Item 20 (Show Game, $d = 0.22$) and Item 21 (Follow Me, $d = 0.16$), a total of 16 items with differences between group means ranging only from 0.02 to 0.22.

This similarity of perceptions between freshmen and sophomore in the category of competitive activities (Items 1, 2, 3, and 4) with values of around 3 further confirms the results of the comparison between teachers and students (see Section 3. 2), indicating that both freshmen and sophomore did not regard these activities highly effective. Similar explanations can be given to Item 8 of recreational activities, Items 9, 10 and 11 of conversational activities, Items 13, 14, 15 and 17 of cooperative activities, and all items of simulation.

Difference, though minor, can be found mainly in the category of recreational activities: Item 5 (English Dubs, $d = 0.26$), Item 6 (Song Cloze, $d = 0.30$), Item 7 (Role Play, $d = 0.27$), and two items of other categories (conversational and cooperative): Item 12 (Presentation, $d = 0.33$) and Item 16 (Crazy Stories, $d = 0.33$), a total of five items with differences between groups means ranging from 0.26 to 0.33. In other words, freshmen preferred to have these activities than sophomores though the latter group were not fond of them probably because after more than one year's study, as has been explained before, they found that they had had too many of them and did not find anything new in them. While freshmen were keen on these activities probably they took part in such activities for the first time and found them interesting and useful.

It is worth mentioning that some difference can be perceived from sophomores' attitudes towards Item 12 (Presentation). It was observed in this research that in an oral English class, presentation usually lasted a little too long per student, so sophomores might have got bored with it, though freshmen approved it. Perhaps some adjustments should be made in this activity so that it can appeal to both freshmen and sophomores.

4. Conclusion

On the whole, it is encouraging to find that most teachers (85 percent) and students (73.75 percent) agreed to add more classroom activities to English speaking class.

General perceptions of the five categories of activities have shown that the category favoured most by teachers was conversational activities (55 percent), while the one liked more than other categories by students was recreational activities (56.25 percent), including freshmen (60 percent) and sophomores (51 percent).

Detailed analysis of the twenty-one classroom activities demonstrated that both students and teachers agreed to have classroom games or activities of some kind whatever the activities were. This finding is consistent partially with the research results of Oradee (2012) and Chanseawrassamee (2012) in which only students' or adult learners' positive attitudes towards activities or fun games were investigated. The activities that showed similar but less strong opinions of both teachers and students are the category of competitive activities, two items in recreational activities and most items in cooperative activities and simulation.

The activities that reflected different receptions of teachers and students are in the category of conversational activities and a few items in other categories, which can be referred to as traditional activities, namely, Role Play, Short Play, Debate, Mini Lecture, Retelling a Story, Presentation, Pair Work, Discussion and Job Interview. This discrepancy between teachers and students show that although students were aware that these activities are helpful in promoting their communicative competence, some changes and innovations are needed in design to arouse their interest. In other words, it is important to consider the needs and desires of students when teachers prepare and design lessons for English speaking classes.

The findings of the research also show that there is not much distinction in the perceptions of freshmen and sophomore about classroom activities used for English speaking class except for a slight difference in five items, which are English Dubs, Song Cloze, Role Play, Presentation, and Crazy Stories. Whether freshmen's interest in these activities will diminish with the passage of time like high grade students still awaits further research. However, based on the result of the present research one thing is clear that students of different English proficiency levels require different classroom activities so that their particular needs can be satisfied.

A major limitation of this research is that it was conducted only in one university with 100 students and 20 teachers. Future research with the aim to find what students as well as teachers think of classroom activities commonly used in English speaking class may consider including more students from different universities to guarantee representativeness. In addition to that, triangulation, for example, by means of interview, would be very helpful to enrich information about this research topic.

In spite of the limitations, however, regarding what students think about classroom activities, especially those that might be conducive to their language development in relation with their teachers' views, this study has brought some insight into a neglected area of research which expects teachers to integrate students' perceptions of classroom activities into their own when planning their lessons.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

(Students' Version)

Dear students,

We are doing a research for English major students' attitudes toward educational activities used in English speaking classes. So, your opinions about classroom activities used in your English speaking classes are very important for us.

For each question, there is no standard answer. The data we collect are used only for research purposes and will not bring any inconveniences to your life. Since this questionnaire is an anonymous survey, you do not need to write your names. Please answer the questions according to your own opinion and actual situation. The findings

of the research will contribute to the improvement of the activities used in your English speaking classes. Thank you very much for your cooperation!

1. You are a _____?

- A. freshman B. sophomore C. junior D. senior

2. What is your gender?

- A. Male B. Female

3. What is your opinion about your English speaking class this semester?

- A. Very boring B. Boring C. Undecided D. Interesting E. Very interesting

4. Do you agree to add more educational activities to your English speaking class?

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

5. **Taboo** (a word-guessing activity) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

6. **Disordering Letters** (restoring a word from disrupted alphabetical order) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

7. **Simon Says** (making appropriate actions according to a student's instructions) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

8. **Discover Me** (guessing a student's name according to descriptions) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

9. **English Dubs** (selecting a part of the film and dub the video clip) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

10. **Song Cloze** (writing down the lyrics while listening to a song) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

11. **Role Play** (playing a role of someone) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

12. **Short Play** (performing a short play in class) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

13. **Debate** (debating based on a given topic) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

14. **Mini Lecture** (making a mini lecture for 3 to 5 minutes) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

15. **Retell a Story** (listening to a story and retelling it) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

16. **Presentation** (using PPT to make a presentation in the class) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

17. **Pair Work** (practicing a dialogue or doing exercises in pairs) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree

18. **Miming** (guessing while someone is miming) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.

- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
19. **Brainstorming** (discussing a topic and collecting as many ideas as possible) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
20. **Crazy Stories** (taking turns to finish a story) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
21. **Discussion** (discussing a topic in a group) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
22. **Job Interview** (Making a mock job interview) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
23. **Cooking Recipe** (describing how a dish is cooked) is a funny activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
24. **Show Game** (making a mock show in a group) is an interesting activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
25. **Follow Me** (Asking for and giving directions) is an attractive activity to use in English speaking class.
- A. Strongly disagree B. Disagree C. Undecided D. Agree E. Strongly agree
26. In your opinion, how long should an educational activity last?
- A. 15 minutes B. 30 minutes C. One hour D. More than one hour

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