

A Development of a Basic Burmese Language Learning Activity Package Based on Communicative Language Teaching and Brain-Based Learning Principles

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Abstract

With the new paradigm shift of education, communication is focused on to support the students' practice using the target language fluently in different situations without strictly use of correct grammar. Moreover, brain-based learning principles are suitable of developing communicative competence because the students learn through activities that they acquire the language with different perception. Students can study language content while using it by linking prior knowledge with the new one. The objectives of this study were 1) to develop and examine the effectiveness, 2) to implement, and 3) to explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic Burmese language learning activity package. The findings revealed that the package was appropriate to implement in Myanmar 1 course. The organization met 0.84; meanwhile the content was 0.76. For the implementation, it could be noticed that it was at the significant level at .05. Moreover, the students had positive attitudes towards studying with the package.

Keywords: Communicative Language Teaching, Brain-based Learning Principles, Basic Burmese Language Package

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1. Introduction

In Thailand, not only it is focused on English which is a universal language, Chinese, Burmese, and Korean are seemingly appeared to play the most important languages too. It is observed that most of people from many countries especially neighboring countries travel, study, and do businesses in Thailand. Even they employ English as a medium of communication, other languages are still important and take more roles.

Like other countries, English, Burmese, Korean, and Chinese also play an important role in Thai education. This is not only because they are regarded as the most important foreign languages, but also to know other languages than mother language is useful for the ones who study. Because the government needs to develop Thai education as an international standard, Thailand then pays more attention, gives the importance and appreciates the value of languages or learning since kindergarten to tertiary levels. Subsequently, they are commonly taught in Thai schools as to make Thai students to be able to communicate and use them fluently. Moreover, these languages are widely used in Thailand because they are Asian languages and they are used in many areas not only for education but also business, industry, and travelling.

Actually, teaching and learning languages in Thailand emphasize into four language skills: speaking, listening, writing, and reading. In order to study or communicate with the foreigners and derive benefits in the use of languages in the future time, students have to practice and use those four skills efficiently. However, it is undeniably to notice that some students cannot communicate well in authentic circumstances. According to the preliminary survey, some students revealed that they knew how to speak and remember the sentence patterns. Unfortunately, they could not produce the sentences to communicate. Moreover, it seems like they cannot perform well using their personal competency in the classroom. That means five basic senses are not provided the best learning opportunities for the students. With this in mind, communicative competence is emphasized. It will help to focus the students' practice using the target language fluently in different situations without strictly use of correct grammar. Moreover, brain-based learning principles are suitable of developing communicative competence because the students learn through activities that they acquire the language with different perception. Students can study language content while using it by linking prior knowledge with the new one. They can arrange that they learn reflecting and evaluating their own learning. So, if the teachers provide effective teaching method based on the students' learning capacities, it will help them learn best.

2. What Communicative Language Teaching Represents

Communicative language teaching or CLT represented one language teaching which is focused on communication. It has roots in the idea that the goal of language learning is to become good at using language for communication (McKenzie-Brown, 2012). This is supported by Savignon (n.d.) that communicative language teaching refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning. The central theoretical concept in communicative language teaching is “communicative competence”.

It is noticed that there are two main modes of CLT: a communicative perspective on language and a communicative perspective on learning which are concentrated on. The communicative perspective on language is primarily about what students learn. It proposes that when the students learn a language, the students are primarily learning not language structures but language ‘functions’. The communicative perspective on learning focuses attention on how the students learn, especially on natural capacities to ‘acquire’ language simply through communication without explicit instruction (Littlewood, 2013).

3. Brain-Based Learning

It is interesting to learn about the brain which gives the foundation the teachers need to teach the students about their learning. So, there is a must for both teachers and students to learn more about the brain and appreciate its complexity and power. Obviously, the human brain seems so wondrous, mysterious, and powerful; however, it takes a whole time to decipher its inner workings (Jensen, 2008).

There are many researchers and experts who study about brain-based learning. They defined several definitions as presented in the followings. To start with, Politano and Paquin (2000) revealed that brain-based learning is a natural, motivating, and positive ways of maximizing learning and teaching. It is an approach that is based on the ways the brain learns best. Moreover, Jensen (2008) mentioned that brain-based learning is referred to the way the brain is naturally designed to learn. There are three keywords to be engaged: engagement, strategies, and principles. Not only these mentioned, Slavkin (2004) defined brain-based learning as any teaching technique that utilizes information about the human brain to organize how lessons are constructed and facilitated. The practice emphasizes how the brain learns naturally. All mentioned above, it can be concluded that brain-based learning is an approach to let the brain works naturally with systematic process.

4. Objectives of the Study

There were three main objectives for this study:

1. to develop and examine the effectiveness of a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

2. to implement a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

3. to explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

5. Research Procedures

In this study, the research procedures were divided into three main stages as follows:

1. to develop and examine the effectiveness of a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

2. to implement a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

3. to explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

In Stage 1, it was started with the study of basic concepts and related theories: communicative language teaching, brain-based learning principles, and communicative competence. Apart from that, the state and problems of students' communicative competence were surveyed. Then, a basic Burmese language learning activity package was developed and examined the appropriateness by experts. The pilot study was implemented for the feasibility and finally revised the package based on experts' comments and suggestions.

Data Resources

1. Academic books and articles related to a basic concepts and related theories: communicative language teaching, brain-based learning principles, and communicative competence
2. 5 experts who examine the appropriateness of a basic Burmese language learning activity package
3. 5 students who attend the semi-structured interview
4. 5 students who join the pilot study

Instruments

1. Semi-structured interview
2. A basic Burmese language learning activity package
3. Experts' checklist form

4. Students observation form

Statistical Procedures

1. The contents from the semi-structured interview were analyzed by categorizing with the similarities and differences and summarizing.
2. For a basic Burmese language learning activity package, the researchers collected the results of the evaluation from the experts and analyzed with the statistics: mean and standard deviation.
3. The data from the students' observation form was collected and analyzed.

In Stage 2, a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles was implemented. Experimental grouping was identified with one group pretest-posttest design, then the Test was designed.

Data Resources

1. 20 university students who were studying in Myanmar 1 at Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai, Thailand were implemented.

Instruments

1. Pre-test and post-test

Statistical Procedures

1. The data obtained from the pre-test and post-test s statistically analyzed by arithmetic mean, standard deviation, and t-test in order to compare the students' learning achievement before and after implementing a basic Burmese language learning activity package.

In Stage 3, it is to explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles.

Data Resources

1. 20 university students who were studying in Myanmar 1at Mae Fah Luang University, Chiang Rai, Thailand were implemented.

Instrument

1. Open-ended Questionnaire

Statistical Procedures

1. The data obtained from the questionnaire was analyzed the differences and similarities, then categorized and summarized them.

6. Findings

With three purposes of this study, the research findings were presented in three main parts as follows:

1. the findings to develop and examine the effectiveness of a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles;
2. the findings to implement a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles;
3. and the findings to explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles.

Finding One

The findings to develop and examine the effectiveness of a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

A basic Burmese language learning activity package

It was developed based on the background information from: 1) the classroom teaching experiences for Myanmar 1 course provided for students who were studying in Mae Fah Luang University, and 2) semi-structured interview relating to state and problems of students' communicative competence for learning in Myanmar 1 course, including related theories: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Brain-based Learning Principles, Communicative Competence, and material design.

The Design of a basic Burmese language learning activity package

The researchers studied different research papers, academic journals, articles, books, including course syllabus in order to design a package. Then, nine lessons were designed.

For examining the effectiveness of a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles, it was proposed to five experts for

the evaluation of the effectiveness of a package. The expert’ checklist form was adapted from “The textbook and instructional material evaluation rubric” of Nevada Department of Education (2013). There were two main criteria for evaluation: organization, and content. The findings were shown in the table below:

Table 1 Mean Ratings for the Evaluation of the Effectiveness of a Basic Burmese Language Learning Activity Package

Evaluation Items	Mean	Meaning
Organization		
1. Material provides a useful table of contents and glossary.	1.00	Appropriate
2. Layout is consistent; chapters/units are arranged logically; and allow access through multiple modalities. There are four phrases of learning: Let’s Start, Let’s Learn, Let’s Learn More, and Let’s Practice.	1.00	Appropriate
3. Chapters/Units objectives are mentioned clearly.	0.80	Appropriate
4. Teacher edition contains interesting introductions and a list of prerequisites skills for each chapter.	0.80	Appropriate
5. Material contains clear examples and explanations.	0.60	Appropriate
6. Information is accurate, current, and research-based.	0.80	Appropriate

Table 1 (Cont’d)

Evaluation Items	Mean	Meaning
7. Focus of academic and domain specific vocabulary is prevalent	0.80	Appropriate

throughout reading, writing, listening, and speaking.		
8. Size and format of print is appropriate.	0.80	Appropriate
9. Format is visually appealing & interesting.	1.00	Appropriate
10. Electronic and interactive format is available.	0.80	Appropriate
Mean	0.84	Appropriate
Content		
11. Materials focus on the knowledge, skills, and abilities appropriate to the grade level.	0.60	Appropriate
12. Real-world applications are relevant to the students.	1.00	Appropriate
13. Information and directions are clearly written and explained.	0.80	Appropriate
14. Non-text content (pictures) are accurate, authentic, and well integrated into the instructional material.	1.00	Appropriate
15. Lessons/tasks are interdisciplinary when appropriate.	0.80	Appropriate
16. Tasks apply to the diversity of students and their abilities, interests, and learning styles.	0.60	Appropriate
17. Questions and tasks encourage the development and application of higher-level thinking skills.	0.60	Appropriate
18. Teacher edition includes formative assessment tools and processes.	0.60	Appropriate
19. Tasks support students'	0.80	Appropriate

communication.		
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Table 1 (Cont'd)

Evaluation Items	Mean	Meaning
20. Tasks support students' learning naturally.	0.80	Appropriate
Mean	0.76	Appropriate

From Table 1, it could be seen that all items in both evaluation areas were not less than 0.50. For the organization of a package, the mean score met 0.84; meanwhile, the content was 0.76. This meant all items were appropriate to use in Myanmar 1 course.

The feasibility of the implementation of a basic Burmese language learning activity package

After a package was designed by the researchers, evaluated by five experts, and revised, two lessons are selected to pilot with five students who studied in Myanmar 1 at Mae Fah Luang University.

For this step, five students were studied with the researchers. The pre-test and post-test were administered to the students. Before the instruction, five students were completed the pre-test, and then took the post-test after the instruction. The pre-test and post-test were evaluated the efficiency of the lessons with E1/E2 evaluation criterion. Moreover, the students could give comments and suggestions during this stage. The efficiency of the lessons with E1/E2 evaluation criterion was presented in Table 2 below:

Table 2 The Efficiency of the Lessons with E1/E2 Evaluation from Pilot Study

Items	Number of Students	Total Score	Overall Score	Efficiency
Scores for Pre-test (E1)	5	125	98	78.4
Scores for Post-test (E2)	5	125	102	81.6

From Table 2, the efficiency of the lessons that were piloted with five students who studied in Myanmar 1 at Mae Fah Luang University was 78.4/81.6.

Finding Two

After a package was piloted with five students, it was implemented to the participants in Myanmar 1, the T-test Dependent Sample was used for evaluating the students' learning achievement. It was shown in Table 3 as follows:

Table 3 The Average Score for the Comparison of the Students' Learning Achievement by Using a Basic Burmese Language Learning Activity Package by Pre-test and Post-Test Scores

Scores	n	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	P
Scores for Pre-test	20	11.85	2.34	5.479	*0.00
Scores for Post-test	20	13.40	2.11		

*Significant level at .05

From the table above, the mean level of the students' learning achievement before using a basic Burmese language learning activity package was 11.85 (2.34) and the mean level of the students' learning achievement after using a basic Burmese language learning activity package was 13.40 (2.11). It could be noticed that it was at the significant level at .05. So, it could be summarized that the students' learning achievement was improved by employing a basic Burmese language learning activity package.

Finding Three

The findings to explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles.

The researchers designed open-ended questionnaire to survey the students' attitudes towards studying with a basic Burmese language learning activity package. In the open-ended questionnaire, there were two questions asking about their attitudes towards studying with a package. It was found that:

1) Students' Attitudes towards the Organization of a Package

The students expressed that the organization of the lessons was quite clear and easy to follow up. They first knew the lessons' objectives and expected to meet the objectives. Then the lessons started from the "Let's Start" stage which could help them get to know and recall their prior knowledge before studying. In some lessons, the students accepted that they did not have any background information, but they could guess from the pictures relevant to the lessons' contents. Moreover, they could follow each stage easily. For the stages of "Let's Learn", and "Let's Learn More", they could continue and expand their knowledge in the classroom. In addition, it was quite convenient to study

Burmese and confirm their understanding from English language. This was quite beneficial for them to make their own understanding. Not only for three stages mentioned previously, “Let’s Practice” stage appeared very useful for the students to apply their knowledge to authentic settings. Last but not least, authentic pictures used in the lessons were very fantastic for the students and they could get close to the real environment even they do not have chances to visit Myanmar.

2) Students’ Attitudes towards the Content of a Package

For the content of a package, the students revealed that even they did not have a lot of prior knowledge involving Burmese language, the material could support them to learn. They felt comfortable to participate in the tasks and activities the teachers designed. They could apply their knowledge, language abilities to join the tasks and activities. Moreover, they were brave to speak out and communicate in the format of dialogue and simulation. One more important idea was that the contents were up-to-date and responded to the authentic circumstances. All topics were useful and applied in real world.

7. Discussion

It was discussed into four main areas as follows:

1. To develop a basic Burmese language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

Before a package was developed, basic concepts and related theories: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), Brain-based Learning Principles, Communicative Competence, and material design including background information from: 1) the classroom teaching experiences for Myanmar 1 provided for students who were studying in Mae Fah Luang University, and 2) semi-structured interview relating to state and problems of students’ communicative competence for learning in Myanmar 1 was studied. Then, it was designed.

To examine the effectiveness of a basic language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

For the examination of a package, a package was evaluated the appropriateness by experts and piloted for the feasibility of implementation. It was found that a package was appropriate to implement. As it can be verified by the organization which met at 0.84; meanwhile, the content was at 0.76. Moreover, when it was piloted, the efficiency of the lessons was 78.6/81.6. So, a package was appropriate to implement with the participants.

2. To implement a basic language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

For the findings, the mean level of the students' learning achievement before using a basic Burmese language learning activity package was 11.85 (2.34) and the mean level of the students' learning achievement after using a basic Burmese language learning activity package was 13.40 (2.11). It could be noticed that it was at the significant level at .05. So, it could be summarized that the students' learning achievement was improved by employing a basic Burmese language learning activity package.

3. To explore the students' attitudes towards using a basic language learning activity package based on communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles

To explore the students' attitudes toward using a package, the open-ended questionnaire was administered to the students. They expressed that they preferred studying with a package. There were various activities which encouraged the students to practice speaking and they felt self-confident to build up their communicative competency. It is similar to Savignon (n.d.) that communicative competence represented the ability of classroom language learners to interact with other speakers, to make meaning, as distinct from their ability to recite dialogues or perform on discrete-point tests of grammatical knowledge. Moreover, they felt that they were motivated to learn and practice activities support their brain working naturally. This is supported by Tang (2017) that brain-based learning is a skill acquisition which consisted of three phases during the learning process: a cognitive, an associative, and an automatic phase.

8. Conclusion and Implications

In order to enhance the students' learning achievement of Burmese language which is quite new and challenging, it is important to apply communicative language teaching and brain-based learning principles. Even though they both are identical, they can unify to apply in the language classroom and they will strengthen teaching and learning. For communicative language teaching, a communicative perspective on language and a communicative perspective on learning are referred to. The communicative perspective on language is primarily about what we learn. It proposes that when students learn a language they are primarily learning not language structures but language 'functions'. The communicative perspective on learning focuses attention on how to learn, especially on capacities to 'acquire' language simply through communication without explicit instruction (Littlewood, 2013). Apart from that, brain-based learning principles should be concentrated on. It will support natural, motivating, and positive ways of maximizing learning and teaching based on the ways the brain learns best (Politano and Paquin, 2000).

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