

The Development of Communicative English Model in the Workplace for Business English Students

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Abstracts

This study concerns the implementation of a Communicative English Model for Business English students in the Workplace (CEBE model). The research objectives were to 1) investigate the challenges of communicative English usage encountered by Business English students in the workplace, 2) develop the CEBE model, 3) investigate the efficiency of the CEBE model using the established E_1/E_2 (80/80) criteria, and 4) examine the learning achievement of students following the model's application in a classroom setting. Thirty Thai fourth-year Business English students enrolled at a public university in Bangkok participated in this ten-week study. The research instruments utilized included a questionnaire and pre- and post-tests. The data were analyzed using content analysis, paired-samples t-test, frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. The results revealed that 1) English speaking in the workplace and daily life was perceived as a highly significant concern ($\bar{X} = 4.64$). 2) The CEBE model was comprised of five aspects: 2.1) Communicative Language Teaching, 2.2) Role-play, 2.3) Speaking skills, 2.4) Positive learning environment, and 2.5) Teachers' constructive feedback. 3) The model's efficiency yielded an $E_1/E_2 = 89.50/92.00$, with an Efficiency Index of .7160. Finally, 4) there was a statistically significant difference between pre- and post-test scores ($p=.001$), indicating a substantial improvement in students' speaking skills. The CEBE model is concluded to be an effective instructional approach for enhancing communicative English competence within a workplace context.

Keywords: Business English, CLT, English for Workplace, English Speaking, Teaching Model

Introduction

English is widely used in the workplace (Changpueng & Pattanapichet, 2015; Clement & Murugavel, 2018; Neville, 2018). Most individuals are likely to use English in their occupations, aiming to enhance their proficiency to remain competitive. Furthermore, English

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has been taught in society for decades and continues to play a vital role in both education and professional contexts. It is therefore essential to practice English skills, particularly in communication. English communication skills are a key factor in employment opportunities, as many companies prefer candidates with strong English proficiency. Conversely, those with limited English ability often encounter greater challenges in securing jobs. Yingamnuaychai (2013) emphasized that English is a critical language for job-seeking across various regions, including the United States and China. Most companies, especially international ones, prioritize English-speaking applicants in their hiring processes as they move toward greater internationalization.

However, challenges remain in the use of communicative English. According to Krizan et al. (2005), there are four key aspects of communicative English use: word choice, denotative and connotative meaning, grammar, spelling, punctuation, and sentence structure. It is evident that communication in English can vary and depend on the context. Word choice, in particular, is an important factor in ensuring successful communication between sender and receiver. Receivers may struggle to understand messages when words convey overly complex ideas (Bovee & Thill, 2005). Phuangmanee (2016) reported that workplace communication problems were found at a moderate level, ranked by speaking, listening, writing, and reading, respectively. Similarly, Lertchalermtipakoon et al. (2021) conducted a needs analysis of students in the tourism and hospitality industry. Among the objectives examined, listening and speaking emerged as the most significant challenges in workplace communication within the field. It is therefore evident that listening and speaking play a crucial role in workplace communication, as highlighted by previous studies.

Moreover, an appropriate instructional model could yield positive outcomes for students by enhancing their English communication skills. Joyce and Weil (2003) introduced the Social Family Model, which emphasizes collaborative learning. It fosters social skills, teamwork, self-esteem, and academic achievement. Key components of this model include group investigation, role-playing, and jurisprudential inquiry. Savignon (1983, 1997) also describes five components of a communicative curriculum, which are thematic clusters of activities or experiences related to language use: 1) Language Arts, or language analysis, 2) Language for a Purpose, or language experience, 3) Personal English Language Use, 4) Theater Arts, and 5) Beyond the Classroom. The literature reviewed could serve as a foundation for developing a communicative English teaching model for Business English students. Therefore,

this study aimed to investigate problems in communicative English use in the workplace and provide a basis for constructing a communicative English teaching model.

To the best of this study's knowledge, little research has examined communicative English problems in workplace contexts. Furthermore, there is a strong need to establish a communicative English model specifically designed for Business English students. However, students' communicative English skills in workplace settings remain unsatisfactory. A guiding approach to reshape their perceptions of communicative English is therefore necessary. The effectiveness of a developed model is also a crucial factor to explore in the EFL classroom. Additionally, this study seeks to provide guidelines and practical implications for English language course developers in light of current trends in the EFL domain.

Objectives

1. To investigate problems in the use of communicative English in the workplace among Business English students at a public university.
2. To develop a Communicative English for Business English (CEBE) model at a public university.
3. To examine the efficiency of the CEBE model at a public university using the established E_1/E_2 (80/80) criteria.
4. To evaluate the learning achievement of students using the CEBE model in the classroom.

Research Hypotheses

1. The efficiency of the CEBE model is higher than the established criteria of 80/80.
2. The posttest mean scores of students' speaking skills using the CEBE model are higher than their pretest scores.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework illustrates the relationship between the independent and dependent variables to provide a clearer picture of the study. It is presented in Figure 1.

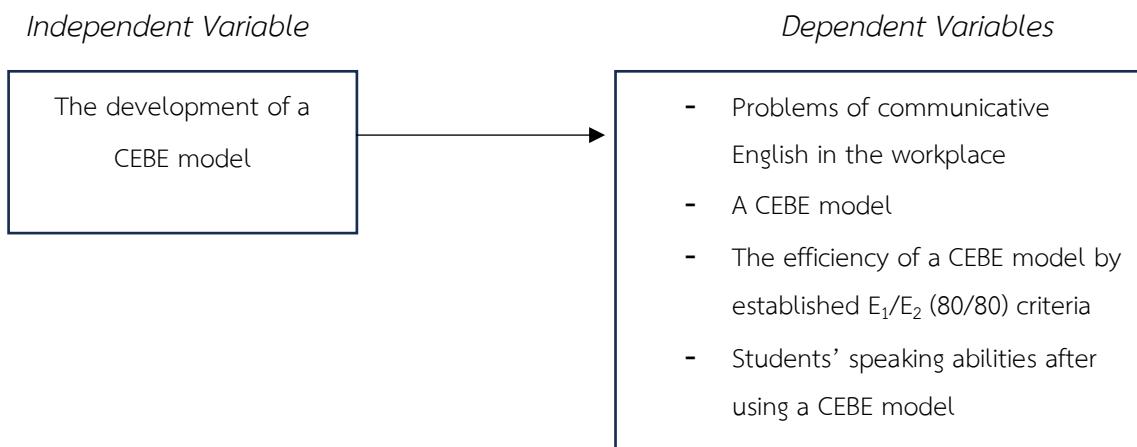


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

Research Methodology

1. Research Design

A mixed-methods design was employed in this study, consisting of two distinct phases. The initial phase used an exploratory sequential design to gather preliminary data, followed by a one-group quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design in the second phase.

2. Population and Participants

The target population was diverse, encompassing stakeholders, Business English students, and alumni. The first phase focused on collecting data necessary for the development of a CEBE model. Both primary and secondary sources were included in this initial data collection. The participants were categorized into three groups, with their roles and characteristics detailed as follows:

First group: This focus group was selected using purposive sampling. It comprised a total of fifteen participants from Business English students, alumni, employers of alumni, and experts in related fields. The group was divided into two main sectors: five participants from the business sector and ten participants from the educational sector.

The second group: This group consisted of third- and fourth-year Business English students from a public university who were asked to complete a questionnaire. These individuals were current students and trainees during the second semester of 2024. The trainees had completed three months of practical experience in organizations such as hotels, tourism agencies, airports, marketing firms, or logistics companies in Bangkok or nearby areas. Selection utilized a combination of purposive sampling and convenience sampling. The

sample size was required to exceed 30 respondents to ensure that the findings were accurate and reliable. The timeframe for questionnaire responses was designated as the fourth week of February 2024, from Monday to Sunday, accommodating student schedules.

The final group: This group included thirty fourth-year Business English students from the first semester of 2025 at a public university. This group participated in the phase where the CEBE model was implemented. The model's efficiency was assessed using the established E_1/E_2 (80/80) criteria (Promwong, 1977).

3. Research Instruments

3.1 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed based on the literature review and data synthesized from the focus group sessions. The data informed the structure of this 30-item, five-point Likert scale questionnaire. Its purpose was to inquire about communicative English problems and guide the development of the CEBE model.

3.2 Pretest, posttest and rubric

The pretest and posttest instruments were adapted from the TOEIC Speaking Test, a highly recognized standardized assessment. The same test format was used for both the pretest and posttest administrations. The situational topics covered daily life and hotel contexts. The test consisted of 11 questions across five task types: 1) reading a text aloud, 2) describing a picture, 3) responding to questions, 4) responding to questions using provided information, and 5) expressing an opinion. Participants were allocated approximately 20 minutes to complete the speaking tasks. The English speaking proficiency of the students was assessed by the researcher and co-researcher. Two assessors evaluated the participants' responses to ensure accurate findings and establish inter-rater reliability. The speaking skills were rated using a 20-point rubric adapted from Dorji (2021) and the TOEIC Speaking Test criteria. The criteria for assessment included pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and communication strategy.

All research instruments underwent validation by three experts using the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC). The resulting index for all instruments was above .5, confirming their suitability for the study. The questionnaire demonstrated high internal consistency, yielding a Cronbach's alpha coefficient score of .92, which is well above the acceptable threshold of .7. Following the piloting of the pretest and posttest, the Cronbach's

alpha coefficient was again calculated to determine test reliability. The pilot test result was .94, indicating that the test was highly reliable for implementation with the actual participants.

4. Instructional Instruments

The CEBE model in this study incorporated eight lesson plans. The model's efficiency was assessed using the E_1/E_2 (80/80). The included learning materials consisted of vocabulary, language focus on daily life and hotel contexts, authentic materials, images, word cards, PowerPoint presentations, worksheets, and quizzes. The quizzes were used to determine the first efficiency criterion, E_1 (80). A posttest was then administered to evaluate students' learning achievements, which was analyzed as the second efficiency criterion, E_2 (80).

All lesson plans were validated for content validity by three experts using the Item-Objective Congruence Index (IOC). The experts rated all aspects with a score of 1, confirming the appropriateness of the lesson plans for this study.

5. Data Collection

The data collection process was structured according to two main research designs: the exploratory sequential design and the one-group quasi-experimental pretest-posttest design.

An Exploratory Sequential Design

This phase involved collecting qualitative data through focus group interviews. All participants were initially provided with an information sheet and requested to sign an informed consent document. However, participants declined to sign the document but agreed to participate in the interview on the condition of anonymity (not mentioning names). Consequently, the interview commenced without voice recording. The resulting qualitative findings were categorized into two main themes: problems in communicative English use and concepts for the construction of a CEBE model. These concepts highlighted key elements such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), teacher's constructive feedback, role-play, a positive learning environment, and speaking skills development. This synthesized data then informed the development and structure of the questionnaire. The questionnaire was distributed to participants via Google Form to gather quantitative data regarding problems in communicative English use and guidelines for creating the CEBE model. The collected data were subsequently synthesized to design the CEBE model lesson plans.

A One Group Quasi-Experimental Pretest-Posttest Design

In the second phase, the CEBE model was implemented to assess its efficiency based on the E_1/E_2 (80/80) criteria (Promwong, 1977). The model was piloted before full implementation. The eight lesson plans of the CEBE model were implemented in the classroom over ten weeks. All participants were given an information sheet to read one week prior to the start of the study. After this reading period, they were asked to sign an informed consent form before the study began. Participants took the pretest during the first week. Each lesson was allocated four hours per class. Posttest data were collected in the final week.

6. Data Analysis

Qualitative data: Data from the focus group was analyzed using content analysis. The components of the CEBE model were summarized into themes based on the initial data from the focus group.

Quantitative data: The scores derived from the pretest and posttest were analyzed using the SPSS program to calculate the mean, standard deviation, and a paired-samples *t*-test. Concurrently, the efficiency of the CEBE model was assessed through the calculation of the mean, standard deviation, and percentage. Data from the 5-point Likert scale questionnaire were analyzed by frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation. Interpretation of the mean scores was based on the following five-level scale: 4.20–5.00 means Strongly Agree or Most, 3.40–4.19 means Agree or Much, 2.60–3.39 means Neutral, 1.80–2.59 means Disagree or Little, and 1.00–1.79 means Strongly Disagree or Least.

Research Results

Research question 1: To what extent are there problems with communicative English use in the workplace among Business English students at a public university?

Table 1 The results of problems in communicative English use in the workplace

Question	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning	Rank
1. Using grammar (e.g., tenses) is difficult or makes you less confident in speaking English.	3.58	1.22	Agree	13
2. You feel a lack of confidence in speaking English because you fear speaking incorrectly or losing face.	3.51	1.41	Agree	14
3. Insufficient vocabulary is an obstacle to listening, speaking, reading, and writing in English.	4.27	1.10	Strongly agree	5

Table 1 (Continued)

Question	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning	Rank
4. Writing business reports or paragraphs is difficult due to problems with structure, vocabulary, idioms, and insufficient reading of English books.	4.13	0.94	Agree	9
5. Speaking English is important both in the workplace and in daily life, but it seems to be a problem for communication.	4.64	0.61	Strongly agree	1
6. External speakers should be invited to train students in speaking English.	4.04	1.00	Agree	11
7. Four English skills (listening, speaking, reading, writing) should be developed simultaneously for balanced and effective communication.	4.42	0.72	Strongly agree	3
8. The university should have an English Language Clinic as another unit to improve English skills.	4.24	0.91	Strongly agree	6
9. Listening and speaking should be the main skills when teaching English.	4.51	0.79	Strongly agree	2
10. Reading and writing English should be practiced together, such as writing summaries after reading.	4.22	0.82	Strongly agree	7
11. Instructors should assign more reading, have students keep vocabulary journals, and practice regularly to increase vocabulary and enhance proficiency in using English.	3.93	0.99	Agree	12
12. Using appropriate structures, vocabulary, and idioms in context affects English communication.	4.13	0.81	Agree	9
13. Using authentic materials and role-play to simulate real-life situations would improve your English skills.	4.27	0.78	Strongly agree	5
14. Using AI and technology, such as English games or YouTube, would increase interest and effectiveness in developing your English skills.	4.16	1.00	Agree	8
15. Listening to different English accents (e.g., Indian accent) and unfamiliarity with specialized vocabulary (e.g., food-related terms) are significant problems in workplace communication, especially in the hotel industry.	4.16	0.95	Agree	8
16. Practicing listening and speaking skills and memorizing specific vocabulary (e.g., restaurant terms) would increase confidence in interacting with customers and improve work efficiency in hotels.	4.29	0.87	Strongly agree	4

Table 1 (Continued)

Question	\bar{x}	S.D.	Meaning	Rank
17. Integrating more role-playing activities in English speaking and providing additional training would help build confidence in speaking English and enhance communication skills at work.	4.11	1.03	Agree	10
18. There should be training for employees on listening and speaking English, as well as training on dressing, personality, product knowledge, room types, room rates, booking procedures, and services.	4.13	0.97	Agree	9
Total	4.15	0.98	Agree	

The data from Table 1 indicate that respondents generally agreed ($\bar{x} = 4.15$) that the listed factors influence English language learning and communication. The most prominent finding was the perceived communication challenge associated with English speaking, despite its recognized necessity for both workplace and daily life settings ($\bar{x} = 4.64$). In terms of instructional focus, participants strongly supported a strong emphasis on listening and speaking skills ($\bar{x} = 4.51$) and the balanced development of all four skills ($\bar{x} = 4.42$). The lack of vocabulary knowledge was identified as a significant obstacle ($\bar{x} = 4.27$), and using authentic materials and role-playing was favored for skill improvement ($\bar{x} = 4.27$).

The results showed that English speaking skills are necessary for both workplace and daily life. Respondents favor integrating authentic materials, role-playing, and technology to enhance English skills, with targeted training recommended for specific workplace needs, such as hotel industry interactions.

Research question 2: To what extent can a CEBE model be developed for Business English students at a public university?

The synthesis of various data sources, including the literature review summary, theoretical framework, focus group summary, and questionnaire results, led to the development of the CEBE model. The key components of this model are presented in Figure 2.

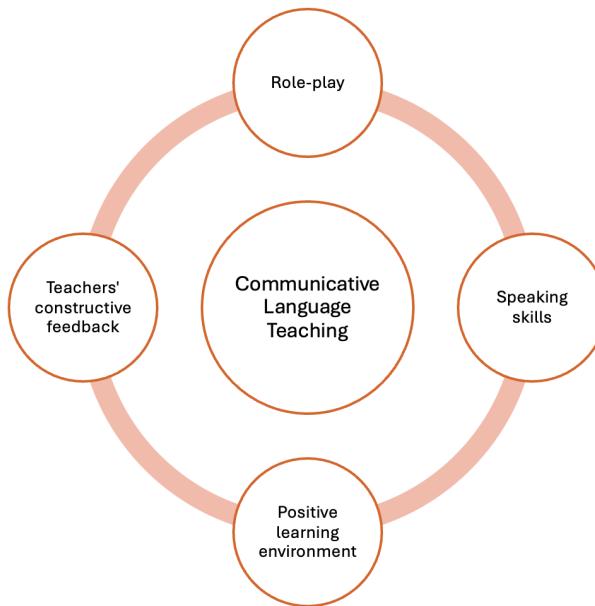


Figure 2: CEBE model

Upon completion of the various phases of the study, the CEBE model was constructed around five core aspects: 1) Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), 2) Role-play based on real-world scenarios, 3) Speaking skills development focused on daily life and workplace contexts in hospitality resulted from the survey and focus group, 4) Positive learning environment, and 5) Teachers' constructive feedback.

Research question 3: What are the levels of efficiency of a CEBE model at a public university, as measured by the established E_1/E_2 (80/80) criteria?

Table 2 The efficiency of a CEBE model

Evaluation List	Total Score	\bar{x}	S.D.	%
Process scores, quizzes (E_1)	1,611	53.70	3.40	89.50
Posttest scores (E_2)	552	18.40	1.16	92.00
The efficiency of $E_1/E_2 = 89.50 / 92.00$				

Table 2 demonstrates that the CEBE model achieved high efficiency based on the established E_1/E_2 criteria. Participants attained a total score of 1,611 on the process quizzes (E_1) with (S.D. = 53.70), (89.50%). On the final post-test (E_2), the total score was 552 with (S.D. = 18.40), (92.00%). The calculated efficiency ratio, represented by the ratio of to percentage scores (89.50/92.00), indicates a high level of learning achievement and strong consistency between ongoing formative assessments and the final summative outcome. These findings

suggest that the instructional process was effective, as participants performed well both throughout the learning period and on the final assessment.

Table 3 Results of quizzes

Quizzes	\bar{x}	S.D.	%	Total
Quiz 1	8.53	1.04	85.33	256
Quiz 2	8.53	1.04	85.33	256
Quiz 3	8.73	1.20	87.33	262
Quiz 4	9.13	1.14	91.33	274
Quiz 5	9.23	0.90	92.33	277
Quiz 6	9.53	0.63	95.33	286
Total				1,611

Table 3 presents the results of the six process quizzes, which primarily targeted the development of speaking skills. The table includes the mean scores, standard deviations, percentages, and total points achieved for each quiz. A clear trend of steady improvement was observed across the quizzes, from Quiz 1 through Quiz 6. Specifically, the mean score showed a significant rise, increasing from 8.53 to 9.53, and the corresponding percentage improved from 85.33% to 95.33%. Furthermore, the standard deviations generally decreased, indicating a reduction in score variability among participants over the instructional period. Overall, the cumulative total points earned across all six quizzes amounted to 1,611, reflecting consistent enhancement in participant performance throughout the learning process.

Table 4 The Effectiveness Index (E.I.) of CEBE Model

Lesson Plan	No. of Students	Full Score	Total Score		(E.I.)
			Pre-test	Post-test	
CEBE Model	30	20	431	552	.7160

Table 4 details the comparative results of the pretest and posttest administered to the 30 student participants (with a full score of 20 points per student). The total pretest score for the group was 431, which increased to a total posttest score of 552 after the CEBE model implementation. This improvement is quantified by the Efficiency Index (E.I.) of 0.7160, which signifies a substantial gain in student performance following the instructional period.

Collectively, the data suggests that the CEBE model demonstrated a positive and impactful influence on student learning outcomes.

Research question 4: To what extent will the use of a CEBE model affect students' learning achievement?

Table 5 The comparison of students' pre-and posttest scores

CEBE model	n	\bar{x}	S.D.	t	df	Sig.
Pretest	30	14.37	2.40	10.64	29	.001*
Posttest	30	18.40	1.16			

* $p < .05$

Table 5 presents the results of the paired-samples t -test. The analysis revealed a statistically significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores, with a significance level of $p=.001$. This result is below the .05 threshold, indicating that the observed improvement is statistically significant at the .05 level.

Discussion

English speaking proficiency is considered highly significant for Business English students, yet difficulties in this area remain a pressing issue requiring immediate improvement. These challenges arise not only in academic settings but also during workplace internships. Phuangmanee (2016) investigated English communication problems perceived by salespeople at a telecommunication company in Bangkok and found that workplace communication problems were most frequent in speaking, followed by listening, writing, and reading. Similarly, other studies (Pinsirikul et al., 2023; Rajprasit et al., 2015) confirmed that employees struggled with productive skills (speaking and writing), citing challenges such as difficulty understanding diverse English accents and the need to employ clarification strategies (e.g., asking for repetition or confirmation). Despite these challenges, English proficiency plays a vital role in achieving professional goals. For instance, Putra et al. (2021), through a systematic review, highlighted speaking as the most important of all language skills. Consequently, course development should integrate more English teaching activities that prioritize speaking as the central focus. In terms of employment after graduation, applicants with higher English proficiency have a greater chance of securing jobs, as English is used as a job-seeking language across the world (e.g., the United States and China). Most international organizations prefer

English-speaking applicants to support the expansion of international networks (Yingamnuaychai, 2013).

In response to these challenges, the communicative English model for Business English students was developed, consisting of five interconnected aspects that guide classroom implementation. The first aspect is Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which emphasizes communicative competence in second language learning. Widely adopted in ESL and EFL classrooms, CLT promotes learners' natural use of language through authentic communicative tasks (Bilsborough, n.d.; Jin, 2008; Nguyen, 2010; Richards & Rodgers, 2014). The second aspect is role-play based on real-world scenarios, which requires cooperative learning with peers. Shaftel and Shaftel (1982) explain that role-play helps students understand social behavior, recognize their societal roles, and organize information to solve problems effectively. The third aspect highlights speaking practice, which is central to communicative competence. Instead of merely studying language, students engage in meaningful communication and complete problem-solving tasks that encourage authentic language use (Jin, 2008, p. 81). The fourth aspect is fostering a positive learning environment. Littlewood (1998) notes that CLT activities can cultivate constructive teacher-student and peer relationships, thereby enhancing motivation and language learning in the classroom. Finally, the fifth aspect is constructive teacher feedback. Feedback is vital because it enables learners to improve through targeted and supportive guidance. As Nifli-Sakali (2020) emphasized, constructive feedback can increase students' motivation, engagement, and proficiency. Together, these five aspects form the foundation of the model, which was synthesized from stakeholder input and the literature to ensure its relevance for EFL students in workplace-related contexts.

Building on this foundation, the efficiency of the CEBE model demonstrated a positive impact on improving communicative English, surpassing the established criteria. For example, Yuh Anchunda (2020) examined an instructional model designed to enhance students' English-speaking ability, which comprised five components: principle, objective, learning content, instructional strategy, and evaluation. The results indicated that the model was highly appropriate for classroom use, particularly in developing speaking skills. Learners expressed high levels of satisfaction, and the model received positive feedback for providing opportunities to practice speaking and presenting, thereby promoting active learning and communicative engagement. Similarly, Boonteerarak (2021) investigated an English training

curriculum for counter clerks in convenience stores in Chiang Mai, Thailand, and found that participants' communicative competence improved significantly. English-speaking customers also reported satisfaction with the trainees' English use, while trainees themselves regarded the curriculum as highly beneficial.

Drawing from these prior findings, the present study seeks to extend such benefits to Business English students by offering opportunities for authentic communication through workplace-related scenarios, particularly in hospitality contexts. Students are encouraged to exchange ideas, engage in collaborative tasks, and refine their speaking skills through structured feedback from teachers. Consistent with Nifli-Sakali's (2020) findings, such feedback plays an essential role in boosting motivation, sustaining engagement, and developing proficiency. Ultimately, learning achievement improved significantly following the use of this model. In addition, careful preparation of appropriate learning materials and activities, together with sustained teacher-student interaction, emerged as key components in fostering a positive and effective classroom environment.

Limitations of the Study

1. The sample size in this study was limited due to the small number of participating students. As the main objective was to examine the efficiency of the CEBE model in an EFL classroom, the findings may not be fully generalizable. Moreover, the short data collection period posed another limitation. Extending the research duration in future studies would allow for a deeper exploration of additional factors that might influence the outcomes.

2. Another limitation lies in the data collection method. While a semi-structured interview could have provided valuable insights into students' perceptions of classroom activities, this study relied solely on a single-group pretest–posttest design. Including a control group in future research would strengthen the comparison of results and provide a more comprehensive understanding of the model's effectiveness.

Recommendations

1. Recommendations for educational practices

The CEBE model has the potential to benefit multiple stakeholders, including language policymakers, curriculum developers, teachers, and ESP instructors. Specifically, English-speaking courses for student trainees in the hospitality industry could integrate this

model to enhance workplace communication. In addition, it may serve as a useful framework for designing professional training activities that emphasize English-speaking skills in real-world settings.

2. Recommendations for future research

Based on the findings of this study, several directions for future research are proposed. 1) Since this study focused primarily on speaking skills, further research should also include other language skills such as listening, reading, and writing. 2) The study revealed only limited needs for English skills development as reported by hospitality personnel; therefore, future studies should investigate the specific English needs of hotel staff to strengthen workplace communication. 3) Because English problems were identified mainly in the hospitality sector where students undertook internships, additional studies should explore English-related challenges across a wider range of hospitality contexts. 4) Further research should also examine the underlying factors that contribute to communicative English problems in the industry. 5) Finally, student satisfaction with the developed CEBE model after its implementation should be investigated, as this feedback would provide valuable insights for refining the model.

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