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Can-Do Statements for Improved Oral Communication: A Practical Approach

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ABSTRACT

In past decades, several can-do frameworks have been developed with the aim of establishing a degree of standardization and precision in the evaluation of language proficiency levels. The availability of these scales of measurement may assist teachers and educational administrators in designing courses and in improving the means of assessment for their students. Additionally, can-do frameworks may assist students in achieving their learning objectives by enabling them to more accurately identify materials and courses that align with their proficiency levels. Although these language proficiency frameworks have since established their importance within the language education realm, their full potential may yet to be fully realized. In the search for more practical communicative activities, some language teachers engage in experimentation and with some creativity to develop educationally relevant and appealing tasks for their students. As such, an oral communication activity was created by modifying portions of a can-do framework and realigning individual can-do statements into speaking tasks. This activity has since been utilized on a continual basis for the past several years and has been periodically updated for improvements. This article will attempt to detail aspects pertaining to the development, implementation, and potential practicality of the activity. An inquiry was also conducted between the differences of students in their perceived abilities to communicate before and then after participating in the activity. Insight gathered from class observations and student feedback will likewise be presented. Moreover, pertinent background information on can-do frameworks and suggestions for the implementation of the activity will also be provided.

KEYWORDS: Can-Do Statements, Language Proficiency Assessment, Task-Based Learning, Oral Communication Activities

INTRODUCTION

As the utilization of can-do frameworks has become more prevalent in recent decades, a shift towards standardization and enhanced precision in the evaluation of language proficiency levels has followed (Council of Europe, 2001; Little, 2007). These frameworks have the potential to aid educators and administrators with improved accuracy in the measurement of proficiency levels, and this has led to the development of courses that are better suited to the specific needs of students (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011). As for students, can-do descriptors can help them identify potential deficiencies in their language abilities that may be essential in real-world communicative situations (Collett & Sullivan, 2010). Additionally, can-do frameworks may assist learners in achieving their educational objectives by enabling them to more accurately identify materials and courses that align more closely with their proficiency levels (North, 2000). In addition to the aforementioned benefits, can-do statements have also been shown to have a positive impact on learner motivation. According to Richards and Bohlke (2011), integrating can-do statements in language classes can augment learners' motivation and engagement by providing them with a clear understanding of what they have accomplished and are expected to achieve over time. This heightened sense of awareness and control over their learning progress can inspire learners to become more invested and committed to achieving their language learning goals.

In terms of the use of can-do statements in the classroom, there are several possible applications, including the establishment of learning objectives, the evaluation of learners' progress, the creation and design of lesson plans, and the monitoring of student language development over time. In a study by Collett and Sullivan (2010), can-do statements were integrated in language classes, in the form of study progress sheets, and were found to have benefited students by enhancing their self-regulated learning skills such as goal setting and reflection. Can-do statements can also be helpful for teachers in the planning stages of organizing instructional content with the identification of materials that are more relevant, meaningful, and effective for learners. Moreover, the utilization of can-do statements may assist educators in more easily identifying specific areas of learners' needs to help improve their language abilities.

Despite having a long-established presence in language education circles and being recognized as being a valuable tool for promoting proficiency-based instruction and in the assessment of proficiency levels, the full potential of can-do frameworks has yet to be fully realized (Little, 2007). In the pursuit of improving the quality of education, language teachers often strive to supplement their classes with activities, at times experimental, that may better address the needs of their students. In one such endeavor, Fewell and MacLean (2017) created a communicative activity that integrated content from a language proficiency framework for a collaborative learning project for EFL learners. As such, a similar can-do communicative activity was developed and has been utilized by the authors over the years and has undergone periodic modifications to optimize its effectiveness. The adjustments that have since been initiated were generally aimed at simplification of the original construct, as the worksheet had previously required much detailed feedback. Although such a design may have been essential for data-driven research in the past, it was deemed as being less practical for the day-to-day

communicative objectives of the class activity. The can-do communicative activity has since adopted a more user-friendly interface but has maintained its fundamental features of integrated descriptors.

Furthermore, the structured and logical sequence of incremental levels of difficulty has been maintained as well. Thus, the design of the activity has remained aligned with recommendations by educators for logically sequenced and structured sub-tasks leading towards completion of a major task (e.g., Wilson & Devereux, 2014). The ongoing modifications to the can-do activity have likewise been a developmental learning process for the instructor as well. While more recent versions of the can-do communicative activity may be perceived as improvements, there is always some uncertainty if additional adjustments are needed. This article will introduce some aspects of can-do frameworks in general and then proceed with a more detailed description of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, as its descriptors were utilized in the communicative activities. In addition, the creative process of developing and modifying the can-do statements into communicative activities will also be discussed. Moreover, insight and feedback from EFL university students who participated in the activities and perspectives of the instructor will likewise be presented. In terms of the core questions that this study attempted to address, these consisted of assessing the potential impact that a communicative activity integrated with a can-do framework may have on the oral communication skills of EFL learners. Specifically, the purpose was to investigate whether participation in the can-do communicative activities led to improvements in students' English communicative abilities and/or perceived communication abilities. Moreover, the study also examined student perceptions of the overall effectiveness of the activity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Can-do statements consist of multiple language descriptors organized into a systematic list that categorizes language-based abilities by sections, which are arranged by incremental levels of difficulty. The creation of these descriptors was in response to a need for a standardized classification system that could more accurately categorize language proficiency levels. The initial development of can-do statements and frameworks began in the 1970s with the Council of Europe's creation of the threshold level (B1) of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Van Ek, 1975). Thereafter, new levels were added to the framework with some periodic refinement (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR first established a set of descriptors for six language proficiency levels, ranging from beginner (A1) to proficient (C2), and has since become a widely recognized standard in language education (Lee et al., 2022). The development of the frameworks was based on an action-oriented approach and was heavily influenced by the communicative approach to language teaching—which emphasizes the ability to use language effectively in real-life situations (Council of Europe, 2001). The frameworks have become essential tools in assisting language educators in tasks involving curriculum design, instruction, and assessment (Little, 2007), as well as for learners in setting goals and in monitoring their progress (Nagai & O'Dwyer, 2011). Since the development of the CEFR, other organizations such as the National Council of State Supervisors for Languages (NCSSFL) and the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) have developed their own can-do

frameworks (Butler, 2023). Both the NCSSFL and ACTFL versions were created in response to the need for a more specific set of descriptors than those available at the time. It should also be noted that both of those educational councils eventually agreed to collaborate in the creation of the combined NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements.

In terms of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, the framework consists of five core levels of proficiency, each of which is accompanied by a detailed list of multiple descriptors that learners attempt to identify as being achievable or not. These descriptors are divided into the language skill areas of speaking, listening, reading, and writing. In theory, being able to recognize which of the descriptors are achievable or “can do” for the learners may help them—or their instructors—identify areas needing more attention in the quest for language proficiency development. The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements have a structured layout with one main “proficiency benchmark” or general description that briefly summarizes the language ability level in one sentence (see Figure 1). Thereafter, several sets of “performance indicators” narrow the descriptions further and are divided into three sublevels of proficiency (low, mid, high) within each of the core levels. For instance, the novice level would consist of novice-low, novice-mid, novice-high. The other core levels are structured in a similar fashion. The more precise descriptions within each of the sublevels are consistent with other can-do descriptors; however, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements offer a distinctive and advantageous addition in the form of several specific examples at each sublevel.

Figure 1

Sample of Novice Level Descriptors of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

NOVICE		
PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK		
<i>I can</i> communicate in spontaneous spoken, written, or signed conversations on both very familiar and everyday topics, using a variety of practiced or memorized words, phrases, simple sentences, and questions.		
<i>How can I exchange information and ideas in conversations?</i>		
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
NOVICE LOW	NOVICE MID	NOVICE HIGH
<i>I can</i> provide information by answering a few simple questions on very familiar topics, using practiced or memorized words and phrases, with the help of gestures or visuals.	<i>I can</i> request and provide information by asking and answering a few simple questions on very familiar and everyday topics, using a mixture of practiced or memorized words, phrases, and simple sentences.	<i>I can</i> request and provide information by asking and answering practiced and some original questions on familiar and everyday topics, using simple sentences most of the time.

Note. The figure includes proficiency benchmarks and performance indicators. From *American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages* 2017, p. 9.

The can-do statements have become indispensable for many language educators by providing structure and standardization in an area inflicted with long-standing ambiguity. For instance, it has since been possible to more accurately determine the language proficiency level of students in different skill areas

(e.g., novice-low interpretive listening, intermediate-mid presentational writing, etc.) with systematic lists of language tasks on a scale of incrementally increasing levels of difficulty. The can-do statements have likewise been important in establishing a standardized and more precise classification system for different language levels in educational materials. This has also assisted teachers in identifying educational materials that may more closely correspond to the proficiency levels of their students. The comprehensive and detailed list of the can-do descriptors may also allow students and teachers to conceivably pinpoint any communicative areas that may need additional attention. Moreover, students may also attempt to evaluate their own range of communicative abilities from the can-do descriptor list.

Li and Zhang (2021) propose a combination of both external measurements, including language tests, to be used in conjunction with self-assessment for a more accurate evaluation of language proficiency levels. Although a combined measurement approach may be suitable in certain situations, it could be challenging when time and resources are limited. Alternatively, there have been some encouraging suggestions on the benefits of preparing and training students as a means of improving accuracy in self-assessment. In a study conducted by Dolosic et al. (2016) that examined self-assessment accuracy via pre- and post-tests among French L2 learners in a short-term language program, it was found that improvements in self-assessment accuracy became apparent as learners enhanced their preparation and gained more experience with the assessment process. The importance of experience in impacting self-assessment accuracy has likewise been noted in earlier studies (e.g., Spolsky, 1992; Ross, 1998). In a similar study (Brown et al., 2014), the researchers have concurred on the importance of experience, stating that self-assessment tasks that more closely align with potential scenarios—those likely to be encountered or even those experiences that can be imagined by learners—would be most ideal. Moreover, Brantmeier and Vanderplank (2008) agree that the authenticity of a task would be helpful for learners with improved conceptualization, and this could increase the accuracy of self-assessment.

In several of the aforementioned studies, learner experience and the ability to conceptualize a language task were mentioned as factors of concern. Although a number of recommendations have been proposed to alleviate such shortcomings (e.g., strengthening authenticity, aligned testing), there remains a strong likelihood that not all the can-do descriptors have been personally encountered or can even be accurately conceptualized by each of the learners. However, there is a blunt and straightforward way of ensuring that learners have genuinely experienced a specific task, and that is to simply have them attempt to achieve it. While such an undertaking may seem to require a considerable amount of class time, these tasks could be easily integrated into communicative class activities. In fact, the layout of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements is systematically arranged with sets of descriptors sorted into different categories according to language skill area and proficiency level. At first glance, one may notice the ever-so-present checkoff boxes along the list of descriptors (see Figure 2). Originally, this structured framework was purposely created to allow students or teachers to use the checkoff boxes with ease. In principle, after reflecting on one's ability to accomplish a communicative task, each of the boxes would be checked off in succession. Once the check-off list

was completed, the unchecked items would also serve as a detailed record highlighting specific areas needing further attention and focus. However, the enormity of the number of can-do statements, although advantageous for ensuring thorough coverage, are arguably a potential weakness due to their extensivity. This was one of the drawbacks that has prompted the creation of the modified communicative activity, as will be discussed below. However, one of the more significant concerns may be in the reliability of L2 learners to accurately answer the can-do statements on the check-off list. Although several suggestions have been offered for using the can-do descriptors in class (e.g., Moeller and Yu, 2015), in many of those activities, students and teachers are ultimately relying on “guesstimation” to some extent.

Figure 2

Sample of Intermediate-Mid Level Descriptors of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

INTERMEDIATE MID	
I can participate in conversations on familiar topics using sentences and series of sentences. I can handle short social interactions in everyday situations by asking and answering a variety of questions. I can usually say what I want to say about myself and my everyday life.	
I can start, maintain, and end a conversation on a variety of familiar topics. <input type="checkbox"/> I can be the first to start a conversation. <input type="checkbox"/> I can ask for information, details, and explanations during a conversation. <input type="checkbox"/> I can bring a conversation to a close. <input type="checkbox"/> I can interview someone for a project or a publication. <input type="checkbox"/> I can _____	I can use my language to handle tasks related to my personal needs. <input type="checkbox"/> I can request services, such as repair for a phone, computer, or car. <input type="checkbox"/> I can schedule an appointment. <input type="checkbox"/> I can inquire about membership in an organization or club. <input type="checkbox"/> I can _____
I can talk about my daily activities and personal preferences. <input type="checkbox"/> I can talk about my daily routine. <input type="checkbox"/> I can talk about my interests and hobbies. <input type="checkbox"/> I can give reasons for my preferences. <input type="checkbox"/> I can give some information about activities I did. <input type="checkbox"/> I can give some information about something I plan to do. <input type="checkbox"/> I can talk about my favorite music, movies, and sports. <input type="checkbox"/> I can _____	I can exchange information about subjects of special interest to me. <input type="checkbox"/> I can talk about artists from other countries. <input type="checkbox"/> I can talk about historical events. <input type="checkbox"/> I can talk about a mathematics, technology, or science project. <input type="checkbox"/> I can _____

Note. The figure includes checkoff boxes with specific examples for each can-do statement. From *American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages* 2013, p. 8.

As the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements have both a straightforward and user-friendly construct while also encompassing an underlying format of gradually increasing levels of difficulty, these encompass many components that are essentially ideal for communicative class activities. It may be somewhat surprising that the utilization of the can-do frameworks has been largely confined to that of a checkoff list for students in L2 classes. Nevertheless, in modifying the can-do statements into a class activity, it provides a clearly defined direction for students to self-monitor their progress, as they complete each communicative task, while also advancing towards more challenging tasks along the proficiency scale.

THE “FRAMEWORK” OF THE ACTIVITY

The NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements consist of a comprehensive list of language descriptors that are set along a scale of increasing levels of difficulty and accompanied by multiple examples for each descriptor. The distinguishing factor with these language proficiency guidelines is in the inclusion of detailed descriptions, unlike other proficiency benchmarks that are often limited to generalities along their scales. Although the standard procedure for using can-do statements in a class typically involves students checking off boxes from a list of communicative descriptions on what is deemed achievable or not, there is an inherent level of uncertainty as one cannot accurately determine the likelihood of communicative success without first attempting each of the tasks. As there was a need to reduce such ambiguity, an alternative approach was devised for using the can-do statements in class: transforming the can-do descriptors into specific communicative tasks that could enable students to truly assess the attainability of each task. Along the can-do proficiency statements, there is a list of *proficiency benchmarks*, essentially general descriptions of language ability. This is reflective of the typical layout of most can-do frameworks. As previously mentioned, the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements also include a detailed list of can-do statements, and these are listed within each *proficiency benchmark* section; specifically, in a subsection classified as *performance indicators*. For example, in the *interpersonal communication* category at the intermediate level, one proficiency benchmark provides a general description of, “I can participate in spontaneous spoken, written, or signed conversations on familiar topics, creating sentences and series of sentences to ask and answer a variety of questions” (see Figure 3). In each section below the *proficiency benchmark*, a question is presented. In the instance of this example, the question is the following: “How can I express, react to, and support preferences and opinions in conversation?” Thereafter, a list of three separate subsections is sorted by proficiency level (low, mid, high) with each having a *performance indicator*, essentially a more detailed description. Below each *performance indicator* there is a list of five can-do scenarios that attempt to better clarify the description for each subsection. These can-do scenarios are listed as examples. For instance, one example from this subsection is the following, “I can have a conversation with others to determine how we should plan to spend our spring break.”

Since the can-do statements cover an extended range of proficiency levels and include a comprehensive selection of communicative tasks—such as those within the category of interpersonal spoken communication—modifying portions of the framework into an activity was deemed suitable for EFL oral communication classes. After a tedious process of trial and error in creating and utilizing the activity, followed by later modifications for a collaborative project (e.g., Fewell & MacLean, 2017), and then subsequent years of continual refinement, the authors developed a more refined version of the communicative activity. Regarding the range of language proficiency tasks on the can-do scale to be adapted for the communication activity, it was determined that the novice-high to low-, mid-, and high-intermediate levels would be the most suitable. The modification process was straightforward, involving a simple adjustment of descriptive sentences into directive statements for students to follow. As seen in Figure 2, one of the can-do statements is written in the affirmative, “I can talk about my

interests and hobbies.” Thus, a simple conversion could make this into a communication task by modifying it into a command, “Talk about your interests and hobbies.” As for implementation of the communicative tasks, students would simply make an attempt to complete each directive. Thus, attempting to complete a particular task would leave less doubt as to whether it was communicatively achievable or not. Following this format, the entire list of NCSSFL-ACTFL can-do statements within the interpersonal communication section were modified into communicative tasks.

Figure 3

Sample of Intermediate Level Descriptors of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

INTERMEDIATE		
PROFICIENCY BENCHMARK		
<i>I can</i> participate in spontaneous spoken, written, or signed conversations on familiar topics, creating sentences and series of sentences to ask and answer a variety of questions.		
<i>How can I express, react to, and support preferences and opinions in conversations?</i>		
PERFORMANCE INDICATORS		
INTERMEDIATE LOW	INTERMEDIATE MID	INTERMEDIATE HIGH
<i>I can</i> express, ask about, and react with some details to preferences, feelings, or opinions on familiar topics, by creating simple sentences and asking appropriate follow-up questions.	<i>I can</i> exchange preferences, feelings, or opinions and provide basic advice on a variety of familiar topics, creating sentences and series of sentences and asking a variety of follow-up questions.	<i>I can</i> explain preferences, opinions, and emotions and provide advice on a variety of familiar and some concrete topics that I have researched, using connected sentences that may combine to form paragraphs and asking a variety of questions, often across various time frames.
EXAMPLES: Speaking/Listening or Signing		
INTERMEDIATE LOW	INTERMEDIATE MID	INTERMEDIATE HIGH
<i>I can... (customize with specific content).</i> <i>I can</i> interact to plan a hiking trip with friends asking each one what they would like to do. <i>I can</i> have a conversation with others to determine how we should plan to spend our spring break. <i>I can</i> interact to share ideas with others about how to celebrate a friend's birthday. <i>I can</i> interact with my partner to identify points of agreement on the reasons for our science experiment results. <i>I can</i> interact to share ideas about where I would prefer to live and why.	<i>I can... (customize with specific content).</i> <i>I can</i> exchange opinions related to dating practices in other countries and provide reasons. <i>I can</i> exchange opinions on organic vs. non-organic food. <i>I can</i> exchange opinions about movies based on books and express whether the book or the movie is better. <i>I can</i> exchange ideas about sports in schools in the US vs. other countries. <i>I can</i> exchange opinions about the length of the school day or work week.	<i>I can... (customize with specific content).</i> <i>I can</i> exchange opinions on a school policy and give reasons for why it should be changed. <i>I can</i> exchange opinions about the use of personal devices at school. <i>I can</i> outline positive and negative environmental practices in a conversation with city council representatives. <i>I can</i> exchange advice on how to be a successful learner. <i>I can</i> exchange opinions about the ways we use social media in our personal and school or work lives.

Note. The figure includes proficiency benchmarks, performance indicators, and examples. From American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages 2017, p. 9.

IMPLEMENTATION OF THE ACTIVITY

Regarding the general procedure for utilizing the communicative activity, a brief description is as follows: Students first form groups of three. Instructions and the allotted time for the task are displayed on a presentation slide. In the next slide, a description of the can-do speaking task is provided. One student will then proceed to complete the can-do task within the allotted time and then the others will follow the same process for a similar task. Once time has expired, the instructor announces the end of the tasks, and a slide with a QR code is displayed on the projector screen, directing students to an online form to complete a brief self/peer evaluation. Immediately thereafter, another set of can-do speaking tasks is displayed for the next section, and the same procedure is followed. This procedure is repeated until each of the group members has had an opportunity to complete a task. It should be noted that each of the tasks, although at the same level of the can-do scale, has been modified to be slightly different from one another. As for the procedure of implementing the activity, there have been some changes over the years with a shift from paper-based score sheets to the utilization of ICT-based applications for recording student progress. Moreover, the ICT shift also led to improved efficiency in monitoring student progress and in managing data with Google Forms and Sheets. In addition, the procedure now encompasses the use of PPT slides for the instructor to dictate the timing and completion of each can-do task in class. Finally, it was decided that students should remain in the same group throughout the semester, as a means of more smoothly dictating the activity. A more structured step-by-step description of the procedure for implementing the activity is presented below:

- Step 1: Form groups of three students.
- Step 2: Display activity instructions on the PPT slide.
- Step 3: Announce the time allocated for preparation and completion of each task.
- Step 4: Show a description of the can-do speaking task on the PPT slide.
- Step 4: Read the description (duo input) and announce the start of the activity.
- Step 5: Students proceed to complete the activities in their groups.
- Step 6: Monitor the time and announce the end of the task.
- Step 7: Show a QR code on the PPT slide that directs students to the evaluation form.
- Step 8: Students evaluate four aspects:
 - (a). amount of English (as opposed to Japanese)
 - (b). quantity of speaking (as opposed to silence)
 - (c). quality of speaking
 - (d). degree of task completion
- Step 9: Students submit scores of their evaluation.
- Step 10: Repeat steps 4-8 sequentially until all group members have completed the task.

The can-do statements were adapted into communicative speaking tasks, and these were completed individually among students within the different groups. Each group was limited to three students in total, and a turn-based rotation system was established for the activity. One student was designated as

the speaker and would attempt to complete the communicative task. Once the task was completed, all the students within the group would rate their peer's speaking performance along with the self-evaluation of the peer as well. The purpose of having both peer and self-evaluation checks was multifaceted. First, formulating a dual-assessment system provided an added layer of score validation. Moreover, a comparison between self-evaluation and peer-evaluation scores provided individual students with a means of assessing the accuracy of their own judgment. Peer evaluation, in particular, has been found to be a reliable means of assessment. According to a study conducted by Saito and Fujita (2004), peer ratings were deemed to be reliable and consistent when compared to teacher ratings. As for the factors being assessed on the evaluation form of the communicative activity, these consisted of the following: the *Amount of English* used as opposed to Japanese, the *Quantity of Speaking* versus silence, and the degree of *Task Completion*, and the *Quality of Speaking*. As previously mentioned, evaluations consisted of both peer and self-assessments which provided a means to not merely measure potential differences between self and peer ratings, but to also promote a critical self-awareness in different areas of speech delivery. For instance, in one of the areas evaluated—the amount of English and Japanese spoken—was purposely included as a means of encouraging students to maintain an English-speaking environment while engaging in the group activities. The reluctance to communicate in the L2, even in instances involving basic communicative interaction, has been a noted obstacle in conversational tasks in Japanese university EFL classes (Eguchi & Eguchi, 2006). As for the inclusion of the *Amount of English* in the evaluation form, this was an attempt to encourage students to strive towards using the L2 rather than the L1, a common concern in EFL classes (e.g., Manara, 2007; Cook, 2001). Regarding the *Quantity of Speaking*, the aim was to reduce instances of silence during the activity. There have been cases of students responding with brief remarks—perhaps fulfilling the task per se—but often remaining silent thereafter. *Task Completion*, as in any class activity, was one of the most obvious goals and was therefore included in the form. As for the *Quality of Speaking*, its inclusion was a means for students to provide encouragement and supportive feedback to one another.

Among other ongoing concerns, there is the variability in proficiency levels among students, an issue arguably prevalent in most EFL classes. However, this factor may be somewhat mitigated, at least in the initial weeks, by starting the activity at the novice-low level of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements. However, it should also be mentioned that the purpose of starting the activity at a lower proficiency level was not solely intended to assist students at the bottom tier. It was also aimed at building confidence by providing an achievable routine for all students to complete tasks before advancing to higher levels. In terms of the group activity, students had to complete several different communicative tasks at each level before advancing to the next stage. As mentioned previously, all the can-do tasks were modified at each level to ensure that students would not have to contend with identical tasks like those of their peers. These modifications ensured that students were provided with a greater degree of equality when engaging in the activities—as replicated tasks were avoided—and in evaluation scoring as well. In addition, the allocated time for the communicative tasks was divided into two segments: preparation time and task completion time. The preparation time was set to be longer during the early stages, at the more basic levels of the activity, but would gradually be shortened

at each successive level. In contrast, the task completion time was gradually extended. The rationale behind reducing the preparation time was an effort to condition students, incrementally developing their abilities to engage in spontaneous speech. As for the task completion time, its extension was a means of helping students acquire the ability to speak beyond short responses, a common limitation for EFL learners. It should also be noted that students were engaged in the communicative activity in every class. The allotted time for the activity was fifteen minutes on average. A group typically completed three cycles of can-do tasks, giving each student a total of three individual speaking tasks. The peer and self-evaluations administered in each class provided essential data to assess student communicative ability and progress. The data also provided the instructor with information essential for offering feedback and guidance to students. Additionally, the evaluations helped raise student awareness on key components of the communicative activity (e.g., avoiding silence, promoting L2 use, etc.).

METHODOLOGY

Research Questions

In this study, the following research questions were addressed:

1. Were there differences in students' perceived communication abilities before and after participating in the activity?
2. Was the activity effective in promoting communication in the target language?
3. What were the participants' impressions of the activity?

Participants

This study involved 38 students enrolled in second-semester EFL classes at Meio University during the fall of 2023. The students exhibited a broad range of English language proficiency levels ranging from lower-intermediate to advanced. The gender ratio was a near equal distribution with 47% female and 53% male participants.

Materials and Procedures

Data were collected in a modified selection of checkoff list items from the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements that students completed both before and after participating in the communicative activity. This selection from the can-do checkoff list consisted of 12 items in total and was examined before and after the participants engaged in the communicative activity. Furthermore, after fully completing all the communicative tasks, students were asked to provide written feedback on a form with open-ended questions.

It should be noted that self/peer assessment evaluations were collected at periodic intervals, as students completed different sections along the can-do scale (see Figure 4).

Figure 4*Sample of Peer/Self-Assessment Scoring Sheet*

[Speaker #1] Name:					
Task Components	Scores				
Amount of Speaking	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%
Amount of English	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%
Quality of Speaking	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%
Completion of Task	100%	90%	80%	70%	60%

Note. The participants submitted scores digitally with dropdown menus. The figure includes the scoring sheet in paper format to provide a clearer view.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the pre- and post-activity checkoff lists were analyzed by calculating the mean scores and standard deviations for each of the 12 selected can-do statements. This allowed for a comparison of students perceived abilities before and after participating in the communicative activity, identifying instances of overestimation or underestimation. For the self and peer assessment evaluations, which were collected after each task, average scores were calculated for each of the four task components: *Amount of Speaking*, *Amount of English*, *Quality of Speaking*, and *Completion of Task*. The data provided insight into the effectiveness of the activity in promoting communication and highlighted areas where students excelled or faced challenges. Additionally, the open-ended written feedback was subjected to a thematic analysis. Responses were coded and categorized into five distinct themes: *English Speaking Ability*, *Topic Discussions*, *Effort and Improvement*, *Compliments and Positive Feedback*, and *Challenges and Criticisms*. This analysis helped identify common patterns in students' reflections on their experiences with the activity.

RESULTS

Among the self/peer assessment items, both the *Amount of Speaking* and *Amount of English* may be deemed as indirect indicators that the activity tended to promote communication. Both items were assessed at (87.99%) and (92.91%) respectively, indicating that the activity promoted speaking to a greater extent. In terms of *Quality of Speaking*, assessment scores averaged (87.59%), although the

inclusion of this item served merely as a means of positive reinforcement among peers. As for *Completion of Task*, the average score (84.43%) was the lowest among all task components, as the format of the activity included time limitations that posed some difficulty. Although the study was not specifically focused on differences between self and peer assessment, it should be noted that relevant data from the participants' communicative activity feedback forms were collected. In terms of the self/peer assessment results, the data were similar and consistent, aligning with previous studies (e.g., Ma & Winke, 2019) indicating similarities in scores with some under evaluations in self-assessments.

In terms of the pre/post data from the checkoff list items of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements, differences were found ranging from slight to extreme (see Figure 6). In terms of perceived can-do abilities, there were varying degrees of inaccuracy that either exceeded or underestimated individual expectations. The results of the pre/post checkoff list, although based on a small sample size, are concerning because individual assessments of perceived language ability were unrealistic in some cases. These preliminary findings suggest that students' input on some checkoff list items may be questionable unless they have an opportunity to attempt the language tasks beforehand.

Figure 5

Pre/Post Data of Selected NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statement Checkoff List Items

Checkoff List NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements	Mean (PRE)	Std Dev (PRE)	Mean (POST)	Std Dev (POST)
1. I can ask and talk about family members and their characteristics.	0.947	0.226	0.914	0.284
2. I can ask for directions to a place.	0.868	0.343	0.686	0.471
3. I can invite and make plans with someone to do something or go somewhere.	0.816	0.393	0.771	0.426
4. I can talk with someone about family or household tasks.	0.868	0.343	0.971	0.169
5. I can ask and answer questions related to various subjects.	0.237	0.431	0.371	0.49
6. I can make a reservation.	0.763	0.431	0.857	0.355
7. I can interview someone for a project or a publication.	0.526	0.506	0.543	0.505
8. I can talk about my daily routine.	0.974	0.162	0.971	0.169
9. I can talk about historical events.	0.237	0.431	0.314	0.471
10. I can ask for and provide descriptions of places I know or would like to visit.	0.658	0.481	0.8	0.406
11. I can give the basic rules of a game or sport and answer questions about them.	0.605	0.495	0.657	0.482
12. I can arrange for a make-up exam or reschedule an appointment.	0.5	0.507	0.743	0.443

Note. Data indicates pre ($n=38$) post ($n=35$) self-evaluation scores of participants perceived abilities to complete the selected communicative tasks.

As seen in the data from the pre/post can-do checkoff list (Figure 5), variability in scores ranged from near accuracy (Item 8: 97.40% to 97.10%) to significant divergence (Item 12: 50% to 74.30%) in perceived can-do abilities. Overall, there were three instances of overestimation of abilities and eight instances of underestimation. In terms of the items that were overestimated, these posed more difficulty for students than they anticipated. In comparison between pre/post can-do checkoff list scores, the lowest difference was at 3.3% (*talking about family*) while the highest difference was at 18.2% (*asking for directions*). The pre/post differences of all three items that were overestimated averaged 8.3%. However, it should be noted that instances of underestimation in ability were more prevalent and had a wider deviation overall with differences diverging as little as 1.7% to those reaching 24.3%. The pre/post differences for items that were underestimated averaged at 10.5%. Finally, regarding an item that was accurately rated in both pre/post checklists (Item 8), the topic—*I can talk about my daily routine*— was a common theme and more likely encountered in EFL classes, thus potentially impacting the results. In contrast, another common topic, *asking for directions*, was surprisingly inaccurately assessed. This suggests that familiarity alone may not be sufficient; other factors, such as task difficulty level or insufficient preparation for the specific task, may have contributed to the initial inaccurate assessment by students.

In addition, peer and self-feedback were collected at the end of the activity to identify potential patterns in the responses. In total, students submitted 262 responses following the completion of each task. These responses were categorized into five distinct themes: *English Speaking Ability* (comments on fluency and pronunciation), *Topic Discussions* (feedback on the specific topics discussed), *Effort and Improvement* (self-reflections on effort and growth), *Compliments and Positive Feedback* (encouraging remarks directed at peers), and *Challenges and Criticisms* (observations of difficulties and constructive critiques). Among these, 56 responses were related to *English Speaking Ability*, including comments on participants' fluency or pronunciation. One student remarked on a peer, saying, "She can speak all English!" Meanwhile, another student reflected on their own performance, noting, "I could speak English without getting stuck." The largest category, however, focused on *Topic Discussions*, with a total of 105 responses. For instance, one student described their peer's topic as, "He explained about Kamakura." Another student reflected on their own performance, stating, "I talked about household chores." In a category characterized as *Effort and Improvement*, there were 35 responses, which tended to include more self-reflective comments. For example, one student wrote, "Trying my best," while another commented, "Still not good enough, but keeping trying to talk was a good thing." Conversely, in the category of *Compliments and Positive Feedback*, all 39 comments were directed at peers. Students encouraged their peers with positive remarks such as "Excellent!" and "Great job! You did this task perfectly!" Finally, in a category described as *Challenges and Criticisms*, there were a total of 51 responses. Remarks such as "That was a tough question!" and "Could do a little bit more" may have reflected the challenges students encountered while attempting to complete some of the communicative tasks. Additionally, there were responses that did not clearly fit into any of the categories. For instance, some included comments like "He was at war with mold" and "Don't forget desert." These might have been follow-up replies to something students said while attempting

to complete the communicative tasks. Nonetheless, there were 16 miscellaneous responses that did not fit into any of the categories.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study suggest that the oral communication activities created by modifying portions of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements have the potential to promote opportunities for learners to communicate while also simultaneously serving as a more accurate gauge to measure their spoken L2 abilities. Observations of students participating in the activities revealed that they were motivated, quite possibly by the systematic design of the tasks and by finding purpose in the gradual progression of difficulty. This sense of direction stood in contrast to the ambiguity often associated with other ESL/EFL communicative activities. In terms of an examination of the pre- and post-checkoff list, there was a variability in students' self-perceived abilities, with instances of both overestimation and underestimation. Overestimation, seen in tasks such as asking for directions, suggests that students may initially have an unrealistic sense of their ability in common scenarios that may be perceived as being achievable, although those specific tasks may not have ever been attempted in a communicative situation. Conversely, the more frequent and pronounced underestimations—evident in tasks such as *arranging for a make-up exam*—indicate that students often lack confidence in their communicative abilities in less common scenarios.

As for the self/peer evaluation results, these provided further evidence of the activity's success in promoting communication in the target language. There were high scores overall in the categories of *Amount of Speaking* (87.99%) and *Amount of English* (92.91%), indicating that the activity effectively encouraged students to speak frequently and prioritize using English during the tasks. This aligns with the primary goal of the activity: to promote oral communication in an interactive and meaningful context. Furthermore, the structured, step-by-step procedure and incremental progression of difficulty allowed students to build confidence as they advanced through the tasks. However, the lowest score among the task components, *Completion of Task* (84.43%), may indicate the potential difficulty students faced in meeting the demands of the time-limited activities. This could be attributed to insufficient preparation time or the complexity of certain tasks. Finally, it should be mentioned that the incorporation of technology, specifically the integration of ICT-based tools such as Google Forms and Sheets, was helpful in improving the efficiency of tracking student progress and in managing data.

Reflecting on the implementation of the activity, several aspects went as planned, while others presented unexpected challenges. The structured progression of tasks, starting from novice-high to intermediate levels, successfully motivated students by providing a clear sense of direction and achievement. This aligned with the design intention of building confidence through achievable tasks before advancing to more complex ones. Additionally, the use of technology, such as Google Forms and Sheets, streamlined the process of collecting and managing data, enhancing the efficiency of the activity. However, some tasks proved more difficult than anticipated, particularly those with strict time limitations (e.g., *Completion of Task*). In response to this, future implementations could include more flexible time allocations or additional scaffolding for complex tasks to improve completion rates. Furthermore, while the integration of technology was generally beneficial, occasional technical issues

were encountered, and this highlighted the need for contingency plans, such as providing paper-based alternatives.

The implications of this study for innovative language teaching practices are significant. First, educators can adapt can-do statements into communicative activities to create structured, goal-oriented tasks that better align with learners' proficiency levels. This approach not only promotes active language use but also enables L2 learners to more accurately self-assess their language abilities. Second, incorporating peer and self-assessment provides students with an opportunity at self-reflection and accountability, a means of encouraging ownership of progress. Finally, the utilization of technology may offer benefits in terms of organization and efficiency, especially for those more comfortable with ICT integration.

CONCLUSION

The modification of can-do statements into communicative tasks provided a practical and effective means for students to enhance their English language skills while enabling a more accurate assessment of their L2 abilities. The findings suggest several practical implications for language educators. First, the modification of the can-do statements into communicative activities may help bridge the gap between perceived and actual communicative abilities by providing learners with actionable, measurable goals. Second, the utilization of both peer and self-assessment as feedback may also encourage reflection and accountability. Furthermore, the structured and logical sequencing of tasks—with incrementally higher levels of difficulty—was motivating for students and supported the development of oral communication skills.

The modification of the NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements into communicative tasks has proven to be a viable method for promoting active participation and practical language use in the EFL classroom. This approach not only promoted meaningful interaction in the target language but also improved students' accuracy in assessing their L2 abilities. This study has demonstrated that modifying can-do statements into communicative tasks can effectively promote oral communication while also providing L2 learners with a more accurate realization of individual proficiency levels. The findings suggest several practical implications for language educators: (1) utilizing structured, proficiency-aligned tasks with clear learning objectives to motivate learners; (2) incorporating peer and self-assessment to promote reflection and accountability; and (3) utilizing technology to streamline activity management and data collection. These strategies can help create more effective and engaging language learning experiences that support the development of essential communication skills.

While slight adjustments enhanced the usability of the communicative activity for the instructors, challenges remain in finding a balance due to the extensiveness of the can-do frameworks with the ever-present limitations of class time. Nevertheless, this project has demonstrated an achievable and practical model for integrating structured communicative activities into language instruction. Future studies could explore broader applications of this approach across varying proficiency levels, instructional settings, and languages, further advancing the potential and practicality of can-do frameworks in language education.

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