
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language Functions in ESL Classrooms: Basis for the Enhancement of English Conversational Skills of Junior High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Communicative competence is one of the primary aims of English language education, and it highlights the proper use of language functions in specific situations. This study aimed to determine the language functions used in ESL classrooms by Junior High School students. The identified underrepresented language functions became the point of departure in designing an enhancement program to improve the conversational English skills of the students. This study used qualitative research design as it employed audio recordings, classroom observations, and field notes as instruments to gather data from the six (6) ESL classrooms. This study used the model of Michael Halliday's Language Functions as a framework for the conversation analysis of verbatim transcriptions. The study found that the participants mostly used representational, heuristic, personal, and instrumental language functions during their conversational English sessions. However, imaginative, regulatory, and interactional language functions were recognized as underrepresented. A Conversational English Enhancement Program (CEEP) Framework and Modules focused on the identified underrepresented language functions were designed for the language learners. The study's concerns, such as the sparse use of imaginative language function in discussion, ineffective ways of employing regulatory function in communication, and maintaining dialogues, were specifically and contextually targeted by the modules. Thus, students in ESL classrooms should be given avenues to exercise their conversational English skills by giving them exposure to authentic situations where they can maximize language functions appropriately.

KEYWORDS

Conversational English skills, language functions, Practical Spoken English Program (PSEP).

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1. Introduction

The language we use in our everyday lives is a reflection of our daily activities in our various situations. It changes, it improves, and it innovates. Salayo (2021) stated that language variations in every part of the world are affected mainly by the differences in the speakers' occasions, intentions, and implied meanings of the speakers and level of understanding of the speakers' pragmatic functions and both the speakers' language and the addressee. This can be further exemplified by the English teachers providing instructions to the students in the ESL (English as Second Language) classroom to help them achieve communicative competence. Communicative competence in the ESL classroom setting can be seen in how a student uses a specific language to relay thoughts, ideas, and feelings, commonly referred to as language functions.

Learning to utilize language for a variety of functions is a key component of communicative competence (Pien, 1985). Casta and Hufana (2016) stress that language functions are often used as fundamental guiding principles in ESL classrooms. It is a tool to apply the concepts learned in language learning by using these in varied situations in order to communicate effectively in a discourse. As a matter of fact, several studies highlighted how specific language functions, such as MAK Halliday's framework, can

be used in improving curriculum and instructions in almost all levels of ESL classrooms. In the study of Ahamad et al., the seven functions of language by Michael Halliday were used as a framework (2019), and the study identified the students' proficiency in the seven language functions—instrumental, regulatory, interactional, personal, imaginative, heuristic, and informative—as well as the significant connections between these language functions and the students' oral and written performance. All respondents of the study received marginal marks on the various communicative tasks at the outset. They were, therefore, lacking in every aspect of language. This finding is then used to propose lesson guides in the functional English second foreign language discipline. Moreover, Britton (1971) made use of three language functions: transactional, expressive, and poetic, which is similar to Halliday's function of instrumental, personal, and imaginative. This study specified how the use of these three language functions must be incorporated by participants and spectators to create meaning and understand one another. Moreover, this research suggested how language must be integrated across all curricula for continuous practice and use. In a similar study by Casta and Hufana (2016), the result of their study used more representational language function, which is 47.32% in ESL textbooks, which is a challenge posed to cover other language functions in crafting ESL textbooks.

The Practical Spoken English Program is an aggressive and down to earth program that allows students to participate in various discourses using the English language as a tool. One of the parts of PSEP is the Conversational English session. This is how PSEP trains students to communicate with people in a variety of settings using everyday English. Students will be placed in pairs or groups where a specific scenario will be presented. Therefore, in order to communicate thoughts, ideas, and experiences to the audience, students must utilize a suitable and functional language.

Given this, the researcher would like to present a new perspective on studying language functions in an ESL classroom setting as it may vastly contribute to the enhancement of the English conversational learning activities under the Practical Spoken English Program implemented in the locale of the study. By examining a teacher-student interaction in an ESL class, specifically the PSEP Conversational English Session, the language functions that are not given much attention as they acquire diverse language classroom experiences will be addressed. Thus, this study will also take into account the language functions that are not frequently employed in ESL classrooms as a point of departure in enriching the content and language learning competencies to be included in the Practical Spoken English Program.

Moreover, studies on the use and analysis of language functions in the Philippines are not given much attention, as is evident in the lack of literature and studies in the locale. It is also important to note that there is an enormous adjustment on the part of the teachers in the new normal education set-up, specifically in teaching language abilities in the ESL classroom. Additionally, the PSEP was not implemented for the last two years, given the pandemic situation; hence, tailoring and enhancing the implementation of the program to accommodate the communicative needs of ESL learners for a holistic language learning experience is a very timely and relevant outcome of any research undertaking.

With the gaps presented, this study focused on identifying the language functions used by language learners in the ESL classroom setting. The intended outcome of this study served as the basis for enhancing the English conversational activities under the Practical Spoken English Program (PSEP) implemented at the University of La Salette, Incorporated, Santiago City. Specifically, this research addressed problems on language functions that are underrepresented in the language learning process so it can provide empirical data as a basis for providing ESL learners with a more holistic language learning experience that targets their overall communicative needs. Thus, the results of the study can largely contribute to devising additional ways and strategies for the effective implementation of the aforementioned program through an improvement plan. Lastly, this study can also provide data for the teachers in order to contextualize and improve the learning materials in the PSEP to be appropriately suited to the communicative needs of the learners, which will be an aid in the long run so that they can become communicatively competent in various situations inside and outside the classroom.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition and Nature of Language Functions

Learning to utilize language for a range of purposes is a key component of communicative competence (Pien, 1985). These include asking for information, elaborating, and putting up a request, among others. Students have been shown to benefit in a number of ways from their knowledge of how language works (Hughes & Lavery, 2004; Kinsella, 2010). Students are thus more equipped to understand what others say and respond to it correctly based on this information. Additionally, it enables students to combine their ideas in a variety of ways, absorb the patterns required to convey their ideas, and recognize the linguistic requirements of specific tasks and concepts (Kinsella, 2010).

Casta and Hufana's (2016) study, which used ESL textbooks as its main source of data, stressed the value of language function analysis in the educational setting. The study also tried to determine the general and particular language functions used in various introductory ESL textbooks. Language exponents (vocabulary, structures, and grammatical content), which students should be

exposed to and are expected to acquire, can be identified by classifying and identifying language functions (Canale & Swain, 1980; Green, 2012). Such information offers a variety of meanings or meaning possibilities suitable for ESL beginners (Halliday, 1975). The study also examines how ESL textbook language function content compares to the demands of beginning ESL learners.

2.2 Halliday's Language Function Model

Michael Halliday (2003:80) listed a set of seven initial functions as follows: Regulatory, Interactional, Representational, Personal, Imaginative, Instrumental, and Heuristic.

1. Regulatory Function is the language used to influence the behavior of others. Concerned with persuading/commanding/requesting other people to do things you want. For example: Could you like to give me some money?
2. Interactional Function language is used to develop social relationship and ease the process of interaction, concerned with the phobic dimension of talk. For example, I love you, and I want to live with you forever.
3. Personal Function is the language used to express personal preferences, identity, feelings, emotions, personality, opinion, and the reaction of the speaker. Sometimes referred to as the "Here I am" function, announcing oneself to the world. For example, Toba Lake is a good place to get refreshed.
4. Representational Function is used to exchange information and concerned with relaying or requesting information. For example, Europe Island is a place that makes us realize our dream.
5. Heuristic Function is used to learn and explore the environment. A child uses language to learn, which may be a question-and-answer type or the kind of running commentary that frequently accompanies children's play. For example, What is the tractor doing?
6. Imaginative Function is the language used to explore the imagination, create an imaginary system or ideas, and tell stories, jokes, or fairy tales. It may also be used as children play and create imaginary worlds or may arise from storytelling. For example, a good player can be successful in this drama.
7. Instrumental Function is used to express what people need. For example, I want to buy a car to make travelling easier.

2.3 The Practical Spoken English Program (PSEP)

It is an aggressive, sustainable, and down-to-earth program that enables teachers and students to undergo helpful English-speaking lessons on a regular basis. It is a strategic process that builds the confidence of Filipino students. The proponent of this program is Caroline Tino. This program aims to eliminate a few reasons why Filipino students refuse to speak in English; some of these are lack of confidence, lack of practice, lack of idea, and lack of vocabulary or English know-how.

One of the components of this program is the Conversational English. This is PSEP's strategy of building students' ability to converse with others using common English in various situations. Here, students will be assigned to a partner or to a group in which a specific situation will be given. Students, then, must use appropriate and functional language in order to convey thoughts, ideas, and experiences to the audience. Still part of Conversational English is the Conducting Meeting/Problem Solving Drill. This is a higher form of conversational English. Students are given cases to solve through conversational exchange. Both students must apply much thinking and analysis in the course of the activity. Students are given certain procedures to follow to navigate the cases that are given to them. Much of the activities are anchored on leadership situations.

The cited related literature and studies underscored how focusing on language functions can be an important tool in improving language teaching and learning. Through the years, it has developed as an essential aspect of determining appropriate content, classroom experiences, and resources to be included in the pedagogy. Moreover, studies on language function have also paved the way for the improvement of the communicative competence of the learners using the English language vis-à-vis its application to society. In addition, studies and literature presented also revealed the role of language functions as a tool in bridging the improvement of interaction among individuals in various situations and modes. However, less focus is given to how the findings on the language functions can be used in the improvement of the existing enhancement program that is used in the ESL classroom. Hence, needful attention should be given in order to help educators adopt to the current challenge of education in the new normal in the ESL Classroom using the Practical Spoken English Program Conversational English sessions.

3. Methodology

This study used qualitative descriptive research methodology. The researcher employed audio recording, classroom observation, and field notes as research instruments. The participants of this study were the six (6) Communication Arts- English Teachers and their corresponding ESL classes at the University of La Salette, Incorporated-Junior High School Department. It is one of the few institutions in the region that offers the Practical Spoken English Program, making the location ideal for the study.

The following were the procedures followed in order to gather the data needed in this study. The researcher asked permission from the university administrators regarding the study's data gathering. Once approved, the researcher asked permission from the Subject Area Coordinator of the English Department of the Junior High School Department and the target participants of the study regarding the conduct of the audio recording and classroom observation during the delivery of the Practical English Spoken Program every Monday during their Conversational English session. This is to capture the conversations between the teacher and the ESL learners in the classroom context. Likewise, the consent of the study's participants was sought at the outset of the data gathering process for ethical considerations. They were informed of the objectives of the study, and they were not coerced to participate in the study. Also, they were assured of anonymity, data protection, and confidentiality in their responses. To ensure this, a consent form was distributed to the participants of the study, signed by their parents or guardians, allowing them to participate in the study's conduct.

After getting approval from the Subject Area Coordinator and the consent of the target participants of the study, the researcher asked for the respondents' schedule for the audio recording and classroom observation. Once the schedule for the audio recording and observation was finalized with reference to the schedule of the Practical English Spoken Program Conversational English session, audio recording and observation were conducted.

Each audio recording was at most one (1) hour long per class. Audio recording was started once the opening greeting from the teacher started and continued until the closing greeting. The researcher also used field notes to take down significant statements or any kinds of utterances relevant to the focus of the study while conducting classroom observation. He properly labelled the audio recordings per class for easy identification.

The collected data were subjected to verbatim transcription. Each transcription was provided with labels (e.g., Teacher Participant, Student Participant 1, Student Participant 2). After gathering qualitative data from audio recordings and classroom observation, the verbatim transcriptions were subjected to discourse analyses. The researcher used the Language Function Model in the classroom by Michael Halliday, a linguistic framework that was employed for the analysis of the language functions used by the Junior High School students in the ESL classroom. Dominant and underrepresented language functions were noted to properly design an enhancement program suited to the needs of the learners. Descriptive statistics, specifically frequency count and percentage, were employed to do this. The qualitative analyses had undergone data member checking for validation from at least three (3) experts other than the researcher.

After determining the types of language functions evident in the ESL classroom, the underrepresented language functions were integrated as one of the salient points or dimensions in the Conversational English sessions of the Practical Spoken English Program. This became the point of departure in crafting the Conversational English Enhancement Program (CEEP), which will improve the delivery of the aforementioned program and subsequently address the overall communicative needs of ESL learners.

4. Results and Discussion

Overall, there were 1,103 recorded language functions. The study revealed the dominant language functions that were mostly utilized during the conversational English sessions in the ESL Classrooms.

Table 1. Language Functions in ESL Classrooms

No.	Language Functions	Frequency Count	Percentage
1	Regulatory	127	11.51
2	Interactional	137	12.42
3	Personal	167	15.14
4	Representational	307	27.83
5	Heuristic	170	15.41
6	Imaginative	38	3.44
7	Instrumental	157	14.23
	Total	1103	100%

4.1 Dominant Language Functions in ESL Classrooms

In the study, dominant language functions used by the participants were identified. These are the representational, heuristic, personal, and instrumental language functions. Gaining the highest percentage of 27.83 % out of 100% (307 over 1103) among the language functions is representational. It was noted that the participants commonly used this language function to provide information, explain rationale, provide support on reasoning, and give elucidation on the "hows" of things. It can be noted that students used this representational language function as most of the activities, prompt questions, and situations found in the PSEP Conversational English kit are anchored on, allowing students to explain concepts, share experiences, and provide information on

a specific scenario. From a larger perspective, students are also encouraged to use this function in other subjects and in accomplishing language tasks like plenum sharing and small group discussions. With these exposures created, it cannot be denied how students have truly mastered the use of this language function to communicate and transfer ideas to others in a direct, straightforward way.

As revealed in the verbatim transcription extract, it can be seen how the participant used representational language function to explain the rationale of an activity as provided in a situation:

Hello, Good Morning; so the project we have and we have been doing for the street children is actually the SCEEK or SCEEK, which is the Street Children's Education and Experi[en]ces Keeping project, which aims to, as it says, keeps and protects the student learning in all aspect which enables their knowledge and understanding to be broaden more mat it be physically, mentally or other else through programs. (Student Participant 3)

This statement suggests how the participant used the representational language function in order to state an activity, explain the rationale behind that activity, and provide clear information on what the project will be all about. This is supported by the study of Black and Huerta (1994), which uses the framework of Dyson to interpret the language functions; representational language was mainly used to provide information about events and circumstances- actual or imagined, past or present (Dyson, 1989, p. 284). Another utterance recorded from the participants stated:

Of course, Palawan, it will cost 5,000 pesos if you want to ride an airplane, and the hotel, it will cost 1 600 per day. In Cebu, it will cost 2 122 pesos, and lastly, Boracay, 1,570 on transportation and 2, 520 per day in hotel. (Student Participant 4)

The utterance above provides straightforward information about the travel, which was asked about in the PSEP Conversational English session. It detailed the amount of money needed per place during the travel. It can be gleaned how language serves as a way to share the information which are factual and directed to what was being asked in a scenario, as exhibited mostly by the participants.

Secondly, the heuristic language function also emerged as the second dominant language function used in ESL classrooms, with 170 utterances out of 1103 (15.41 % out of 100%). Notable discoveries regarding the use of this function were identified. The study participants used the heuristic function to ask questions, clarifications, directions, locations, and processes. In addition, it was also used to initiate a conversation. In the study, the heuristic language function was used dominantly by the respondents as they were given lots of prompt questions to start on, leading them to shape the discourse into an inquisitive style of conversation, asking one question from another and vice versa. With the opportunity seen from the study, the respondents were able to utilize the heuristic language function as a tool in igniting conversations. Aside from this, it also titillates clarifying insights and asking for information. Hence, inferring the core of the heuristic function from the study, which is to ask someone to say something out of a thing.

The study posited this language function as second because, without heuristic language, the conversation may be a hard way to initiate and sustain. Moreover, it can be inferred that questions, whether close or open ended, can lead to many options for a conversation to start or a topic to be talked about.

Here are the sample statements/questions from the respondents that were used during the conversational English session.

Hi, excuse me. May I ask where can I get the enrolment form?" (Student Participant 12); "Sorry, I'm just new here. Can you help me find the Registrar's Office?" (Student Participant 15); and, "I am not really familiar with the registration process. Can you teach me?" (Student Participant 6).

Questions stated above were used by the participants in order to get specific, direct, and useful information about a thing in a given situation. Getting answers to these, would enable the participants to do another thing. With this, it can be extrapolated how heuristic language function can be very useful in accomplishing tasks. In the assertions of Djatmika (2014), a human should interact to others to fulfill their needs socially and culturally; which heuristic function served this purpose as a means for the participants to initiate conversations

Utterances such as "Really? Just like stories on wattpads? Sounds exciting. But, isn't ABM hard?" (Student Participant 4); "Huh? ABM? Why are you taking ABM?" (Student Participant 6); "Well ahh I'm in a business administration, man. I bet you need a brief *** on enrolment procedures?" (Student Participant 14) are some of examples of the heuristic language function as found in this study.

Looking closely at the clarifying questions, it also follows the structure of having a question after another question in the form of restatement or rephrasing. In the end, it continues to provide its purpose of soliciting answers but in a clearer version. Assurance

is also what one would like to get by using this language function. Surmising the statements above, clarifying questions can be helpful to engage the speakers in expounding their answer to the question by using various language functions to properly information, thoughts, and opinions. This can also test how broad one's lexicon is in a given scenario.

Three important points were highlighted regarding how personal language functions were utilized, as it ranked third among the dominant language functions, with a percentage of 15.14% out of 100% (167 out of 1103). Accordingly, the participants used this language function to express opinions and emotions, share positions and decisions made, and express identity. The situations provided in the PSEP Conversational English, such as asking for a favorite destination on travel, a quick afternoon stroll in the park, and talking to the mayor, to name a few, have boosted the participants to be expressive of their sentiments and thoughts as reflected through the scenarios provided in the kit. Also, during the conversation, words that portray ownership, strong emotions, and opinions were also highlighted from the verbatim transcription. It can be inferred that the participants used this type of language function mainly to express feelings depending on how the situation is presented and offered.

Brown (2007: 223) said that the prime function of personal language function is to know the goal that wants to be achieved with that language, for example, expressing, asking, responding, greeting, saying farewell, and so forth.: *"I am very happy to be your classmate too" (Student Participant 8), and "I've been well. My sister has been busy lately. Oh, that reminds me, I'm so scared at senior high." (Student Participant 16).*

Expressing emotions is a vital tool in communication to let other speakers know what you feel and how you feel in certain ways. The statements above reflected emotions conveyed by the speakers in the conversational English session. The use of this language can also reveal one's identity.

Another significant finding from this function is this: *Yes, being a nurse takes time; if you persevere and believe in yourself, you can be one. I admit that nursing might be hard and difficult, but there is no such courses that is easy because you need to study well and make sacrifices to attain that dream job you want. (Student Participant 14)*

The statement revealed how the speaker expressed his opinion by using the pronoun 'I,' which denotes ownership. Moreover, the speaker presented his thoughts about nursing, which was manifested by the use of adjectives and the sharing of experiences. Personal language function can be inferred then as the use of language to express what one's think about a certain thing.

According to Costa et al. (2017), since individuals based their decisions on the information they are given, language has the power to affect people's choices and judgments. Because this aspect can also affect decision-making, it is crucial to consider the language in which the information is presented.

In addition, the study revealed that there was also a prevailing use of instrumental function, as evidently seen in the recorded 157 utterances of over 1103 (14.23%). The importance of this language function was highlighted by the use of language to express one's needs and goals, influence others, and make recommendations. Several factors, such as the design of the learning material, the innate need of the participants to convey what they want during the conversational session, and the opportunity given to the participants to share their recommendations and persuasion, all lead the participants to mostly exercise this function.

"Let's try the new pasta restaurant downtown. I hear that it's affordable, and it's a new hit on social media." (Student Participant 20). In the given statement, the English language was also utilized to offer options or present choices to the other speaker. Therefore, language is used as an instrument to convey options over something.

4.2 Underrepresented Language Functions in ESL Classrooms

However, three underrepresented language functions emerged in this study: imaginative, regulatory, and interactional.

Imaginative language function was identified as having the lowest number of utterances, gaining 3.44% out of 100% (38 utterances over 1103). With this, it was posited that there is a limited idea on the part of the participants regarding the use of this function in usual conversations, as seen in the study. Moreover, concerns about the exposure of the participants to this function are very limited as well; hence, they are unable to apply it in a conversation. The PSEP Conversational English session kits that were used by the participants provide little to no activities and opportunities for the students to exercise this function. It is usually directed for the students to explain, infer, and share personal thoughts. The use of imaginative function in the conversation is not highly acclaimed or introduced, as heard in the audio recording and observed in the usual PSEP conversational session. It can also be deduced that with the small number (38 statements) of utterances made by participants in utilizing the imaginative function, there were limited learning activities on the use of adjectives, sensory images, creative use of basic parts of speech such as verbs, nouns, and adverbs as seen in the limited lexicons recorded in the study.

In addition, limited to none learning contents and academic exposures were introduced to students to use the imaginative function as an additional tool in making conversation exciting, entertaining, and meaningful, as reflected in the discourse the participants created during the conversational English session.

As a result, utterances made by the students under this function are short and brief. The expansion of their vocabulary under this function is also limited, as students can only utter limited lexicons. However, in a blog written by Mark Anthony titled: "Language Development in 11-13 Years Old", the quantity of learning a youngster does has a strong correlation with how much their vocabulary grows. A high school graduate could possess more than 80,000 words, compared to a first-grader's 8,000–14,000 words. Given this, it can be noted how tweens and young teenagers must be expanding their vocabulary as well as their knowledge of how to use words with various meanings, how to use idioms effectively (for example, "I was like a fish out of water at that audition.") and how to use sarcasm appropriately.

The language development of the respondents under the age of 11-16 should have been highly improved. It has been cited that students under this age should be able to develop narrative and complicated grammar skills, increased vocabulary and improved word meaning inference from context, and advanced comprehension of metaphorical language. Hence, the respondents should exhibit a greater capacity to look beyond literal interpretations and comprehend the metaphorical uses of language as a result of cognitive growth and brain changes (Aiken, 2022).

On a brighter note, respondents of the study use imaginative functions mainly to describe:

"Well, favorite things to[see] here is the beautiful creation of God, which is the lake, the beautiful kids or the cute kids playing around, and the plants and the trees" (Student Participant 11).

This excerpted statement also affirms how imaginative language function was used as a means to describe creatively a specific person, place, or thing, hence making the conversation engaging and colorful. Balgos and Sipacio (2016) stated that when describing something, imaginative functions creatively apply appropriateness, brevity, clarity, ethics, and vividness to a particular person, place, or thing in order to evoke sentiments and give color and flavor to the communication.

On the other hand, concerns on how one can utilize language to command, request, and instruct manifested in regulatory function were also identified as low, which only comprised 127 utterances (11.51% out of 100%) of the total analyzed language functions. It was found that less opportunity was given for the participants to use this function in a conversation, as seen in the conversational English activities. It can be implied that opportunities for the student participants to execute this particular language function are present but limited. Highlighting how to use it in accordance with the situation is minimal. Moreover, the role of the students in exercising the regulatory language function should be highlighted inside the classroom.

Another reason is that fewer activities or situations are present in the current PSEP conversational English session to satisfy this need. Situations such as requesting someone to eat in the park, asking for information during the trip, and enrollment are the only situations in the PSEP Conversational session kit that portray the use of regulatory language function. Hence, with the activities provided, students are given little exposure to exercise this function. As a matter of fact, less authority is given in a scripted PSEP conversational English session, though it was reminded to the participants to freely add to the script. However, one should understand that students under the age group of 11-16 years old may have had issues controlling their emotions and seeking clarification when necessary, hence hindering their ability to use regulatory language function in full blast (Aiken, 2022).

The example utterance made by one of the respondents below highlighted how regulatory function serves as a tool in providing information to instruct:

...Of course. First, you go to the registrar office to sign the form that you needed to ide-that you needed to identify you. Then, after that, you go back to the registrar office to check all the importance information to make sure it's co, it's all. (Student Participant 22)

Looking at the statement above, the speaker laid out a clear guideline on going to the registrar using transition signals such as 'first, after that, then.' This was supported by Wrench et al. (2022), who states that language serves as a powerful tool to instruct and ask other people to do something. To strengthen this, language serves regulatory purposes by influencing other people's conduct through commands, guidelines, or persuasion.

Moreover, the interactional language function was also identified as underrepresented, with a percentage of 12.42 % (137 out of 1103). As seen from the data, students do have the ability and desire to carry on a conversation, but the language instructions as to the use of common interactional conversation starters should be further strengthened to maintain interactions. The graph shows how the participants used this language function limitedly. One reason for this is the lack of ideas regarding the use of interactional

connectors and triggers that were limitedly known by the participants to sustain the conversation, as evidently seen in the verbatim transcriptions.

Another is that hesitations to affirm, initiate, and provide additional inputs were also noted by the participants, thus ending the cycle of the conversation to what is only prescribed from the conversational English session kit.

Data reveals that participants used this to maintain relationships such as greetings, saying compliments, and goodbyes. Participants widely uttered, *"Good morning!"* (Student Participants 2, 4, 5, 6, 10), *"Nice to meet you!"* (Student Participants 16, 22), *"Thank you so much"* (Student Participants 3, 5, 7), *"you're welcome"* (Student Participant 2, 4, 5, 6, 10), and *"I love your dress"* (Student Participant 20) to name a few.

As noticed, the short statements provide a brief response to something. These responses must be said in order to maintain the relationship and not appear rude. It can be gleaned that participants know how to use these functions appropriately, as evidently seen in the verbatim transcriptions. Moreover, the idea of how to use this language function is important to make the conversation richer, nicer, and more appealing. People frequently employ interactional to make their connection friendlier. Additionally, according to McCharty (1991:136), interactional discourse will serve as the grease for social machinery, establishing roles and relationships with others before transactional speak, verifying and cementing ties, showing solidarity, and more.

Short conversational response expressions examples are also lifted from the verbatim transcriptions, which include *"yeah!"*, *"agree,"* and *"gotcha"*. These words are used operationally to sustain and maintain the conversation. Most of the time, people tend to use a lot of this, what we call fillers, to help sustain conversation and avoid dead air in communication. This is effective as it can keep the conversation going and serve as an assurance that someone is still listening to the conversation. Keeping the use of these words can help save the conversation from falling.

Hence, the study's findings, those relating to the underrepresented language functions—became the basis for an enhancement program designed to help JHS students improve their conversational English skills.

4.3 Conversational English Enhancement Program (CEEP)

The enhancement program focused on developing the identified underrepresented language functions, which are imaginative, regulatory, and interactional. Activities were provided in each of the modules aimed at improving the respondents' conversational English skills. This program will offer a range of activities for students in grades 7 through 10 to improve these underrepresented language functions. In keeping with this goal, this program also focuses on the learners' communicative competence, enabling them to advance in their chosen sectors using the English language in the future.

The Conversational English Enhancement Program (CEEP) Framework and Modules aim to address the underrepresented language functions in ESL classrooms, as found in this study, which are imaginative, regulatory, and interactional. This program will provide various activities across grade levels (Grades 7-10) to enhance these underrepresented language functions.

The CEEP as explained into two parts, which are the CEEP Framework and the CEEP Modules offered detailed descriptions of each of its components. It elucidates the parts and the expected learning activities embedded into it based on the result of this study.

4.3.1 Conversational English Enhancement Program (CEEP) Framework

This framework is actually based on the training design that Tandoc (2019) and Lacar (2021) presented because it is similar to the general format of a training program or design that various learning institutions adopt and similar to the training design format of the locale of the study for which the CEEP is suitable. This framework consists of parts that are important in laying the foundation of the CEEP. The CEEP contents, objectives of the CEEP, learning outcomes to be expected from the students, the instructional methods/activities, materials to be used, and the evaluation tool or the evidence of student's learning.

The academic design of the CEEP Framework is anchored on the idea of experiential and task-based learning through providing activities that can activate students' engagement and interaction during conversational English sessions after the lectures. This is an approach where students 'do more' on the task as they discover and unleash their skills guided by proper scaffolding (Vgotsky) from the teacher. To realize this, the framework is subdivided into three (3) modules, each bearing specific underrepresented language functions as identified from the study. There are equally four (4) activities in each module specifically design in a spiral progressive manner as patterned in the K to 12 Curriculum design from the Philippines, targeting Grades 7-10 respectively. Lectures are provided in between activities to supplement what the students constructed during the learning process, hence strengthening students' understanding and life-long application of the learned concepts in the classroom.

Each activity is anchored on enhancing the identified challenges of the students in the underrepresented language functions in the study. Injecting additional supplementary content aimed at enhancing the students' initial schema about the topic. The end goal of all of this activity is to achieve communicative competence among students through the conversational English sessions stipulated in the framework.

4.3.2 Conversational English Enhancement Program (CEEP) Modules

In order to give the vision of the CEEP Framework, the CEEP Modules were created. The three (3) sets of modules are prepared with varying levels of difficulty to target one underrepresented language function at a time. Each module was created based on the underrepresented language functions, which were packaged as follows:

- Module 1- Going Beyond: Using Imaginative Function as Linguistic Flavors in Conversational English Sessions
- Module 2- The Power of comMAND: Appropriate Utilization of Regulatory Language Function in Conversations
- Module 3-Activating Social Skills: Interactional Function Tool in Maintaining Conversation and Relationship

The modules created were gender responsive and used gender fair-language that is gender sensitive and non-sexist pursuant to DepEd Order No. 32. Series of 2017, also known as the: "Gender-Responsive Basic Education Policy" in the Philippines. The CEEP modules contain parts that are essential in achieving the goals of the program. These parts are strategically plotted in order to achieve lesson development, progress, and spiral flow of the lesson across grade levels. Parts of the module are represented by an icon. These icons facilitate easy access to the accomplishment of the tasks. Moreover, color palettes were assigned in each of the modules for easy identification. Module 1 has a blue color palette, while module 2 has a yellow palette, and module 3 has a green palette.

5. Conclusion

The linguistic concept of language functions was often neglected in the discussion of the communication process. Highlights on language use should be given utmost importance, especially to the early learners of ESL, so that they may be able to utilize the English language appropriately and correctly. The dominant language functions, which are representational, heuristic, personal, and instrumental, were widely used by the participants in the study. Myriads of opportunities were given to students to exercise these functions, as is evident in the PSEP Conversational English kits. Moreover, these language functions were deeply used in order to communicate in a direct and straightforward manner in transferring and achieving one's wants. The underrepresented language functions, as identified in the study, only show how ESL teachers provide little to no opportunities for every learner to be aware, experience, and practice these underrepresented language functions in their classes. In addition, the lack of knowledge and proper understanding of how these language functions can be used in daily conversation should be bolstered through exposure, classroom interactions, and discussions.

Hence, the Conversational English Enhancement Program (Framework and Modules) was created. It is recommended that an impact assessment be conducted on the use of the CEEP framework and modules to observe sustainability. This can then be enhanced further by future researchers as time and the linguistic dimension progresses. The CEEP framework and modules developed should be subjected to quality assurance assessment. With its limitation of recording the utterances of the students under the PSEP Conversational English session, it is advised that similar research be carried out in the future by using a contextualized classroom group interaction by the students as the source of data.

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