
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Communicative Language Teaching and Assessment Strategies in Online English as Foreign Language (EFL) Tutoring Context

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ABSTRACT

Many Filipinos have found employment in the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) online tutoring industry. The EFL online tutoring extends beyond the traditional academic mainstream, becoming a dynamic and personalized avenue for language learning. This paper aimed to fill the research gaps surfaced by the dearth of research in online learning, where there are limited known teaching and assessment strategies used to deliver EFL tutoring classes. It specifically sought to identify the effectiveness and adaptability of communicative language teaching strategies to cater to the language needs of EFL learners. The participants were tutors of Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese learners. Through a phenomenological qualitative inquiry, this study subsequently gathered data through a semi-structured interview with eight priori codes as a research instrument. On the other hand, tutoring class observations also corroborated the parallel validation of interview data. The data further analyzed using cool, warm, and thematic analyses. The directives of themes explicated in this study were delineated by the emerging Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach by Richards and Schmidt as conceptual framework, other prevalent strategies were also reiterated. In a nutshell, the participants' perspectives highlighted the effective utilization of language activities in all instructional and evaluative aspects. These are the use of authentic materials as a push for authenticity, opinion sharing, role-playing, information gap activities, information transfer activities, mechanical practice in language familiarization, meaningful practice by giving prompt feedback, language task, and project work. Consequently, the constraints revolved around language barrier, technological barrier, short attention span, and validity of assessments involved. Also, essential suggestions for future researchers are accentuated in this study.

KEYWORDS

Communicative language teaching, English as a foreign language, online tutoring, online teaching strategies, online assessment strategies, authentic communication, language learning.

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1. Introduction

The Filipino teachers are renowned both domestically and internationally for their exceptional traits in the classroom. English teachers are one of the professions in most demand. According to studies, non-native speakers highly value Filipino teachers in English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms. Rogayan (2018) found out that Filipino teachers, especially the young ones, are passionate about teaching. Their skills and expertise have been established inside and outside the country, especially in teaching ESL or EFL to different Asian countries.

Online tutoring continues to gain prominence in EFL instruction, especially in Southeast Asian countries like China, Japan, and Korea. According to Gil (2008), some challenges regarding English language learning in China are lack of exposure to the language, lack of speaking opportunities, inadequate learning resources, and limited qualified teachers. As a result, non-native speakers are

keen and eager to learn the language by enrolling their children at a young age in numerous English-language tutoring programs online. Parents believe that exposure at a young age will increase their learning motivation, leading to a high proficiency in the language (Tachibana *et al.*, 1996).

Moreover, the fourth Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) aims to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education for all, as well as to promote lifelong learning opportunities (United Nation, 2015). SDG 4 is particularly important in the context of online EFL tutoring. It increases access to high-quality education, particularly for students in remote or impoverished locations who may lack access to qualified English teachers or other resources. Accordingly, it overcomes geographical obstacles by employing technology to provide individualized, flexible learning experiences tailored to individuals' particular needs.

The EFL online teaching or online tutoring industry has opened opportunities for Filipino teachers to do remote work because of the availability of modern technology. Balgoa (2019) attested that Filipino English teachers are notable for their exceptional communication skills in the English language since the Philippines is an ESL country. Moreover, Kato-San (2007), the CEO of Rarejob Philippines, one of the biggest EFL industries, recognized the potential of Filipinos fluent in English. In addition, hundreds of Filipino tutors are already employed in the company and have established their careers for over a decade.

The focus of language learning strategies in teaching EFL centers on empowering learners with effective tools to navigate the complexities of acquiring a second language. According to Hymes (1972), a prominent sociolinguist, language learners should acquire grammatical and lexical knowledge and the ability to apply this knowledge in various social and cultural contexts. It revolves around fostering communicative competence and encompasses language skills such as speaking, listening, reading, and writing in meaningful and authentic tasks. In fact, Nunan (1989) coined that CLT is an approach to language education that fosters real-life communication skills through interactive and meaningful language activities. It emphasizes learner-centered instruction, where learners engage in authentic tasks and interactions to develop their language proficiency within culturally appropriate contexts.

Various studies delve into teaching and assessment strategies in an EFL environment. However, this research mainly focuses on the academic mainstream, not the context of synchronous distance tutoring. Besides, Hipolito and Espique (2023) highlighted a research gap in the existing literature on online distance learning, noting a predominant focus on teaching style and academic outcomes while emphasizing the absence of information regarding teachers' strategies during the unique circumstances of the pandemic. Likewise, the explored teaching strategies are often situated in face-to-face language instruction and/or via online platforms. However, English is treated as an academic subject the learners need to pass. The EFL tutoring extends beyond the traditional academic framework, becoming a dynamic and personalized avenue for language learning since EFL learners do not treat the English session as an academic subject or a learning area in a curriculum. While the literature provides a plethora of strategies for language teaching and assessment, the adaptability of these approaches to an online teaching environment for the development of communicative competence of ESL learners remains an area of uncertainty that requires clarification.

Considering the research gap, the researcher is driven to explore the context of online tutoring due to the factors present on the aforementioned premises. Thus, this article specifically sought to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the communicative language teaching strategies of the research participants in the online EFL tutoring context?
2. What are the communicative language assessment strategies of the research participants in an online EFL tutoring environment?
3. What are the challenges in the communicative language teaching strategies and assessment of the research participants in an online EFL tutoring environment?

Overall, this anticipated research output will provide another vantage point on how the English language is learned in a different setting or environment, which will subsequently promote a more comprehensive and dynamic language learning experience for both EFL tutors and learners.

2. Literature Review

The study is anchored on the "*Communicative Language Teaching Today*," in language teaching of two prominent figures, Jack Richards and Richard Schmidt, who share common ground in their emphasis on communicative competence and meaningful language use. The ultimate goal is to measure not only grammatical accuracy but also the application of language in a variety of communicative situations. In fact, these components postulate that language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to using the language, which is suitable for an online EFL tutoring environment. Specifically, the teaching strategies of EFL tutors suggested that language teaching should provide learners with opportunities for authentic communication, where they can produce language in meaningful contexts. Teaching strategies aligned with this framework involved promoting language input that is both socially and culturally relevant. It could be achieved through the execution of numerous CLT approaches. Furthermore,

their communicative language teaching highlights the importance of incorporating accuracy-fluency, mechanical-communicative-meaningful practices, information gap, jigsaw, and other CLT activities. It merely focuses on linguistic competence rather than grammatical competence in communicative communication.

As a matter of concern and interest of the researcher, this study was crafted due to the research suggestions pointed out in other related studies. Several have focused on the academic mainstream rather than the context of asynchronous distance tutoring. It is reasonable to identify language strategies that enhance the communicative competence of every EFL learner. According to Sun (2011), he recognized the differences between teaching in a traditional classroom and online and the need for new teaching approaches and teaching skills. The myth that a teacher who is good at teaching in a face-to-face class can easily jump in and teach online (Davis & Rose, 2007) is no longer entertained. There is little concerted effort in identifying and studying the new approaches and skills online language teachers desperately need.

On the other hand, Compton (2009) synthesizes the "existing but limited literature" specifically on the skills or strategies needed for online language teaching. In his proposal, the skills consist of three major areas: 1. Technology in online language teaching; 2. Pedagogy of online language teaching; 3. Evaluation of online language teaching. Many other scholars look at specific areas in online teaching. A frustrated overnight-classroom-turned-online-teacher could find very few practical guidelines or immediate help in their proposals. The answers as to what to do and how to do it or what not to do are still anyone's guess (Sun, 2011). The prominent linguists Krashen (1982) and Canale and Swain (1980) also share common ground in their studies about Krashen's Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Canale and Swain's Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). These studies emphasize communicative competence and meaningful language use in EFL teaching. Krashen had a significant impact in all areas of second language research and teaching since the 1980s. His second language acquisition theory consists of five main hypotheses: (1) The acquisition-learning hypothesis posits that language acquisition is more effective than language learning in acquiring native-like proficiency; (2) The monitor hypothesis explains the relationship between acquisition and learning. The monitoring function is the practical result of the learned grammar; (3) The natural order hypothesis is based on research findings that suggested that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a "natural order" which is predictable; (4) The input hypothesis attempt to explain how the learner acquires a second language; and (5) The affective filter hypothesis embodies Krashen's view that several "affective variables" play a facilitative, but non-causal, role in second language acquisition. These variables include motivation, self-confidence, and anxiety. In fact, the Input Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis of Krashen postulate that language acquisition is most effective when learners are exposed to comprehensible input in a low-anxiety environment, which is also suitable for an online EFL tutoring environment.

Furthermore, the term communicative teaching is associated with the work of Dell Hymes (1972), but Canale and Swain (1980) are well-known for their influential contribution to the development of the communicative approach to language teaching. Their model of communicative competence highlights the importance of not just linguistic competence but also sociolinguistic, discourse, and strategic competences in effective communication.

3. Methodology

This chapter presents the research design of the study, which explains the type of research methodology the researcher utilized. The participants, research instruments, data-gathering procedure, and data analysis of the study are also described.

3.1 Research Design

The study employed an empirical qualitative method, specifically a phenomenological approach to qualitative inquiry. It seeks to understand and interpret the complexities of human phenomena by delving into participants' subjective meanings, perspectives, and lived experiences (Creswell, 2018). It is a non-numerical, context-rich approach emphasizing the depth and context of understanding rather than statistical generalizability. Likewise, it involved collecting and analyzing textual or visual data, such as interviews and observations, to uncover patterns, themes, and insights (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This research design helped the researcher comprehensively describe the language teaching strategies practiced by EFL tutors. Regarding the interview and class observation transmitted, the researcher was able to explicate a thematic analysis of the instructional experiences of the research participants, especially on the aforementioned phases of online language instruction.

3.2 Participants

This study's participants were EFL tutors catering to learners' language learning needs in EFL settings like China, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. The participants were selected through purposive sampling and media crowd-sourcing. Thus, the researcher selected participants purposively who could give information or possess experiences as data needed as it provided in-depth insights about how they deliver online language instruction, particularly in teaching and assessing students' communicative abilities. Palinkas *et al.* (2015) posed that this intentional selection helps ensure that the sample provides a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. Moreover, the researcher targeted 20 participants who are EFL tutors, as supported by Creswell (2018),

who elucidated that phenomenological research targets 3-25 participants. However, data collection continues until new themes or communicative language teaching insights emerge, indicating that theoretical saturation has been reached. To have a clearer view of the selection of research participants, here are the detailed inclusion-exclusion criteria that were taken into account in the sampling procedure:

Table 1. Inclusion-Exclusion Criteria

Parameters		Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
Educational Expertise	Background or	The tutor is a graduate of a four-year bachelor's degree with English as his/her field of specialization.	The tutor is a graduate of a four-year bachelor's degree but his/her field of specialization is not English.
Online Tutoring Service		The tutor possesses over six months of experience in online tutoring.	The tutor does not have over six months of experience in online tutoring.
EFL Tutors' Clienteles		The tutor teaches English to learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds in EFL contexts such as China, Japan, Thailand, Korea, Taiwan, and Vietnam, spanning a range from four-year-old to adolescents.	The tutor teaches English to learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds in ESL contexts such as United States of America and Canada, especially those below four-year-old and beyond the adolescent stage.
Tutoring Workload and Workspace Engagement		The tutor works online in a part-time or full-time basis for improvement of learners' communicative abilities, not necessarily to pass English as an academic subject.	The tutor works online in a part-time or full-time basis in a mainstream language classroom, with the aim to pass English as a subject or learning area in a defined curriculum.

3.3 Research Instrument

The researcher used semi-structured interviews and a combination of observation and recorded video tutoring sessions. A semi-structured interview piloted to the EFL tutors explored their instructional experiences, particularly on teaching and assessment strategies upheld in an online tutoring context. It focused on topics such as instructional approaches, pedagogical techniques, teacher-student interaction strategies, communicative assessment, and challenges faced in the online tutoring context about the aforementioned phases of language instruction. The semi-structured interview questions were initially crafted using priori coding. All of these codes aligned with this study's focus and objectives. Thus, 11 interview queries were composed to gather the needed data based on a list of questions expanded from the eight a priori research questions, namely interaction in the target language, authentic texts, macro skills, link between classroom and outside language activities, communicative competence, communication skills, authentic communication, and real-life contexts.

On the other side, observations or recorded video tutoring sessions were examined to gain insights into the instructional strategies used by EFL tutors, particularly in teaching and assessing learners' communicative abilities of learners. The observation class lasted for 30-55 minutes. Furthermore, through observation and recorded video tutoring sessions, the researcher could comprehensively delineate how each communicative teaching and assessment strategy was employed in an online tutoring context. Considering this, it served as a basis or guide in developing language training material design.

3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

At the outset of gathering data, purposive criterion sampling was used to interview participants who were likely to have relevant and rich sources of information. After selecting potential research participants, the researcher asked for consent from their respective EFL managers and the tutors themselves for ethical considerations. The researcher ensured the data privacy or protection of the information participants shared for the study's success.

Afterward, the semi-structured interview with them was coordinated. Specifically, their availability of time for the interview was of the utmost concern for their convenience. The one-on-one interview with the research participants was conducted online via

Google Meet. The researcher interviewed the participants based on a list of questions expanded from the eight a priori research questions: interaction in the target language, authentic texts, macro skills, link between classroom and outside language activities, communicative competence, communication skills, authentic communication, and real-life contexts. The open-ended questions allowed the participants to freely express their experiences, feelings, and thoughts about their online tutoring. There were also follow-up questions that were improvised during the online interview. The interview through Google Meet lasted about 30 minutes to less than an hour. The interview process with EFL tutors continued until data saturation had been reached.

In the study's second phase, the researcher conducted online tutoring class observations, which were recorded. This observation helped the researcher analyze and cross-validate the interview data. It explored each communicative language teaching and assessment strategy if these were employed in online language instruction. In this regard, three observation-based video recordings of classes were considered. The first and second video-recorded lessons were disregarded, and the third video-recording lesson served as a basis for analysis.

The researcher collected field notes and audio recordings from the interviews in the data transcription process. These recordings are then uploaded and transcribed with the support of an online software called TurboScribe Transcription. It offers 99.8% accuracy with speaker recognition and time stamps. Likewise, the researcher ensured an accurate transcription by manually checking the written form multiple times.

3.5 Data Analysis

After the data collection process, gathered data were subjected to appropriate qualitative analysis, and results were interpreted considering the context of the study's research questions. The interview transcriptions were subjected to cool and warm analysis to identify the significant and relevant statements that would explicate and describe the communicative language teaching and assessment strategies used by EFL tutors in their online language instruction. Recorded tutorial sessions and observations, task descriptions, and analyses were also studied to describe how EFL tutors employ communicative language teaching and assessment strategies in their online language instruction.

In addition, coding these significant and relevant statements was done afterward to form recurring themes or categories for the thematic analysis that were deemed essential in the logical arrangement, analysis, and discussion of information about EFL tutors' communicative language teaching and assessment strategies. After the transcription, member data was checked with every research participant. It was then followed by data validation with the Thesis Adviser, functioning as data auditor. This member data-checking process was executed to ensure that the analysis of the observations or recorded tutoring sessions and interview transcripts as qualitative data were processed, interpreted, and analyzed systematically.

Moreover, the transcriptions concerning the three research questions were coded in the data pool to summarize the main themes. Deductive coding was used to develop categories or themes directly based on the study's conceptual framework in explicating the first, second, and third research problems.

4. Results and Discussion

In this chapter, the researcher presents the findings and analysis of this study. It explored the individual experiences of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) tutors regarding how they view and interpret their communicative language teaching and assessment strategies in an online tutoring context. The challenges encountered by the EFL tutors were also attributed. Through repeated reviews of the interview data, four major themes related to the research questions were summarized and reported in the section below. The sub-themes were categorized in the study of Richards and Schidmt.

Furthermore, a study by Smith and Jones (2021) demonstrated that effective teaching requires seamlessly integrating strategies and activities. Their research underscored that when teachers align their activities with broader instructional strategies, students exhibit higher levels of understanding and retention. Anderson et al. (2020) conducted an observational study in diverse classroom settings and found that the distinction between teaching strategies and activities is often blurred in practice. Their findings highlighted that successful educators naturally blend strategies and activities, creating a dynamic and responsive learning environment. Thus, activities concerning communicative language learning strategies in teaching and assessing students are presented below.

4.1 Communicative Language Teaching Strategies Employed by Participants in Online EFL Tutoring Context

This theme discusses how EFL teachers delineate and describe communicative language teaching strategies based on their viewpoints of EFL language learning. The way they look at and describe this kind of teaching strategy was primarily taken into consideration as the literature discloses its essential role in shaping the practice of EFL tutoring context.

Table 2. Communicative Language Teaching Strategies

Use of Authentic Materials as a Push for Authenticity
Use of Opinion-Sharing Activities
Use of Role Play Activities
Use of Information Gap Activities
Use of Meaningful Practice in Language Familiarization
Use of Information Transfer Activities
Use of Language Task as a CLT Strategy

Table 2 shows the encapsulated different communicative language teaching strategies that are prevalent in EFL online tutoring. All of these would be discussed one by one as supported by language scholars below.

Use of Authentic Materials as a Push for Authenticity. This sub-theme encompasses teaching strategies that rely on using authentic materials as a push for realistic learning contexts in EFL online tutoring. *Authentic materials* are defined as a linkage to real-life settings, such as newspapers, videos, podcasts, blogs, and other forms of media. These materials are becoming increasingly valued for their ability to enhance the learning experience of EFL learners. As a result, it promotes language acquisition through exposure to authentic texts, discussions, and activities relevant to specific content areas, fostering language proficiency alongside content knowledge (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). This approach aligns with the communicative language teaching method, emphasizing the importance of interaction and real communication in language teaching (Richards, 2006). It is a creative approach to EFL teaching that connects authentic sources as a basis for tutoring context. This is proven by the following interview extract:

"I actively incorporate authentic texts into my language instruction to enhance the learning experience for my students. Authentic materials such as newspaper, articles, blog posts, podcasts, and excerpts from literature. Additionally, I leverage technology by incorporating multimedia resources, interactive online platforms, and collaborative tools that facilitate active participation." –Teacher Participant 9

Taking into account the inclusion of news articles, flashcards, podcasts, blog posts, and illustrations are concentrated on the exposure of natural language and cultural information as it also leverages technological tools like YouTube videos, songs, voice animation, and GIF props. These were all found true in the study interview findings. Moreover, authentic materials can significantly boost EFL learners' motivation and engagement. To further strengthen this, Teacher Participant 6 insisted, *"I use PowerPoint presentation, videos, e-books, audio recording, and news articles...using realia, props, voice animation, and presentation can change students' mood in learning the language."* These technological advancements have made access to a wide array of resources more accessible. When an individual makes use of a language in an authentic context, skills like listening, reading, speaking, and writing are naturally integrated to achieve communicative competence (Biloon, 2018, as cited in Raymundo, 2023)

Additionally, technological tools were used to support the authenticity of materials. The EFL tutors can now integrate diverse multimedia resources seamlessly into their lessons, providing their students with more prosperous and varied content (Tomlinson, 2012). This technological capability broadens the scope of available teaching materials and allows for a more dynamic and interactive learning environment in EFL language learning. As argued by Teacher Participant 12, *"I usually use online videos from YouTube that offer engaging and entertaining content for language learners."* A study by Peacock (1997) revealed that when students see the relevance of their learning to their own lives and interests, they are more likely to be motivated and actively participate in their lessons. For instance, when an EFL teacher incorporates a trending social media video into a lesson, it can capture EFL learners' interest and make the learning experience more engaging. This scenario is particularly crucial in online tutoring, where maintaining student interest can be more challenging compared to traditional classroom settings (Thorn, 2010). In this regard, some EFL tutors rely on accentuating the EFL Company's curriculum and syllabus.

Consequently, some interview findings revealed that the EFL companies instructed EFL tutors to utilize the prepared handbook or have a free conversation with the learners. It depends on the EFL tutees or parents' reasons why they were enrolled to have language tutoring sessions. It is further supported by the following extract:

"We have our own curriculum and book. So, if your students are Chinese, what the Chinese want is, whatever you give them, you should only rely from that. So, for example, if I gave them a book, whatever book you gave them, your lesson should only stay in the book... if your topic is real-life situation, you can't get topics using newspapers or other materials that you didn't tell them prior. So, it's hard for me in that part, because whatever you gave them, you should only rely from that. But, when you're handling other nationalities like Japanese, Taiwanese, and Korean, and you do free talk, they would like to use paper or other materials that they also have... from there, you can create a lesson that you can teach them." – Teacher Participant 18

Widdowson *et al.* (1987) argued that it is optional if classroom materials are derived from authentic texts and other forms of input as long as the learning processes they facilitated are authentic. Critics of the same case about the push for authenticity heightened that created materials or handbooks can merely motivate EFL learners. The EFL Company's handbooks may be superior to authentic material because they are generally built around the esteemed syllabi. It is a total package for language learning, which entails varied interactive activities. It is found true in the recorded tutoring sessions and actual observations conducted; the researcher found out that materials, digital books, and PowerPoint presentations were prepared, organized, and modified for lively discussions. The digital handbook expands on pre-reading and while-reading activities. Other materials also evolved in three essential parts, as stated:

"Speaking of their materials, they have their own lesson plan. They have their own flow...they have their five parts, but naka-specific na siya magiging tatlong part. Meron siyang active conversation, bull's eye, and free conversation, like that...It's a requirement to meet those three parts."

[Speaking of their materials, they have their own lesson plan. They have their own flow...they have their five parts, but it already specified on three parts. It consists of active conversation, bull's eye, and free conversation like that...It's a requirement to meet those three parts.] – Teacher Participant 16

As a result, it can make language learning more interesting and motivating. Authentic materials were already incorporated into the EFL companies' curriculum, syllabus, or lesson plan presentations. It is highly attributed to the authenticity of materials, as the EFL learners used the material to apply their learned language skills in different incorporated activities. This argument leads to the development of critical thinking skills of EFL learners. They continuously develop their language learning as they delve into real-world content. When students work with authentic materials, they are often required to interpret, analyze, and respond to complex information, which can enhance their higher-order thinking skills (Berardo, 2006). They are encouraged to understand information, which fosters a more active learning process. The integration of reliable materials not only aids EFL language acquisition but also prepare EFL learners for real-life situations where they will need to apply their knowledge and skills effectively. This is driven by the recognition that such materials can significantly enhance language acquisition, critical thinking, and overall student engagement.

Use of Communicative Practice and Opinion-Sharing Activities. On the premise of using authentic materials, teacher participants also incorporate opinion-sharing activities in the form of having the so-called "Free Conversation" in online tutoring. It is often called Free Talk, an unstructured and spontaneous form of dialogue. It is increasingly recognized for its effectiveness in enhancing language proficiency, fluency, and confidence among EFL learners. This approach aligns with the principles of CLT, which emphasizes interaction and real-life communication as essential components of language acquisition (Richards, 2006). Likewise, free conversation sessions foster a more personalized and student-centered learning experience. The EFL tutors can tailor discussions to the interests and needs of the students, making the learning process more engaging and relevant (Nunan, 1999). This was evident in the findings as taken:

"It is always anchored on the real life setting, how the students will use the English language they are learning into real life context such as transactions inside the classroom, market, airports, shops, and other situations where meaningful conversations can happen." –Teacher Participant 20

As Dornyei (2001) said, tutors can create a more dynamic and enjoyable learning environment by focusing on topics that interest the students, which is crucial for sustaining engagement in an online setting. It fosters communicative practice that deals with real-life contexts to develop linguistic competence and language proficiency. This sub-theme accentuates interaction as the means and the ultimate goal of learning a language (Canale & Swain, 1980). The linkage of daily activities with language learning reflects a realistic setting. It encouraged active participation from the EFL learners, evident in the findings when Teacher Participant 11 posted, *"I incorporate real-world events and scenarios. In addition, I invite them to discuss issues pertaining to their everyday life or to share personal experiences."* These critical experiences serve as a springboard for EFL teachers to conduct tutoring sessions. They navigate the world of their students by using authentic materials to develop students' communicative competence. All the participants agreed that building connections with EFL students is essential as they boost their confidence in communicating with their teacher. Teacher participant highlighted:

"I always try to make meaning on my own, asking myself questions like, 'How can I make this deeper and more meaningful?' And then, I open my own idea to the student by asking 'Do you agree with that?' And to connect it to real-life situations, I ask, 'Do you know someone who did the same?'" –Teacher Participant 2

It is evident that rapport was established based on the interview data above. The teacher established a connection by incorporating the art of questioning to strengthen intrapersonal communication. As cited above, the teacher participant also asked the student the same question and let the student have a free conversation. One of the key advantages of free conversation in EFL online tutoring is the development of fluency and confidence in speaking. When students engage in unscripted dialogue, they practice thinking and responding in the target language in real time, which helps to build their conversational skills and fluency (Derwing et al., 2008).

Through opinion-sharing activities, the incorporation of EFL learners' daily lives, interests, and current issues are the ways to encourage the students to speak the language. Parallel results from the observation data also support this sub-theme. The researcher noted the circumstance of an adult EFL Chinese learner who read an article about "Dating Apps are Becoming Popular." He chose to read the short narrative as he practiced reading skills. Afterward, the EFL tutor gave him a True or False assessment to check his reading comprehension. Then, he was asked about his opinion, and he answered it based on his experiences. He shared a lot, including the pros and cons of dating apps, and his talking time lasted for 8 minutes, even though he had not tried using dating apps. His interest in the topic led him to practice speaking the language. The researcher also notes another situation from the observation of other EFL tutors. In this case, the teacher showed pictures, and the EFL adult learner described it. The pictures are autumn, summer, winter, and fall; the other is a Korean band named Bulletproof Boy Scouts (BTS). The student talked for about 13 minutes, sharing his opinion. It was evident that the pictures presented are somewhat related to current trends. The other EFL tutor shared her encounter, as her EFL adult learner shared about marriage. At that time, she said that her adult tutee was having an ongoing divorce.

The EFL tutor let her student talk about it, as it is the current issue that the student wants to discuss. Lastly, in another class, the EFL young learner talks about Jeju Island and her experience visiting it. While sharing, the teacher was attentive in noticing language fillers like uhhhm, ahhh, you know. After the conversation, she was advised to avoid those fillers instead of using cohesive devices. It became a starting point for the EFL teacher to quick-start the lesson about transitional markers or cohesive devices. Therefore, having meaningful conversations with the learners will serve as a springboard in language learning discussions. These skills are essential for achieving true communicative competence, enabling learners to interact appropriately in various social contexts (Canale & Swain, 1980).

Through these circumstances mentioned, prioritizing the interest of EFL learners makes them betrothed in meaningful communication. A negotiated curriculum in CLT allows learners to advocate for themselves and their learning interests, goals, and styles. They have a choice in their learning so that they can participate in meaningful discussions. As a result, incorporating free conversation into online tutoring sessions is a highly effective communicative practice and opinion-sharing activity that enhances language fluency, cultural competence, and learner engagement. By providing a natural and spontaneous dialogue platform, online tutors can create a more interactive and personalized learning experience, ultimately fostering excellent language proficiency and confidence in their students.

Use of Role-Play Activities. The sub-theme was brought from the findings of the language activities administered by teacher participants. Primarily, the core of the fluency task was indicated in role-play activities. It emerged as a highly effective method for amplifying fluency in online tutoring, particularly within the framework of CLT. These tasks involve EFL tutors adopting specific roles and engaging in dialogues that simulate real-life scenarios, which promotes practical language use and interaction. The dynamic nature of role-play allows learners to practice speaking in varied contexts, improving their fluency and confidence in the target language (Ladousse, 1987).

As Teacher participant 11 highlighted, *"The 'Try and Act' part of our lesson material presents real communicative situations for students to practice. This allows them to apply what they've learned in realistic scenarios, enhancing their language skills in practical contexts."* It is parallel to the statement of Teacher participant 4, *"One important thing when teaching them is to be able to use sentences or phrases that can be used in the outside world. We make sure to have role-plays for different situations in order for them to get used to it."* This kind of activity can create a realistic and immersive learning environment. Unlike traditional drills or rote memorization, role-play tasks require students to think on their feet and use language spontaneously, which mirrors real-world communication (Livingstone, 1983). Thus, it caters to the needs of EFL learners to develop speaking skills in the desired language. The researcher found out that EFL learners are very engaged in their classes whenever they have role-play activities. They usually re-enact the role of both characters in the given dialogues or scripts. Students were engaged in changing the tone of their voices and making facial expressions with their teacher as part of the dialogue process.

The observation of online tutoring sessions also showed the integration of role-playing and singing activities comprising hand gestures, facial expressions, and tone of voice. The EFL tutors instructed their EFL tutees as they said verbatim: *"We are going to read the conversations. Let's go! Now, Timmy with his classmates are in the classroom. Let's talk. I will be Timmy, or you will be Timmy? What do you like? Do you want Timmy or Sam? Wow, that's great and awesome. Now, let's do again another set of games."*

Here we go! Let's do the game time. Now, just look and say. Say the dialogue using different voices. Can you do this? –Teacher Participant 1

The interactive nature of role-play also fosters a more engaging and enjoyable learning experience, which is particularly important in maintaining student interest in an online setting (Huang & Shan, 2008). This activity also has a place for their interest as they choose the character they want to portray. They were then able to practice communicating in social contexts with language fluency. For instance, role-playing a restaurant scenario where one student acts as a customer and another as a waiter can effectively teach practical vocabulary and phrases used in dining situations.

Another class observation finding was when Teacher Participant 18 discussed 'Different Feelings.' The EFL tutor portrayed the image or facial expression of happy, angry, sad, hungry, thirsty, cold, etc. The materials integrated into the presentation include illustrations and different feeling sounds. It was followed by note-taking, a short activity, and singing a song for retention. As a role-play activity, the EFL tutor and tutee sang a song with facial expressions, gestures, and changing voices. To support this, the lyrics of the song are presented below:

*"I'm happy, clap, clap! I'm sad, boo, hoo! Happy and sad. Happy and sad.
This feeling is so strong...this feeling is my song.
I'm hot, phew, phew! I'm cold, brrr, brrr! Hot and cold. Hot and cold.
This feeling is so strong...this feeling is my song.
I'm hungry, yum, yum! I'm thirsty, glug, glug! Hungry and thirsty. Hungry and thirsty.
This feeling is so strong...this feeling is my song.
I'm angry, grrr, grrr! I'm tired, yawn, yawn! Angry and tired. Angry and tired.
This feeling is so strong...this feeling is my song."*

It was visible that the lyrics of the song above revolve around different feelings portrayed when singing the song. Apparently, role-play activities are powerful tools for enhancing fluency in online tutoring. They provide a realistic and engaging context for language practice, cater to individual learning needs, allow for immediate feedback, and foster the development of language skills. By incorporating role-play into their teaching strategies, online tutors can significantly improve their students' ability to use the target language fluently and confidently in real-world situations.

Use of Information Gap Activities. Richards and Schmidt (2010) take into account the importance of information gap activities within CLT, precisely its function in creating real communication and engagement among learners. They suggest that these activities involve exchanging information between EFL learners to complete a task, mirror real-life communication, and improve linguistic competence in a practical context. Engaging in these activities reassures EFL learners to use the target language spontaneously and meaningfully. In a tutoring context, EFL learners usually communicate to get language learning they do not possess. The students are usually lured into available vocabulary, grammar, and communication strategies to complete a task. This was noticeable as Teacher Participant 7 said, *"I show them videos of actual activities they can get ideas from. Then, I show series of pictures wherein there were omitted scenes from the video presented. There is an exchanging information between my student and me as tutor. I incorporated in the activity a mystery picture. After that, I ask students to make their own sentences to build related descriptions."* Through this claim, it constitute helping students to process their knowledge by getting ideas from videos and missing pictures. It leads to developing ideas and retention, not only language skills but also viewing skills. Through the given pictures, grammatical practices were employed in constructing sentences. The main goal of information gap activities is to enhance communicative proficiency by utilizing drills. In communicative activities, as Long and Porter (1985) studied, information gaps compel learners to use the target language actively, thereby boosting exposure and practice.

In this premise, information-gap activities also strengthen students' listening and writing skills as they need to fill in the correct words in sentences. However, the process does not end with getting the correct answer. As observed in the findings, EFL teachers allow students to use the words or vocabulary to construct simple sentences. It was supported by the answer of Teacher Participant 1, highlighting, *"I let them use the newly learned word to construct their own phrases after they have become familiar with it."* Since it was mentioned, students might use videos, pictures, and illustrations to fill in the information gaps. Information gap activities facilitate deeper processing by requiring EFL learners to use new vocabulary and construct their sentences in a communicative context.

Use of Mechanical Practice in Language Familiarization. The primary goal of mechanical practice is to develop automaticity in language forms, ensuring learners can produce them correctly and fluently. Examples of mechanical practice include drills, fill-in-the-blank exercises, and pattern practice. These activities are designed to reinforce correct language patterns and reduce errors

through repetition and memorization, thereby laying a foundation for more complex language use in communicative contexts (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Mechanical practice in CLT improves active listening skills by reinforcing auditory discrimination and phonetic accuracy. Likewise, it recognizes the value of repetitive practice in building foundational skills. It supports the answer of Teacher Participant 16, "I often use the materials being provided to us which is the main target from the macro skills are reading and listening. Those are the Pronunciation and Reading Practices wherein repetition is used." This repetitive exposure aids in honing listening skills, making it easier for learners to comprehend spoken language in real-time interactions, thus supporting the overall communicative goals of CLT. One of the challenges noted in the interview findings is the unfamiliarity of some phonemes to EFL learners. As Teacher Participant 18 argued:

"For the teaching techniques, writing, reading, and listening, they're almost the same. The only difference is that it depends on the nationality that you're teaching. For example, when you're handling Japanese, there are some words, not words, letters, there are some letters that they can't pronounce. Or sometimes, their pronunciation is different in those letters. So, what I usually do is, for them to be able to practice those letters that they can't pronounce, I always make them read those words. So, another one is it's the same for Vietnamese, because Vietnamese also have letters that they can't pronounce. So, that's your concentration when you make them read those words."

With this, Richards and Rodgers (2014) reiterated that mechanical drills can help learners internalize sound patterns and rhythms of the target language, which will enhance their capacity to identify and mimic these patterns in real-world communication. By consistently hearing and repeating language structures, EFL learners develop aural familiarity and muscle memory, essential for fluent listening and speaking.

Subsequently, active listening was also attributed to listening activities such as listening to songs, audiobooks, and Dictation. A comprehension activity will then follow it to assess the listening skills of EFL learners. In addition, Teacher Participant 12 responded, "I incorporate listening practice activities, such as dictation, gap-fill exercises, and listening to songs or audiobooks, to help learners develop their listening skills in different contexts" Dictation, according to Ur (1996), encourages students to actively listen, comprehend, and replicate written material, which deepens their awareness of language usage and structure. This exercise is a thorough language-learning technique that goes beyond the mechanical repetition found in drills. It helps with spelling, punctuation, and the ability to parse spoken words into written form.

This aural activity enabled learners to deal with enriching vocabulary as a pattern practice. This argument is noticeable as the findings shown:

"...based on experience, I let them also be familiarized with the words...especially with the kids, before I use that word in the sentence, they need to learn first what is that word. Afterwards, they should know also how to spell the word, and that's vocabulary enhancement...that's the time I let them construct a sentence just to make sure if they really understood the word..." –Teacher Participant 14

This form of practice is characterized by familiarizing words requiring learners to use particular vocabulary in a highly controlled manner, often without requiring meaningful communication or comprehension. Over-reliance on repetitive drills in mechanical practice is a stepping stone to achieving meaningful practice by integrating tasks that promote communicative practice. The exposure to the language being learned is a good indication of being familiar with the English words and how these are being used in appropriate contexts by allowing the process of mechanical-meaningful-communicative activities.

Use of Information Transfer Activities. One of the salient points of Information Transfer activities in CLT is transforming information from one form to another. A process of converting a text to diagram, audio to text, or video to notes. These activities are particularly beneficial for online tutoring since they improve understanding, develop critical thinking, and promote active learning. This sub-theme emphasized task completion by adhering to communicative understanding. It evolves on the use of gamification employed by the teacher participant 13 in the findings, as verbatim: "Read the example. Invent a robot and complete the information. Then, draw your robot, okay? I'm excited to see it. Wow! That's so nice! After our class, you show it to your mommy, okay? Then you have to describe it to your mom." This circumstance allowed the EFL learner to follow instructions and transfer the written form into an illustration. It started by reading the sample robot description: "My robot's name is Loli. It's purple, and it got ten arms. It's always make the bed. It sometimes watches the TV." Afterward, the student started to craft his robot by describing it, following the sentence format, "My robot's name is _____. It's _____, and it's _____. It's always _____. It sometimes _____." His description can guide him in transferring the concept by illustrating how his robot looks. This active participation of the EFL learner relies on his interest. Cognitive load theory states that this transformation process helps learners focus on the internal components

of the material, which improves understanding by reducing extraneous cognitive load (Sweller, 1988). Teachers can use these activities to assist EFL learners in breaking down complex information into more manageable parts, facilitating better retention. The thought of getting the proper instruction or following the tasks indicates that EFL learners can understand English. Hence, there is still a need for a continuity of development and enhancement of teaching strategies. Findings revealed that EFL teachers often employ various tools and platforms to support students' learning.

Use of Language Task as Communicative Teaching Strategy. Due to the study's qualitative nature, other teaching strategy that complement and enhance communicative teaching in a tutoring context is revealed. Hereinto, this sub-theme is not part of the conceptual framework aforementioned earlier. Besides, this sub-theme is surfaced prominently in the interviews' insights as it emphasized additional activity that EFL tutors employed to foster effective learning environments. This language task comprises varied tasks given to EFL learners that made EFL learning fun and enjoyable. As shared by Teacher Participant 4,

"The students vary from beginners to the advanced English learners. The teaching approach is different according to their level. For beginners, they should not [feeling] learning English a stressful thing, so we give them language tasks in indirect ways. Fun is always the main ingredient of the lesson."

Hereinto, Task-Based Instruction (TBI) also emphasized task completion and communicative competence in an indirect way of teaching by utilizing tasks. It is supported by Kagan (1994), who quoted that communicative approach serves as an umbrella for number of designs and procedures in language teaching, including task-based language (TBL) teaching. It focuses on completing communicative tasks to achieve specific goals, encouraging learners to use language for real-world purposes. It facilitates language acquisition by integrating activities that were found interactive. As stated by Teacher Participant 3,

"I often use real life scenarios as language task...dialogue practice in an airport, in a restaurant, and in other settings so when my students experience that situation, they already have an idea on how to communicate in that kind of setting."

The interview mentioned above viewed the salient features of the communicative approach. A form of task-based learning that allows EFL learners to communicate through given scenarios. It is also concerned with using language in particular contexts. It evaluates their capacity to use language proficiency in real-world situations. Having a dialogue practice in an airport, a restaurant, and other settings is similar to the free conversation activity mentioned in the previous discussions. On the contrary, language tasks differ as they conform not to the learners' opinions but to the communicative task that needs practice.

Language task activities in online tutoring classes are highly effective within the framework of CLT which emphasizes the importance of using language authentically and interactively. As highlighted by Richards and Rodgers (2001), CLT encourages tasks that require students to use language for meaningful communication rather than rote memorization. In online tutoring environments, language tasks such as role-plays, problem-solving activities, and discussions provide opportunities for learners to engage in real-life communication scenarios, thus promoting language proficiency (Ellis, 2003). These tasks are designed to be interactive and student-centered, allowing learners to negotiate meaning, exchange information, and practice conversational skills in a supportive setting (Nunan, 2004). Therefore, language task activities in online tutoring classes align seamlessly with the principles of CLT, facilitating practical language use and improving communicative competence.

Furthermore, dialogue practice fosters a sense of accomplishment and progress, which can motivate learners. The fusion of TBL with language tasks thus represents a promising pedagogical approach, leveraging the motivational aspects of games to enhance the efficacy of language learning.

4.2 Communicative Language Assessment Strategies Employed by Participants in Online EFL Tutoring Context

On the other hand, this theme discusses how EFL teachers describe communicative language assessment strategies based on their tutoring experiences of evaluating EFL language learning. This section illustrates the EFL tutors' various language activities to evaluate their student's proficiency and progress in various aspects of language learning. It could be inferred that EFL tutors employ the following CLT strategies in both the teaching and assessment phases of their language instruction since language activities can serve as teaching strategies and assessment strategies in educational settings. This claim was attested by Black and Wiliam (1998), who emphasize that formative assessment is integral to the teaching process as it involves using feedback and questioning techniques to gauge student understanding and guide future instruction. With this integration, language activities employed by the EFL tutors served dual purposes, both teaching and assessing; the only difference is the purpose of employing the language tasks, whether to illustrate and explain a concept or skill for students' understanding or competency acquisition or check their progress on the extent of their language learning objectives through criteria for evaluation.

Table 3. Communicative Language Assessment Strategies

Use of Role Play Activities
Use of Meaningful Practice in Giving Prompt Feedback
Use of Opinion-Sharing Activities
Use of Authentic Materials as a Push for Authenticity
Use of Information Transfer Activities
Use of Project Work as an Assessment Strategy

Table 3 displays the encapsulated different communicative language assessment strategies that are also prevalent in EFL online tutoring. Similar to the aforementioned discussion about teaching strategies, assessment strategies were also presented with the supported narrated from the different language scholars below.

Use of Fluency Tasks. The offshoot of using fluency task is more relevant as an assessment strategy. The study revealed that role-playing is integral to EFL handbooks or lessons in EFL tutoring classes. It is found true that the Teacher participants stated:

“The ‘Act’ part of our material consists of real communicative situations, primarily in business settings. Students are required to effectively engage in these scenarios before progressing to the next lesson. This component serves as a practical application of their language skills and reinforces learning outcomes in relevant contexts.” –Teacher Participant 11

The activity pointed out the integration of authentic communication in administering role-playing activities like in business settings. This strategy is an evaluative measure to cultivate learners' communicative competence (Hymes, 1971). It signifies their communicative abilities and skills to effectively communicate authentically within real-life contexts. This assessment is commonly administered to adult EFL learners. Most of them were enrolled because they needed to pass the IELTS exam, and their company sent some to other countries for work-related purposes. Thus, they need to develop fluency in speaking the desired language. The interview findings revolve around the integration of role-play in practicing language speaking capabilities of EFL learners. Teacher participants also highlighted the following:

“I design role-play activities simulating everyday scenarios like job interviews, travel situations, or customer service interactions, allowing students to practice language in context. These assessments not only evaluate linguistic competence but also emphasize the development of communication skills, cultural awareness, and the ability to navigate authentic language situations they may encounter beyond the classroom.” –Teacher Participant 9

The activities mentioned embraced the actual social context that EFL tutors might experience in real-world scenarios, like having job interviews, travel situations, and customer service interactions as mentioned. Moreover, it is more than merely ending with speaking to test fluency skills. However, EFL tutors also used an analytical rubric in assessing language learning. One of the EFL teacher participants showcased the content of the rubric they used in tutoring classes. A rubric encompasses four categories: fluency and Coherence, lexical resource, grammatical range and accuracy, and pronunciation, besides, upon looking at the shared rubric used by the EFL tutor. It shows that each category has bullet points to be graded from 1-10. Fluency and Coherence assess if EFL learners speak at length, speak without repetition and self-correction, maintain the flow of speech without pauses or hesitations, and use a range of connectors and discourse markers. Lexical resources include using a range of vocabulary, paraphrasing, and using less common vocabulary, idioms, and collocations. For grammatical range, it tackles the use of a range of sentence structures and grammatical tenses and forms and produces error-free sentences. Lastly, for accuracy and pronunciation, it can be understood by pronouncing words and sounds accurately, pronouncing syllables and word stress correctly, and using sentence stress and intonation effectively. All these sub-categories also consist of six key points to be assessed from infrequent to frequent or insufficient to sufficient. The result of this assessment will guide EFL learners if they are already prepared to take the IELTS. According to Brown (2004), clear rubrics and consistent feedback are essential for helping learners improve their fluency over time. The students should understand the goals of each fluency task and the specific aspects of fluency being assessed, such as speed, Coherence, pronunciation, and expression.

Use of Meaningful Practice in Giving Prompt-Feedback. Conferring to the study of Brown (2004), meaningful practice guarantees that students are actively applying knowledge in a way that mirrors authentic language use rather than merely memorizing information. When this meaningful practice is coupled with prompt feedback, it significantly boosts language learning by immediately addressing errors and reinforcing correct responses through drills. Hattie and Timperley (2007) reiterated that prompt feedback is one of the most powerful influences on learning and achievement. It has been extensively studied and validated across various educational contexts. Subsequently, this sub-theme was implemented carefully because of the consolidated

responses from the EFL tutors. These findings were shown in the following quotes from Teacher Participant 9, "*Continuous feedback is provided through written comments and audio recordings, offering personalized guidance for improvement.*" Giving instant feedback through comments, corrections, and suggestions helps maintain EFL learners' motivation and class engagement. This immediate response to learners' efforts ensures that misunderstandings are swiftly corrected and good practices are reinforced, creating a dynamic and responsive learning environment. Online tutoring that incorporates meaningful practice and timely feedback improves instruction effectiveness and fosters the growth of self-sufficient, self-assured students who can use their knowledge in practical settings. They argue that clear, specific, and timely feedback can significantly influence students' cognitive processes, leading to improved performance and a deeper understanding of the material. It shows that prompt feedback is an effective evaluative process for giving assessments, especially in limited online tutoring time, which lasts 25 to 55 minutes of tutoring sessions.

Furthermore, Shute (2008) noted that feedback should be constructive and aimed at reducing the gap between current performance and desired goals. It emphasized the use of language in contextually appropriate ways to achieve communicative goals. This approach encourages learners to engage with the language more deeply by requiring them to comprehend, process, and produce language relevant to real-life situations repetitively, as the researcher cross-validated the interview data through observations of EFL tutoring classes. The EFL teachers gave prompt feedback to guide EFL learners in constructing their sentences correctly and grasping the correct answer. This process highlighted self-regulated learning. Effective, prompt feedback fostered self-assessment and reflection. It empowered EFL tutors to take charge of their language learning process.

Use of Communicative Practice. This sub-theme is still focused on having "Free Conversation" but more on assessing the language capabilities of EFL learners. A communicative practice revolves around administering oral interviews to students so they can share their opinions and interests. Oral Interviews touched on the art of inquiry, a question-and-answer dialogue process between EFL tutors and EFL learners. The significant goal of this technique is to evaluate learner's understanding and critical thinking skills. It is the most straightforward way form of assessment process in any form of teaching and assessment. It looks like a casual interview for the EFL learners to get comfortable using English. The responses state the following:

"In assessing my students, I only use oral questioning...I ask my students to share about themselves, about their memorable experiences, and their goals. In that way, they would feel that they're just telling a story or sharing some thoughts, but little did they know that their skill in speaking using English language is being developed." –Teacher Participant 3

These question-and-answer activities mentioned are fundamental components of communicative practice. It provides a dynamic and interactive way of assessing a range of language skills of EFL learners. The literature of Brown (2004) suggested using question-and-answer to evaluate both the accuracy and fluency of language use. This can be achieved by demanding EFL learners to articulate responses quickly through opinion sharing. In that way, teachers can test students' ability to use language accurately and fluently in real time. Teacher participant 10 pointed out, "*By asking more questions to make them talk more and let them think to express their own ideas. I make the question more personal that they can express their own ideas and they are more comfortable to speak up.*" As highlighted by Richards and Rodgers (2014), communicative competence involves more than just language accuracy; it includes the ability to manage interactions, take turns, and negotiate meaning.

An influential review of Black and Wiliam (1998) in their "*Assessment and Classroom Learning*" highlights that oral assessments encourage active engagement and deeper learning. Students are required to synthesize information and think critically under pressure. This assessment is particularly beneficial in fields where verbal articulation is present, like EFL online tutoring classes. Online tutoring environments mimic these interactive dynamics through Q&A exercises, which let EFL tutors evaluate how well students can carry out dialogues or conversational exchanges. Some findings show that EFL tutors incorporate time limitations for students sharing activities. For example, an EFL tutor is tasked to explain his opinion in just one minute. This kind of assessment allows learners to think critically and respond quickly. Follow-up questions were also thrown up to check the language continuity or interconnectedness of students' ideas.

Use of Authentic Materials as a Push for Authenticity. The researcher found out through the findings the integration of authentic materials as an assessment. Teacher participant mentioned the use of the following assessment materials:

"EFSET tests, Cambridge tests, PET Speaking test, KET, and IELTS are some of the tests that students may take for their assessment. I also use the check list provided by my manager and apply some can-do lists from Cambridge assessment forms and check if they can do the skills in each macro skill." – TP 17

These authentic materials were adapted specifically for students enrolled to take the IELTS exam. It serves as a practice test for EFL adult learners to familiarize themselves with language assessment, which usually covers all the macro skills. There is a need for

them to master language skills in preparation for their IELTS. As a push for authenticity, it shows that EFL tutors must target the specific competencies for their student's practice exams. This method allows for personalized learning experiences where EFL learners progress at their own pace until they achieve defined competencies (Gervais, 2016). It provides a clear and objective measure of student performance, aligning assessments closely with real-world skills and outcomes.

However, EFL tutors used authentic materials like reading short stories to tutor young learners. EFL learners read the narrative's content, allowing EFL tutors to be more observant of the language skills of their young EFL learners. This process was mentioned by a Teacher participant saying:

"For young learners, we check if they say the letter sounds; if they can, we will proceed with the family words, and if they can, we will ask the tutees to read longer sentences and so on. We make sure that if they can read, they should understand it also. Factors like these will simply help determine their level by check from these ways." – Teacher Participant 4

Authentic reading resources have gained popularity in language teaching, especially when recognizing and correcting pronunciation mistakes. Gilmore (2007) asserts that authentic resources provide rich linguistic input that enhances learners' comprehension of language use in natural settings. It helps them become more proficient in all language domains, including pronunciation. This approach aligns with the principles of CLT, which emphasize the importance of using real-life communication to develop language proficiency. Reading aloud from these resources can assist students in honing their pronunciation. Through this practice, tutors can compare learners' pronunciation to the standard forms contained in the original texts, allowing them to pinpoint specific pronunciation faults. Tutors can listen for frequent problems such as improper stress patterns, mispronounced vowel and consonant sounds, and improper intonation when students read aloud.

Thus, as Raymundo (2023) posed, integrated assessment is described as the employment of authentic and contextualized tasks that bring the actual activities and situations from real-life scenarios into the language classrooms. Regarding the employment of authentic and contextualized tasks, language teachers also recognize the need to utilize various assessment tools like rubrics, especially in setting appropriate criteria as descriptors of complex macro skills demonstration, which consequently unveils their practice on integrated assessment.

Use of Information Transfer Activities. Assessment in EFL online tutoring, like Information Transfer activities, serves as performance tasks for students. Since this platform is focused on enhancing the EFL learners' listening and speaking skills, some EFL tutors have been giving different performance tasks depending on the language needs of their learners. These tasks would enable them to practice their skills to become good communicators. These performance tasks as an output or product ranged from transforming a written passage into a chart or summarizing an audio recording into a written text. The exact statements of the Teacher Participant 2 claimed, *"After reading, I ask the student to summarize the whole text to a brief and substantial presentation."* Summarizing activities involves condensing a larger body of text into its essential points, demanding EFL students to comprehend core ideas and express the main concepts. Information transfer activities such as summarizing are integral to developing linguistic and cognitive abilities because they force students to interact with the content thoroughly and communicate it concisely (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

Another powerful form of information transfer activity shared by Teacher Participant 17, *"Students are assigned to present a PowerPoint presentation that will demonstrate their language and writing skills."* A performance task was given to EFL learners as they showcased ideas in a PowerPoint presentation or sometimes a mind-map presentation. Firstly, they foster critical thinking and analytical skills. This critical engagement with the text aids in better understanding and retention of the material. Secondly, it requires learners to process information critically and creatively, facilitating a better understanding of complex concepts. Buzan and Buzan (2010) reiterated that mind maps harness the full range of cortical skills—word, image, number, logic, rhythm, color, and spatial awareness—in a single, uniquely powerful manner. This integrative method aids students in better information organization and memory. Integrating mind-map presentations into information transfer activities, teachers can provide a dynamic and effective learning environment that aligns with the principles of CLT and fosters significant language development. However, this activity does not merely end by crafting a mind-map presentation. One of the Teacher participants posted:

"In my Vietnamese students, yeah, we are required to give them assignments every day, But they do mind map presentation. For example, they will create a mind map first based on the lesson. Those are just the keywords, and then afterwards, they are going to present it through a video, through a presentation... Then, they will explain in that presentation. So, they can easily connect from word to the next word. So yeah, in that way, students can easily track the lessons or connect from one idea to another idea until the end." – Teacher Participant 14

Another form of transformation emerged, from a mind-map presentation into a video presentation, where speaking skills are presented. This flexibility makes information transfer tasks valuable for differentiated instruction and personalized learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2014). In conclusion, through information transfer activities, students were able to develop various language skills (e.g., listening, reading, writing, speaking, viewing, etc.). Macro skills integration in language instruction has been emerging as a pedagogical approach as the language education paradigm continuously campaigns for a more skills-oriented assessment scheme (Raymundo, 2023).

Use of Project Work as Communicative Assessment Strategy. Similar to the teaching strategies mentioned earlier, the use of project work is another prevalent assessment strategy. Hereinto, this sub-theme is not part of the conceptual framework presented. However, it highlighted additional evaluative tool that EFL tutors employed to foster effective learning environments. The use of project work emphasizes collaborative learning and student engagement through structured activities. It serves as an evaluative tool in online tutoring. This method promotes interdependence, accountability, and positive social interaction among students. It is supported by Teacher Participant 7,

"I also give them assignment like mind-mapping then they will do vlogging in presenting their project...they will just like 'Hi, I am ____, this is my vlog...' Video presentation, yes, because we have group chat with the parents and the students, so I can monitor it there if they are doing their task. Those activities serve as their assignment, as project as well."

In an online setting, project work allows EFL learners to engage deeply with the subject matter by working on real-world settings and creating meaningful products. This approach encourages active participation and supports learners in developing essential skills such as research, communication, and cooperation. Online tools and platforms facilitate these projects by providing resources, such as discussion forums, video presentations, and shared digital workspaces. Kagan's perspective highlights that project-based learning in online tutoring not only enhances academic understanding but also prepares students for future professional environments by fostering independent learning and problem-solving abilities.

It is further elaborated with the answer of Teacher Participant 5, *"For evaluating my EFL learners' communicative competence, I use assessment strategies like oral presentations, role-plays, debates, and portfolio assessments."* Moreover, project work activities like oral presentations mentioned above in online tutoring classes align well with CLT principles, which emphasize interaction and practical communication skills. In the context of online tutoring, project work involves collaborative tasks such as creating presentations, conducting interviews, or producing multimedia content, all of which necessitate active language use and interaction among students (Nunan, 2004). These activities provide a context for meaningful communication, allowing students to practice language in real-life scenarios, thus improving their fluency and confidence (Brown, 2007). Additionally, the online environment offers diverse tools and platforms for interaction, such as video conferencing, discussion boards, and collaborative documents, which further support the communicative aspects of language learning (Doughty & Long, 2003). Therefore, project work in online tutoring classes effectively integrates the core principles of CLT by fostering practical language use and collaborative learning experiences.

Furthermore, online tutoring differs to mainstream classroom as students and teachers do not take it as graded subject. Nevertheless, even without the thought of having project works that are not graded, unlike the normal classroom set-up, these forms of activities enable EFL tutors to evaluate the communicative capacity of their students. They serve as a guiding tool to adjust their teaching methods and provide targeted support when needed. In consequence, project works enhance the overall language learning experience of EFL learners.

4.3 Challenges on the Use of Communicative Language Teaching and Assessment Strategies

Based on the interview findings, this theme sought to answer the third research question about challenges and concerns among the communicative language teaching and assessment strategies discussed earlier.

Table 4. Concerns and Challenges
Technological Barrier
Language Barrier
Short Attention Span
Validity of Assessment

Table 4 shows the problems encountered by EFL tutors in EFL online tutoring. These challenges were derived from the interview findings and deliberated below.

Technical Barrier. It is a constraint usually experienced in any form of distance learning here in the Philippines. It includes issues like unstable internet connections, incompatible software, and difficulties using digital tools effectively. As Teacher Participant 3 stated, *“Another problem is a poor internet connection that is unavoidable here in our country.”* There is a primary challenge of inconsistent internet connectivity in the Philippines. This constraint in technical barriers hinders the effectiveness of any distance learning. Barlongo (2020) argued that many areas in the country, particularly rural regions, still need faster internet access, making it difficult for students and tutors to engage in seamless online sessions. However, Teacher Participant 19 also answered, *“Internet connectivity. Especially with my Chinese students.”* Thus, there are technical barriers in distance learning, especially in tutoring sessions, not only on the issue of internet connectivity in the Philippines but also across Southeast Asian countries like China. Sometimes, the internet connection is not the problem; it is the EFL companies' learning management system (LMS). Navigating LMS platforms using mobile devices will be a problem since most LMS are designed solely for desktop use. Poorly optimized LMS platforms on the phone often require excessive scrolling, zooming, and dealing with misaligned text and buttons, which can be time-consuming and hinder effective learning. Moreover, features like uploading assignments, participating in real-time discussions, or using multimedia resources are significantly more challenging on mobile devices (Bakia et al., 2012).

Another challenge in online tutoring is a power interruption, as highlighted by Teacher participant 13, which can disrupt scheduled tutoring sessions. While this circumstance is unavoidable, it's reassuring to know that some EFL companies have taken proactive steps. They encourage EFL tutors from the very start of their application process to have alternative devices or available Powerbanks and UPS back-up for their electronics whenever there is a power outage. These obstacles can disrupt communication, hinder the smooth exchange of materials, and reduce the overall effectiveness of the online tutoring session. To mitigate these challenges, it is essential to ensure both the EFL tutor and the EFL learner have reliable internet access, compatible and updated software, electronic backups, and a basic understanding of the online platforms being used.

Language Barrier. This constraint is the most noticeable in the research findings. The language barriers in speaking English during EFL online classes can significantly impact students' language learning experience. In the study of Gollan and Ferreira (2009), language proficiency affects cognitive load, making it harder for non-native speakers to process and respond in real time. Huang and Hsiao (2012) found that these barriers are compounded online due to the lack of non-verbal cues crucial for understanding and context. Additionally, Chiu and Savage (2014) noted that students often feel increased anxiety and self-consciousness when communicating in a second language over digital platforms, which can further inhibit their participation and learning. Such challenges were evident from the findings, as Teacher Participant 18 shared, *“Language barrier is the number one issue encountered in class. Having very little to zero knowledge of English makes it difficult for the learner to communicate well with the teacher. Most learners are also easily bored in class when they can't relate to the topic.”* This is commonly observed in younger EFL learners, as they can hardly speak some phonemic sounds in English. Limited exposure to Chinese, Japanese, and Vietnamese languages leads to a language barrier. It can hide students' willingness to engage in spontaneous conversation. *“My Chinese students' accent and vocabulary limitations prevent us from having a smooth and well-paced conversation. My preschool learners did not use to speak English at all. So other than a basic greeting, self-introduction, a few yes-no question, there's not much interaction. However, my Chinese students are more hardworking than my Vietnamese students. Viet students are less responsive to tasks and prefer to play games most of the time. My Japanese students, who are mostly adults, are very good speakers and responsive to tasks. But the constraint is more on the cultural side. They are a bit of a perfectionist, and they have different demands when it comes to correction and feedback.”* –Teacher Participant 19

Language is a primary medium through which culture is expressed and understood. Thus, language barriers are intrinsically linked to cultural barriers as well. A study by Schwartz (2019) found that when individuals from different linguistic backgrounds interact, the inability to communicate effectively can lead to misunderstandings and misinterpretations of cultural norms and values. The EFL study habits vary widely across cultures. As a result, language barriers impede direct communication and obscure the more profound cultural meanings conveyed through language, creating a significant hurdle in cross-cultural interactions (Duranti, 1997). As mentioned above, it is not EFL students but their parents who demand different when it comes to correction and feedback. EFL teachers must be careful when administering their lessons and be aware of the culture of EFL learners.

To address this issue, the EFL company encourages teachers to use Google Translate to connect with their students. The same is true: using Google Translate was the only remedy teachers used. It became a serious problem because, from time to time, some tutors often used Google Translate. This may disrupt EFL learners since they want to avoid adjusting independently to the English language. The researcher observed that young learners have online tutoring classes with their parents or guardians beside them. However, as one of the participants claimed:

"In preschool, usually, the non-readers, I mean, the basic readers of English, they are with their parents. So, for example, if I speak English, and the child doesn't understand it, the mother translates it into their own language. My problem with that is, I'm not sure if the translation is correct." – Teacher Participant 18

Parental support in real-time translation fosters a conducive learning environment in online tutoring. Their involvement reinforces EFL students' learning as they offer personal explanations. Unfortunately, in some cases observed, parents contribute to becoming another distraction in students' language learning as they might not be sensitive enough when talking to other people in their household. Consequently, practical strategies to mitigate these language barriers include using visual aids, simplified language, and additional support resources to foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment.

Short Attention Span. The observation of EFL online tutoring classes shows how easily distracted young EFL learners are. The EFL learners' attention spans can be compromised in several scenarios observed. One common issue is the presence of environmental distractions, such as household noise, siblings, and other digital devices, which can easily divert EFL learner's focus. The learner who tends to have tangible materials that surround him usually catches his attention and can use them in class. As what Teacher participant 4 shared, *"For young learner, one of the common concerns is their attention span, so tutors must be good at catching their attention back to the class by using different strategies such call back, games, and so on."* Research indicates that EFL learners often struggle to focus during extended online sessions due to the cognitive load required to process a new language (Krashen, 1982). Also, Cook (2001) pointed out that the necessity to continuously switch between the target language and their native language can lead to cognitive fatigue, making it harder for EFL learners to stay attentive. This diminished attention span might result in decreased comprehension and retention of material, eventually affecting the overall efficacy of online tutoring sessions for EFL learners. (Chen & Kent, 2020). To address this issue, online tutors must incorporate varied and interactive activities that can capture and sustain the interest of EFL students, thereby enhancing their learning experience. Likewise, lack of physical interaction also plays a role. The EFL tutors cannot use body language or physical cues effectively but relatively minimal hand gestures and facial expressions to maintain engagement. Furthermore, monotonous teaching methods that do not cater to various learning styles can cause young EFL learners to lose interest quickly.

Validity of Assessments. The validity of assessments as a challenge refers to the uncertainty of teachers regarding whether EFL learners produce outputs. There is a tendency for cheating and plagiarism across synchronous distance learning. However, this is a rare problem, as observed by EFL tutors. Nonetheless, EFL tutors mentioned their difficulty monitoring dishonesty among EFL tutors during assessments. The exact quotes of the Teacher participant 3, *"The major challenge is that assessments are done through online only. We cannot know if the results of the assessment is true or is in accordance with the student's true performance."*

"One significant constraint is the difficulty in capturing the complexity of communicative abilities through traditional assessment methods. Assessments often focus on discrete language skills, such as grammar and vocabulary, but may struggle to effectively measure students' pragmatic and sociolinguistic competence in real-life contexts. The diversity in language backgrounds among EFL learners can also be a challenge, as it requires tailoring assessments to accommodate various proficiency levels. Striking a balance between formative and summative assessments to address both ongoing progress and overall competence is another challenge." –Teacher Participant 9

In EFL online tutoring, valid assessments are crucial for ensuring students are not cheating or plagiarizing. The assessment results must accurately reflect the EFL learner's understanding of the material. Without valid assessments, it is challenging to determine student progress and identify areas for improvement. Based on the observation findings, this theme rarely happens since online tutoring focuses more on students' communicative competence.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge the challenges that some EFL tutors face in ensuring the authenticity of online assessments. They need more direct supervision and opportunities to monitor student behavior during assessments. This understanding of their challenges can foster a sense of empathy and encourage the audience to consider the difficulties faced by EFL tutors. Consequently, the authenticity of student language assessments becomes questionable, making it difficult for tutors to accurately gauge EFL learners' understanding and progress (Bretag et al., 2018). This compromises the assessment process and diminishes the value of the feedback provided, as tutors may address issues that do not genuinely reflect the student's abilities or language learning needs (Park, 2003).

5. Conclusion

The conclusion drawn from the findings:

1. The most used Communicative Language Teaching strategy was opinion-sharing activities. It conformed to student's interests, which made them betrothed in meaningful discussions as they dived into called negotiated curriculum.
2. Mechanical practice was the least CLT strategy due to the lack of repetitive drills utilized by EFL participants.
3. The most used Communicative Language assessment strategy was communicative practice. Learners were evaluated by practicing different communicative situations (e.g., interviews, role-playing, and complex questioning) with the help of an analytical rubric.
4. Language barriers hindered the least used assessment strategy, mechanical practice, significantly limiting its widespread implementation. A push for authenticity was achieved both in Communicative Language Teaching and Assessment strategies, which is in line with the implementation of authentic materials in tutoring classes. The EFL Company's handbook is enough, despite the limitations it brought out in adhering to other strategies. These handbooks were also used to administer EFSET, Cambridge, IELTS, etc.
5. Constraints exist not only among learners but also among their parents, technological tools, and language use. Therefore, Google Translation became a remedy for communicating effectively with EFL learners, specifically young ones.
6. Notably, it was validated that there is a direct relationship between utilizing Communicative Language Teaching and Assessment strategies in teaching and assessing EFL learners. This illustrates how instructional strategies can be designed to simultaneously serve as assessment tools, providing a holistic view of student capabilities.

For further research, they may also examine the effectiveness of CLT and assessment strategies in tutoring contexts by interviewing parents or learners. It is highly recommended to conduct separate comparative studies across different EFL nationalities and cultural contexts (e.g., Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese, Taiwanese, Koreans, etc.) to understand the global landscape of online EFL education. They may also focus on other CLT activities presented by Richards (2006) that were not found in the findings (e.g., accuracy activities, jigsaw activities, task-completion activities, and reasoning-gap activities). New CLT and assessment strategies for engaging and motivating EFL learners in a tutoring context, together with emerging challenges, should always be the focus of research in the future.

Furthermore, there are insightful suggestions and notable limitations in the study that might influenced its results and interpretation. The study used a comprehensive approach which enhances the validity of the findings and offers a holistic view of the tutoring strategies. On the contrary, there are some notable weaknesses in the study. The study limits other prevalent strategies that were not mentioned in the framework presented by Richards and Schidmt. Also, due to limited participants, which potentially affecting the generalizability of the results. Thus, it is recommended to adequately account for a broader number of research participants and for the exposure to English, which can significantly impact the language learning outcome of EFL learners. Another potential limitation is the short duration of the study, which may not capture all strategies that EFL tutors employ in the long-term horizon. Addressing these weaknesses in future research can lead to more robust and widely applicable recommendations for EFL tutoring practices.

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