

Original Research Article

The Critical Significance of Teaching Strategies for English

Ramon Boloron

Holy Name University- Tagbilaran City, Philippines

Corresponding Author: Ramon Boloron, E-mail: boloronramon@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: May 21, 2020

Accepted: June 25, 2020

Volume: 2

Issue: 2

KEYWORDS

Interventions, Instrumented Team Learning, Extramural requirements

ABSTRACT

The teaching of English in the Philippines is geared toward achieving a high level of proficiency in the English language. However, recently there is a big decline in the English proficiency of Filipinos. The overall results of the English Language Placement Tests of Holy Name University have showed that most high school graduates were ill-prepared for college work and had to be required to take and pass an English Plus, a non-credit remedial class in order to acquire the level of proficiency in English required for college level academic work. The high school graduates' deficiency in English has a far-reaching negative effect from a pedagogical standpoint. Such deficiency is fatal because it delimits the students learning in all levels of the curriculum. Thus, this research endeavoured to find out the critical significance of the teaching strategies for English that would better meet the needs of the range of learners in the classroom. The research hoped to assist English language teachers in addressing their needs and problems in the teaching of English. This study assessed the effectiveness of teaching strategies for English. The research employed experimental design. The research used various modes of Instrumented Team Learning and Extramural requirements. The study used standardized objective tests prescribed by the English Linguistics Project. It had three 100- item objective tests- a diagnostic test, a progress test, and an exit test. It had 50-item objective periodical tests, used as part of the prelims, midterms, and finals. The tests measured the improvement of the students during the semester. The findings revealed that the varying achievement levels of students in English were significantly affected by the type of teaching strategy applied to the respective group of respondents. Of the three teaching methods, instrumented team learning was found to be the most effective method since it generated the highest improvement on the English proficiency of the students when it was applied to the students in the second experimental group. The differences among the mean scores in the diagnostic and exit tests indicated improvement in team learning, while differences among mean scores in periodical tests indicated individual improvement.

Introduction

The recent decades have seen a paradigm shift in our understanding on how language is taught if the goal is how to be effective user of English Language. This paradigm is grounded on the works of Canale and Swain (1980) and Savignon (1983, as cited in Brown 2000) Littlewood (1981), and Hymes (1972) who proposed a holistic view of communicative competence, a view which considers a person's ability to use language in a variety of contexts. The Communicative Language Teaching paradigm shift has led to many suggested changes on how second language teaching is conducted and conceived (Richards and Rodgers, 2001). Some major changes that were associated with the shift (Mendoza, 2011). Learners Autonomy- students became more aware of their own ways of learning so as to criticize their own.

The Critical Significance of Teaching Strategies for English

strengths and work on their own weaknesses (Van Lier, 1996). 2). The Social Nature of Learning- students learned by interacting with their environment and the key features of that environment were the people with whom they came into contact (Breen, 2001). 3). Circular Integration- the concept of language access the communication offered one route for a circular integration. The idea was that language competence was necessary for learning in all subject areas (Chamot and O' Malley, 1994). 4). Focus on Meaning- the focus was in using language, not in language usage. Thus, fluency rather than accuracy was prioritized (Long and Crookes, 1992). 5). Diversity- each student was different and that effective teaching needed to take these differences into account. Diversity among students was not seen as an obstacle but strength. 6). Thinking Skills- among the strategies that learners needed to organize and use were those that involved going beyond the information given and utilizing and building their higher order thinking skills known as critical and creative thinking skills (Paul, 1995).

There is a considerable debate as to appropriate ways of defining Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and no single model of CLT is universally accepted as authoritative (Mc Groarty, 1984; Markee, 1997; as cited in Mendoza 2011). The Communicative Language Teaching was described by (Brown 2000 as cited in Miller 2009) as a vehicle by which students can discover for themselves the meaning of learning through language techniques which focus on the learners. Inspired by the view that language contains meaning, and is not only concerned with structure, Nunan (1994 as cited in Miller 2009) echoed the same sentiment by saying that Communicative Language Teaching uses activities, involving oral communication, carrying out meaningful tasks, and using language which is meaningful to the learner, and by using materials which were tasked-based and authentic that promote communicative language use.

Richards and Rogers (2001) and Littlewood (1981) considered some model activities of Communicative Language Teaching. Such activities enable learners to attain the communicative objectives of the curriculum, engage the learners in communication, and require the use of such communicative process as information sharing, negotiation of meaning, and interaction. They added that communicative classroom activities were designed to focus on completing trades that were mediated through language or involve negotiation of information and information sharing (Ravelo, 2008). Littlewood (1981) opined that social interaction activities such as conversation and discussion sessions, dialogues and role plays, simulations, skits, improvisations, and debates were categorized communicative activities. Other communicative approaches were the use of multiple intelligences, experimental learning, developmental classroom, and a democratic classroom (Ravelo, 2008).

Literature Review

The theories of Communicative Language Teaching offer a framework on how the teaching of English can be approached.). A typical feature of Communicative Language teaching is that "it gives planned emphasis on functional as well as structural features of language combining these into a completely communicative view (Littlewood, 1981, as cited in Mendoza, 2011). Teachers who espouse CLT move beyond teaching the structural rules of the target language, and create opportunities for learners to use the target language in a meaningful way. In doing so, they help their learners build up communicative competence (Mendoza, 2011). Language teaching is not just a structural process, it is also communicative. The communicative approach in language teaching originates from a theory of language communication. According to this approach, the main objective of language teaching is to develop what Hymes (1972) referred to as communicative competence.

The highly contextualized nature of communicative language teaching (CLT) is underscored again and again. It would be inappropriate to speak of CLT as a teaching method in any sense of that term as it was used in the 20th century. Rather, CLT is an approach that understands language to be inseparable from individual identity and social behavior. Not only does language define a community but a community, in turn, defines the forms and uses of language. The norms and goals appropriate for learners in a given setting, and the means of attaining these goals, are the concern of those directly involved. Related both to the understanding of language as culture in motion and to the multilingual reality in which most of the world population finds itself is the futility of any definition of a "native speaker," a term that came to prominence in descriptive structural linguistics and was adopted by teaching methodologists to define an ideal for learners (Savignon, 2018).

Communicative competence (CC), a term in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) literature with an evolving definition over the last fifty years, and its successive notion, interactional competence (IC), must guide the curricular choices second-language teachers make as they seek to help their students successfully navigate scenarios where interaction in the second language (L2) is an expected part of their daily lives (Tarvin, 2014).

Canale and Swain (1980) presented a more thorough description of communicative competence based on their research reported in the document *Communicative Approaches to Second Language Teaching and Testing* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1979.) Communicative competence must be viewed as minimally including three areas of knowledge or skills: grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence. There is no strong evidence for the view that grammatical competence is any more or less crucial to successful communicative than is sociolinguistic competence or strategic competence. The primary goal of a communicative approach must be to facilitate the integration of these types of competence for the learner, an outcome that is not likely to result from an over-emphasis on one area of competence over the others through-out a second language program.

With the later trends in language teaching approaches and methodology and the rise of CLT in 1970s, communicative competence has become the main aim for second and foreign language learning. Such competence should be reflected in language syllabi and teachers' training, teaching and learning methodologies...etc. Many courses have been changed to employ these new trends in teaching to fulfill the learners' needs in learning a language (Ahmed, 2018).

This then is the theoretical framework for communicative competence on which the communicative approach will be based. A communicative approach must be based on and respond to the learner's communicative needs in the second language. These must be specified with respect to grammatical competence (e.g. the levels of grammatical accuracy required in different situations), sociolinguistic competence (e.g. the setting, topics, communicative functions to be handled most frequently), and strategic competence (e.g. verbal strategies for paraphrasing lexical items that have not been sufficiently a communicative approach at least in part on the varieties of the second language that the learner is most likely to be in contact with in genuine levels of grammatical competence that various groups of native speakers (e.g. age groups, occupational groups) expect of the learner in such situations and that the majority of learners may be expected to attain (Canale and Swain 1980).

In a clear and comprehensive view, the theories also described the strategies in teaching English courses using the Communicative Language Teaching approach. Task-based instruction is a type of communicative language teaching. This is not a new concept. Rather, Brown (2002, p.50) said, it puts task at the center of teacher's methodological focus. It views the learning process as a set of communicative tasks that were directly linked to the curricular goals they serve, the purpose of which extend beyond the practice of language for its own sake. Research in task-based learning has attempted to identify types of tasks that enhance learning (such as group work, and pair work), to define task-specific learner factors (proficiency levels, and styles), and to examine teacher roles and other variables that contribute to successful achievement of objectives.

A task based approach solves many of the criticism traditionally associated with Communicative Language teaching. To begin with, these were the characteristics of tasks: 1.) meaning is primary; 2.) learners were not restricted in their use of language forms. 3.) Tasks should bear a relationship to real-world activities; 4.) The priority is on achieving the goal of the task; 5.) Tasks were assessed based on their outcome (Brown, 2002).

Long (1985, as cited in Brown 2002, p.50) framed his approach to task-based language teaching in terms of target tasks, arguing that a task is a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others freely or for some reward. In other words, by 'task' is meant the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play, and in between (Richards, Patt and Weber, 1986).

Interactive learning is one of the communicative language teaching approaches. The theoretical foundations of interactive learning lie in the interaction hypothesis of second language acquisition. Going beyond concept of comprehensible input, it has been pointed out the importance of input and output in the development of language. As learners interact with each other through oral and written discourse, their communicative abilities were enhanced.

At the heart of current theories of communicative competence is the essentially interactive nature of communication. Thus, the communicative purpose of language compels us to create opportunities for genuine interaction. Interactive classes will most likely be found doing a significant amount of pair work and group work. They receive authentic language input in real-world contexts. Interactive classes will be found performing classroom tasks that prepwre them for actual language use "out there". They will be found producing language for genuine, meaningful communication. They will be found practicing oral communication through the give and take and spontaniety of actual conversations. And finally, interactive classes will be found writing to and for real audiences (Brown 2002).

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) style is also described as collaborative learning. A classroom that is collaborative has a learner-centered characteristic. As students work together in pairs and groups, they share information and come to each others' aid. They were a "team" whose players must work together in order to achieve goals successfully. Kagan (1992 as cited in Cayabyab and Jacobs (1999) said that cooperative learning has four essential elements. First, positive interdependence is the heart, the first and the most important element of cooperative learning when group members feel positively interdependent with one another, they feel that they sink or swim together. If one fails, all fail, if one succeeds, everybody succeeds. Positive interdependence spells commitment, and if there is no commitment there is no cooperation. Second, individual accountability means that each individual member must be accountable to learn and contribute her/his fair share of work. In other words, no one can hitchhike or free ride on the efforts of other. Third, simultaneous interaction is evident in cooperative learning. Working in-groups enables specific members in every team to communicate at the same time, i. e., simultaneously. Unlike the traditional classroom, where only one student at a time responds to the teacher's questions, in cooperative learning there is maximum participation because one member per group is speaking. Fourth, equal participation is encouraged in cooperative learning because every member has the chance to communicate. In the traditional classroom, so many students stay silent the whole period; in the cooperative learning the interaction is structured so as to increase the opportunities for all students to participate.

Communicative Language Teaching is also Learner-Centered Instruction. Because language teaching is a domain that so often presupposes classrooms where students have very little language proficiency with which to negotiate with the teacher, some teachers shy away from the notion of giving learners the "power" associated with a learner centered approach. Such restraint is not necessary because, even in the beginning level classes, teachers can offer students certain choices. All of these efforts help to give students a sense of "ownership" of their learning and thereby add to their intrinsic motivation. Learner-centered Instruction includes techniques that focus on or account for learners' needs, styles, and goals; techniques that give some control to the student (group work and strategy training); techniques that allow for student creativity and innovation; techniques that enhance a student's sense of competence and self-worth (Brown 2002).

In a learner-centered environment, students become autonomous learners, which accelerates the language learning process. A learner-centered environment is communicative and authentic. It trains students to work in small groups or pairs and to negotiate meaning in a broad context. The negotiation of meaning develops students' communicative competence (Canale and Swain 1980 cited by Altan and Trombly, 2001) and provides comprehensible input. (Long 1980 cited by Altan and Trombly, 2001).

Littlewood (1981) presented two types of communicative activities: 1). Functional communicative activities and social interaction activities. The principle underlying the functional communicative activities is that the teacher structures the situation so that the students have to overcome an information gap or solve a problem. These functional activities on sharing information include identifying sequences or locations, discovering missing information, discovering missing features, communicating secrets, communicating patterns and pictures, communicating models, discovering differences, following directions, reconstructing story sequences and pooling information to solve a problem. Processing information is also another type of functional instrument, as well as a form of social behavior. 2). Social interaction activities define clearly the social context. They approximate the kind of communication situation encountered outside the classroom. Some activities were conversation or discussion sessions, dialog and role plays on school experience, simulation and role playing, and improvisations (Villamin, et, al, 1994).

Villamin, et, al, (1994) mentioned the following model communicative activities: 1). An authentic material (e.g., weather forecast) is taken up as the reading text. This is used to enable the students to gain the skill in making predictions. 2). Language game: The students take turns in making a prediction of what someone in the class will do for the weekend. Student-to-student interaction takes place as they agree or disagree with the predictions. 3). The students see a portion of a comic strip or film and then predict what will happen next. 4). Role playing: The class plays a game of make-believe. The students, at the suggestions of the teacher, form groups and then assume roles (e.g., a family composed of parents, grandparents, and children). Through words and actions, they react to a given situation. 5). A mixed-up dialog is presented and the students decide how to unscramble it. This is done cooperatively (as a class and then later in small groups).

Methodology

This research employed the experimental design. The study selected three sample population groups: one control group, and two experimental groups. The students were the same in terms of their school of origin. The experimental groups were

exposed to interventions, whereas the control group was not. The students assigned to the video learning program were constituted as the first experimental group (VLP group). The students exposed to instrumental team learning composed the second experimental group (IL group). The students taught using the traditional method comprised the control group.

The instrumented team learning was a strategy used in the English Plus course (1) to solve the problem of classes much larger than the optimum of 20-24 for a foreign language class, (2) enable the students to cover more ground in a short period of time, and (3) introduce social reinforcement in the learning of English skills. The target of instrumented team learning was the development of learner autonomy and automaticity. Students were taught to learn by themselves, individually and in teams, using standard reference materials and a method for distilling linguistic information from the prescribed forms of international media. Through exercises, the learning was made so automatic as to make language performance meaningful, quite fluent, and relatively error-free.

The video learning program was used to (1) get exposed to and learn English from professional native-language speakers, or second-language speakers with near-native fluency, (2) reinforce and expand their general education, and (3) develop listening skills in English. Their listening targets were: (1) content (major ideas, details), (2) structure and style, (3) intent, (4) connections (Integration with prior knowledge, assumptions, implications, applications), (5) language (phonetics, lexicon, grammar). The traditional method used routine activities and exercises that filled the time and straight grammar structure drills as content course only.

The College Freshmen were used for the study since it was only in the freshman year that students were required to take English Plus. The participants were all enrolled in the different programs and had taken the English Language Proficiency test, a prerequisite for English I class. The process of randomisation was designed to ensure that the groups were comparable. In a random design, the study population, the experimental treatments or both were not pre determined but randomly assigned. Random assignment in experiments meant that any individual or unit of a study population group had an equal and independent chance of becoming a part of an experimental or control group or, any treatment had an equal and independent chance of being assigned to any of the population groups. Below is the table of the sample population groups.

Research Participants

Respondent Type	Public	Private	Total
A (VLP group)	19	26	45
B (IL group)	19	26	45
C (Control group)	20	26	46
Total	58	78	136

This action research was concerned with improving the English proficiency of the students and it used the learning materials of the English Linguistic Project - ELP workbook, ELP manual, and the ELP readings which is a collection of reprints of articles in English language, English linguistics, and Foreign language Teaching, in teaching the course in English Plus. The ELP learning materials used International English best exemplified by the variety used in international media. They also used the websites of Merriam- Webster. These dictionaries and websites used data from the US, Canada, UK, and Australia.

It also used standardized objective test prescribed by the English Linguistics Project of Dr. Jonathan Malicsi. No changes were made on the testing instruments. It had three 100-item objective exams – a diagnostic test given at the beginning of the semester, a progress test given about the middle of the semester, an exit test towards the end of the semester. These were “long” tests. The objective exams have been validated through thousands of respondents from among college students in various parts of the country, coming from schools of different types, schools with stringent entrance examinations such as UP, as well as those which practice open admissions. They have been validated through thousands of professionals – including English Teachers – who have participated in English Communication Training Workshops.

The diagnostic test was given in the first week of classes to determine where the students were at the beginning of the course. It was also used as basis for assigning students to teams, seeing to it that each team is heterogenous, and that the more advantaged students were spread out in all teams. The progress and exit tests were integral parts of the competitive instrumented team learning (CITL) strategy used to challenge the students to learn in teams. These two long tests were taken

as on-the-spot team exercises, with open books and notes, and with the students discussing their answers with their teammates. Individual answer sheets were still filled out by the students, and they did not have to agree completely with their teammates on all items. Necessarily, their discussions were controlled by their research into the items concerned. Feedback to the students showed the average of each team, thus encouraging team members to really learn from each other, so that the members scores were all near their best individual score (lest low scores by one or two members pull).

The action research also had four 50-item objective periodical tests, to be used as part of the prelims, midterm, pre-finals, and finals. No changes were also made on the testing instruments. These were "short" tests. The periodical tests were used for grading purposes, and were taken individually, with closed books and notes. These "short" tests covered the same topics as those of long ones, as well as workbook exercises the students have completed before the periodicals. In addition to the objective tests, the students were required to submit three essays (original and revised).

Results and Discussion

The overall results showed that the three groups of respondents were found to be average in the diagnostic test. In the exit test, the control group was average, the first experimental group was high, and the second experimental group was very high. The differences among the mean scores in the diagnostic and exit tests showed improvement in team learning.

On the profile of English Proficiency in the Periodical Tests

The control group was average in the prelim test, high in the midterm test, and average in the final test. The two experimental groups were high in the prelim test, and very high in the midterm and final tests. The differences among mean scores in periodical tests revealed individual improvement.

On the test of Hypothesis

Statistical analysis revealed that there was a significant mean gain between the diagnostic and exit test scores for the control and experimental groups. This indicated improvement in team learning. There was also a significant mean difference in the periodical test scores of the students in the control and experimental groups. This indicated individual improvement. Thus the two hypotheses of no significant difference were rejected. The data on the differences of students' improvement are also conclusive as to how the students in all English classes fare after their exposure to two teaching strategies.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that of the three teaching strategies, the instrumented team learning is the most effective teaching strategy in developing the students' English proficiency. This finds support in the theories of Communicative Language Teaching which describe instrumented team learning as a viable critical pedagogy within the CLT framework. Thus, instrumented team learning is learner-centered, interactive, and collaborative teaching strategy that empowers the learners to integrate theory and practice to improve their language skills.

The video learning is also a strategy that is hinged on the psycholinguistic finding that language is spurred primarily by exposure to positive evidence or actual language use. This conclusion is also supported by the Content-and-Language Integrated Class or CLIC method.

Though many aspects of the traditional teaching method are still valid, many details of video learning and instrumented team learning as innovative teaching strategies have been reanalyzed linguistically in this research and the reanalysis makes for better teaching.

References

- [1] Ahmed, S. T. S., & Pawar, S. V. (2018). Communicative competence in English as a foreign language: Its meaning and the pedagogical considerations for its development. *The Creative Launcher*, 2(4), 301-312.
- [2] Avellana, Cecilia R. (1999). *Facilitating Learner Involvement in the Language Classroom*. The ACELT Journal. 3(2) 5.
- [3] Brown, Douglas H. (2002). *Teaching by Principles An Interactive Approach to Language Pedagogy*. San Francisco, U.S.A: Prentice Hall
- [4] Canale, M. and Merrill Swain (1980). *Approach to Communicative Competence*. Singapore: RELC.
- [5] Cayabyab Eleonor C. and George M. Jacobs (1999) *Making Small Groups Work Via Cooperative Learning*. The ACELT Journal (3) (2) 28.
- [6] Cruz, I. (April 3, 2008) *Teachers, Not Textbook*. Philippines Star, 12.
- [7] Francisco M. (2006). CLT – *Beliefs and Practices*. *Journal of Language and Learning*. 3(1) pp. 213-214.
- [8] Francisquete, Mary Jean M. (2008). *Developing an Academic English Task-Based Language Teaching Training Program for Secondary School Teachers*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.
- [9] Gullas, E. (May 30, 2005). *Gullas Urges Better Use of English in Schools*. Sun Star Cebu, 15.
- [10] Heip, P.H. (2007). *Communicative Language Teaching: Unity within diversity*. ELT Journal, 6 (3), 193.
- [11] Hymes, D. (1972). *On Communicative Competence*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Pres.
- [12] Kagan, S. (1992). *Cooperative Learning San Juan Capistrano, CA: Kagan Cooperative Learning*
- [13] Littlewood, William. (1981). *Communicative Language Teaching*. New York: Cambridge University Pres.
- [14] Malicsi, Jonathan. (2007). *College English Course Guide To Phase I English Language Review: the Corrective Phase*.
- [15] Mendoza, Angelita R. (2011). *Development of Communicative materials on Academic Functions*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.
- [16] Miller, Elma Marie H. (2009). *To Think or Not To Think: A Teacher's Delemma in Drawing out Students from Oblivion*. The ACELT Journal. (3)(2) 16.
- [17] Natad, J. (November 1, 2004) *New Program Works to Improve English Proficiency of Pinoy's*. San Star Cebu, 18.
- [18] Ravelo, Vengie M. (2008). *Language Teacher's Theoretical Orientation and Student Language Performance*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City.
- [19] Savignon, Sandra J. (2018). The TESOL Encyclopedia of English Language Teaching Edited by John I. Lontas (Project Editor: Margo DelliCarpini; Volume Editor: Hossein Nassasji). © 2018 John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Published 2018 by John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Retrieved from: <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/>.
- [20] Tarvin (2014). Communicative Competence: Its Definition, Connection to Teaching, and Relationship with Interactional Competence. Retrieved from: <https://www.researchgate.net/>.
- [21] Vicente, Ma. Luisa Ross (2000). *English Communicative Skills and the World of Work*. The ACELT Journal 4(2), 15.
- [22] Villamin, Araceli, Evelyn Salazar, Edilberta Bala, and Nilda Surga (1994). *Innovative Strategies in Communication Arts Quezon City: Phoenix Publishing House Inc.*