

COLLEGE COMMUNICATIVE TEACHING AND E-LEARNING: A TRAINING SCHEME

Charito G. Ong, Ph.D

University Registrar, *University of Science and Technology of Southern Philippines, Cagayan De Oro City*
Member, *American Studies Association (ASA)*

Member, *Regional Association of Government Communicators (RAGCOM) 10*

Member, *National Association of Registrars of State Universities and Colleges (NARSUC)*

Member, *Philippine Association of Research Managers (PHILARM)*

Member, *Philippine Association of Institutions for Research (PAIR)*

Vice President, *Northern Mindanao School Registrars Association (NOMSRA)*

ABSTRACT

This study sought to design and try out a training scheme for college teachers on e-learning use as a classroom strategy in a communicative teaching mode. Based on needs analysis the teachers of English were reoriented so that they became equipped with the rationale, strategies and assessment techniques of e-learning alongside communicative language teaching through the six learning segments which were revised and finalized after a three-day try out. The researcher used five stages in the model she used to undertake the study.

Specifically, the study determined: (1) the stages in the development of the training scheme and (2) the contents of the training scheme's learning segments as a product of the research.

The current Philippine scenario of college English classes pictures a deterioration of students' communication skills with e-learning left out. Dorothy (2015) says that teaching college English classes has become a chore for many professors. Teaching college English is already a particularly trying and frustrating experience. This could be a reason why too many college students today are so inarticulate in English that the teacher hardly knows where to begin and how to precede. This problem exists in *Capitol University* and *Mindanao University of Science and Technology*, the try-out institutes of this research. As observed in their English classes, students instinctively switch to the first language whenever they find it difficult to express themselves in English - which is particularly most of the time. The researcher noted this during the needs analysis stage of this research.

The scheme produced in this research ensures that teachers will incorporate tasks involving e-learning communication mode such as requiring students to do something in the lesson through e-learning, with the language, or with each other. Developing students' oral and written communication skills is one of the most important goals in language teaching. These skills are essential for interactive survival in a global setting. The training scheme was designed for this purpose thereby incorporating the e-learning schema.

The Capitol University professors of English, along with the Mindanao University of Science and Technology instructors, have to keep up with the current trends in language teaching. They need to update themselves in terms of e-learning use to better achieve the goal of language teaching; which is that of developing students' oral and written communication skills.

Part of the segments produced by the researcher will also lead these professors to reconstruct their own syllabuses to provide for an e-learning communicative class. Howatt (2009) best views the direct application of communicative competence to that of a notional syllabus. The notional syllabus includes some description of the grammar of the language to be learned (in the form of exponents for the notions and functions) but treats it as just one subsystem of rules for realizing a speaker's ideas, feelings and intentions. This in turn involves another sub-system of different kinds of rules (rules of discourse).

With the use of e-learning alongside communicative teaching techniques that are contained in the learning segments of the training scheme, these professors can provide interaction which will be meaningful, interactive, and responsive to the learners' needs as they teach minor English courses.

KEYWORDS

Electronic Learning Tasks, English Language Teaching, Training Scheme, English Classes, Global

1. INTRODUCTION

The relationship between teaching and learning is a complex and fascinating one. In a teaching-learning scenario, an interaction that is meaningful, fluid, interactive and responsive to the learners' needs is ideally provided. Hence, English teachers should look for varied ways to respond to the challenge of teaching language students. To do this, college English teachers have to be prepared by updating themselves with current trends in language teaching such that e-learning is employed. They have to keep up with the latest developments in teaching especially that language trends constantly change and higher technology are introduced daily.

Grobler & Bisschof (2006) state that teacher competence is an essential factor for achieving educational excellence. To ensure that teachers are accountable and knowledgeable about the subject they teach, emphasis has been placed on professional training of new educational systems' designs. Teachers, as the key component of an educational system, need professional training to assure efficiency of students' learning. Thus, educational systems should be driven by the need to achieve efficiency, effectiveness and equity. This highlights the importance of training on-the-job teachers.

For a teacher to develop his competence, the primacy of the classroom is indeed high. It is in that learning environment where she/he becomes the principal agent of change. It is where her/his experience is based and where growth will take effect (Thomas, 2009). Considering the importance of the classroom in a teaching-learning process, this research focused on looking at students in their English classes to see how their teachers develop their communicative competence through e-learning. Developing students' communication skills is vital for them to become professionals, Danao (2002) says. She explains in her book, *Confluence: Journeys* that students need to learn the body of material for the profession they are preparing for. This body of material in the different disciplines is in English. Most importantly, students need to know how to communicate in English since it is an international language, and one of the official languages of the Philippines and of Philippine education. Thus, the English subjects in college must equip students to become the professionals they want to be, Danao concludes.

In recent years, much attention has been given to the varying roles that a language teacher has. Increasing emphasis has been placed on the less obtrusive roles such as monitoring language use and facilitating communication. In some versions of the communicative and task-based approaches there is often no formal presentation phase.

Wayne (2005) states that one of the factors that account for poor oral communication in English among students is the failure of many English teachers to provide enough opportunities for oral communication in the classroom. In a country like the Philippines, which aims to participate meaningfully in international affairs, English has a special place. And so has the English teacher who is called upon to define the role of the English language in national development.

However, it has long been known that teaching does not necessarily equal learning - that what a teacher does in the classroom to teach may not match what the learner perceives the lesson to be about. Prestia (2013) claims that the same teaching method does not work for all learners for they learn in different ways and that teachers should employ a variety of methods in teaching, learning and assessment. The effect of what learners learn in every learning episode may vary, depending on how well they are motivated and how ready they are to absorb presented ideas.

Davis (2003) states that the key to teaching students to think lies in how the teaching process is conducted. Teachers have the command to raise the level of students' thinking even to the extent of analysis and appreciation. Since students do not think this way naturally, interaction is necessary. High quality class interaction contributes significantly to a student's progress in developing his communication/verbal skills. This in turn will lead him to develop his thinking skills. Hence, it can be deduced that it is indeed a necessity to develop students' communicative competence, one of the goals of this research.

2. METHODOLOGY

The Research and Develop (R&D) method was used in the study to gather information about the college English classes of the two try out institutions. Seels and Glasgow's (1995) ADDIE model was modified by the researcher into Needs Analysis, Plan, Create, Try Out and Assess (NAPCTA) and was followed throughout the duration of the research with the incorporation of the e-learning strategies.

In the needs analysis stage, baseline data were obtained from the respondents through the use of Focus Group Discussion (FGD) to gather the type of teaching strategies used in college English classes; the questionnaire for identifying the lesson objectives; the classroom observation which looked into the three parts of the lesson; and the analysis of the content of English tests. From these results, the researcher came up with a training scheme composed of six learning segments for communicative teaching in college English classes.

The previous citations, as presented, defeat the goal of language teaching – that of developing students' oral and written communication skills. College English teachers then must try to hold on against the precipitate erosion of the position of English in the Philippines. This can best be fortified at the plane of the teaching of English in college. College professors have to keep up with the current trends in language teaching by adopting e-learning strategies in classroom teaching.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Making use of the four extensive needs analysis procedures; the data were then analyzed. These were analyzed individually and entered in a matrix in the form of focus, rating and description. Final evaluation was derived through these three categories. The matrix showed commonality of results through simple frequency counts. Results served as basis for the production of the training scheme's learning segments.

To illustrate, the data gathered appeared in a matrix form as shown on the next page.

Table 1. Needs Analysis Results: A Summary

| Instrument | Variables Measured | Description |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Focus Group Discussion (FGD) | Teaching Strategy | Communicative/ E-learning slightly used |
| Questionnaire | Lesson Objectives | Non- Communicative/E-learning in maximum use |
| Class Observation | Strategy, Content, Evaluation | Non- Communicative/E-learning not used |
| Test Analysis | Tests, Textbooks, Work texts | Non- Communicative/E-learning used in maximum |

As shown in the above matrix, there is a need to reorient English teachers' perspectives toward communicative teaching. A training scheme was designed to cater to this need.

Three experts then evaluated the designed training scheme composed of six learning segments. The table on the next page is a summary of the checklist for assessing the learning segments. The three respective trainers on a scale of 1-5 rated these. The scale is as follows:

| | | |
|-------------|---|---|
| Very much | - | 5 |
| Much | - | 4 |
| Just enough | - | 3 |
| Not much | - | 2 |
| Not at all | - | 1 |

Table 2. Trainers' Assessment of the Learning Segments: A Summative Checklist

| ITEM | T 1 | T2 | T3 |
|---|-----|----|----|
| A. FORMAT | | | |
| 1. General Appearance | | | |
| Is the material likely to appeal to the user's aesthetic sense? | 5 | 5 | 3 |
| 2. Component | | | |
| Does the material contain many components that the trainees will have difficulty keeping track of them? | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| 3. Quality | | | |
| Did the researcher use high quality materials in the production process? | 5 | 5 | 4 |
| 4. Appropriateness of Illustrations | | | |
| Are the illustrations of the materials appropriate to the activities? | 4 | 4 | 3 |
| 5. Readability of the Material | | | |
| Is the material readable? | 4 | 5 | 4 |
| B. ORGANIZATION AND CONTENT | | | |
| 6. Approach | | | |
| Does the researcher use an approach consistent with the prescribed topic? | 4 | 5 | 3 |
| 7. Instructional Objectives | | | |
| Are the objectives compatible with the ones prescribed in the segment title? | 5 | 4 | 3 |
| 8. Scope and Sequence | | | |
| Is the scope and sequence of the material compatible with the time frame of the training? | 4 | 4 | 3 |

4. FINDINGS

After the results of the study were gathered, the following relevant points were seen:

1. The college English teachers reported that they developed students' communication skills through question and answer activities in an e-learning mode. These were predominantly observed in the initial stage of this research. Most teachers engaged the students in the lesson by letting them recite only when called. Students also did picture talk. This was seen as another technique used to encourage student talk. In this activity, students formulated sentences out of an exposed picture using the present progressive tense.

To promote students' participation in class, the college English teachers used group dynamics in an e-learning setting. Belonging to a group, each student answers questions orally and earned points. They were not allowed to sit unless the question was answered. The latter activity served as an evaluative measure in the class as observed. It also served as an oral exam.

2. The results of the needs analysis showed that teachers needed to develop competencies in communicative teaching, thereby making maximum usage of the e-learning software. A training scheme needed to be designed for this purpose. Through the needs analysis, the following needed competencies of teachers were discovered. Firstly, teachers are required to value the affective side of language learning. These teachers believed that students perceive language learning negatively since they observed that students either felt uneasy or tensed when asked to speak English. Also, teachers believed that they could not be blamed for these students who use un-English utterances. When they come to college they are already made, a teacher commented.

Moreover, teachers need an update on the use of e-learning classroom strategies through communicative teaching. The lecture method, one that is teacher-oriented was predominantly done in English classes. Very limited chances allowed for student talk. More importantly, teachers have to be exposed to the different strategies of communicative teaching. The Q and A technique was overused. If only they can observe a strategy that really works, they will certainly use it in class. This is one of the reasons why the training scheme was designed.

Another avenue that teachers obviously need to acquire is to examine their course titles. By then, they will see what topics fit in the descriptive title of the course. There were several topics seen in the syllabus which twisted the idea given in the course title. English 1A for instance, a study and thinking skills course, focused solely on the parts of speech for its topics.

Very common evaluative measure used to test students' skills was the paper and pencil test. Teachers are believed to be more creative than adopting just one mind-numbing strategy. Therefore, they need exposure in communicative testing and assessment. By then, not only quizzes and tests will occur in English classes.

3. To develop a training scheme for communicative teaching, the following stages were followed: Needs Analysis, Plan, Create, Try Out, and Assessment (NAPTCA) model. The analysis stage which made use of FGD, classroom observation, questionnaire and documentary evaluation of tests gave the researcher sufficient information on what competencies are needed by college English teachers to develop communication skills of students. The training scheme was then designed based on the needed competencies of English teachers.

The development stage of the scheme had for its baseline data the needs analysis. The scheme, in the form of segments, was then produced. Each segment contained a topic virtual to communicative teaching. Then, the implementation stage followed, actualized in the training of the college English teachers of Capitol University. The trainers who implemented the scheme were experts in the field of communicative teaching.

Before the try out the trainers did a close examination of the segments. They took part in the development of the scheme since they brought materials for sample activities and valuable input.

After the try out, the refinement of the scheme was done. This was based on the evaluation made by the trainers and trainees. During the training, the trainees evaluated the segments in the huddle sessions. The segment content and trainers' presentation of the learning segments were assessed.

After the training, evaluation sheets were given to the participants of the training. They rated the totality of the scheme using the modified evaluation scheme. The comments served as basis for the revision of the learning segments.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Taking the findings as strong points for evaluating this research, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Various opportunities for e-learning talk and student-talk should be provided in English classes. This calls for teachers' creativity in designing meaningful and communicative tasks. After all, communication is but the goal of language instruction. Hence, the usual Q and A technique may not be overused, as there are other strategies to choose from.
2. The needs analysis showed that English teachers lack competencies with the use of E-learning. The activities provided in class did not encourage class interaction. They were the correct usage type if not rote memorizing of the rules of grammar. This therefore, made students more conscious to speak, as they had to think of the correct usage of verbs all the time.
3. Instruments such as FGD and questionnaire cannot be solely relied upon as baseline data in research. Some noted information did not actually happen in the classes observed. This shows that teachers were aware of the idea of e-learning and communicative teaching but did not apply this in class.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following concepts are recommended as a result of the study:

1. An experimental research may be conducted to test the effectiveness of the developed training scheme. This may be compared to another scheme, which gives focus on the grammar approach to teaching English utilizing the e-learning scheme.
2. Teachers need to attend trainings with the design showing the apportioning of the topics per day, with the assessment and activities built into topics. Hence, a designer should detail a training scheme so that a trainee who uses it will just follow using the e-learning serration data schema.
3. Trainings should be conducted on days other than Monday. There is such a thing as blue Monday. People will be late, still unprepared because of the weekend's activities.
4. Too long content of segments may bore the readers/trainees. As such the presentations of concepts have to be capsulated in various formats.

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