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English Language Learners' Attitudes toward the Effectiveness of Communicative Strategies to Develop Their Speaking Skill

A B S T R A C T

The present study aims at finding out English language learners' attitudes toward the communicative strategies that are applied in the classroom and thus discover the effectiveness of these strategies so as to improve the learners' linguistic communicative competence. The aim is achieved by the following null hypothesis which states that English instructors have lacks in teaching and improving the communicative strategies so that the learners have no awareness about the best means to select among these strategies so as to improve their English language main skills generally and speaking skill in particular. The study is limited to the instructors and the students of the second stage of English language department / college of Education / Salahaddin University –Erbil for the academic year 2018-2019. Results show that there is no statistically significance differences among the students concerning the applied communicative strategies but they have positive attitudes towards them. Based on the above result, some conclusions, recommendations and suggestions for future research have been put forward.

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**انطباعات متعلمي اللغة الانكليزية فيما يخص مدى فاعلية التقنيات التواصلية في تطوير مهارات
المحادثة لديهم**

د. بروين شوكت كوثر / كلية التربية / جامعة صلاح الدين

الخلاصة:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى معرفة انطباعات متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية فيما تخص فاعلية التقنيات التواصلية المطبقة في تدريس اللغة الانكليزية واكتشاف مدى فاعلية هذه الاستراتيجيات لتحسين الكفاءة اللغوية لدى المتعلمين. ولأجل تحقيق هذا الهدف تم وضع الفرضية الصفرية التي تنص على أن مدرسي

اللغة الإنجليزية يفتقرون إلى تدريس وتطوير تقنيات التواصل عند تدريس اللغة الانكليزية مما يؤدي الى فقدان الوعي لدى المتعلمين فيما يخص أفضل الوسائل للاختيار من بين هذه الاستراتيجيات لتحسين مهاراتهم الأساسية في اللغة الإنجليزية عموماً ومهارة التحدث خصوصاً. وقد شملت حدود البحث مدرسي وطلاب المرحلة الثانية من قسم اللغة الإنكليزية / كلية التربية / جامعة صلاح الدين – أربيل للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٨-٢٠١٩. وقد اظهرت نتائج الدراسة الحالية عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الطلاب فيما يتعلق بانطباعهم تجاه تقنيات التواصل المطبقة وكان تفاعلهم إيجابياً مع استخدام هذه التقنيات في الصف الدراسي. وعلى ضوء النتائج أعلاه تم وضع الاستنتاجات والتوصيات والمقترحات للدراسات المستقبلية.

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Language is a system which is important to express one's ideas and thoughts and communicate with others. It is our gift for human beings from our creator Almighty Allah. Most of the English language instructors adopt the communicative strategies with the learners so as to enable them to acquire the communicative competence and be able to use English language properly and fluently. The learners of English language department at the college of education appear to have problems of communicating in English for certain reasons such as the deficiency in the use of appropriate communication strategies in speaking context. The communicative strategies that are applied for teaching English Language at English departments have some lacks and they seem to be ineffective to improve the learners' communicative performance; therefore they can't acquire the ability to use the language communicatively. English language is the most dominated language nowadays and both oral and written English skills are necessary and required around the world; therefore to many of learners in English language departments, speaking English seems to be a very challenging task. Since the aim of English language departments is not only to develop knowledge of grammar,

vocabulary and written skills but also to teach oral English skills specially the learners in these departments are going to be English language teachers in the high schools. Most of the learners have lacks concerning the selection of the suitable words or phrases when they speak English. Most of them are not aware of the communicative strategies that help him to overcome his errors in speaking although they are using them through the context of conversation. They know grammar and vocabulary but they can't use this linguistic competence in communication.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The current study tries to achieve the following aims:

1. Exploring the attitudes of the EL learners concerning the effectiveness of the applied communicative language strategies in improving their speaking skills.
2. Investigating the effects of the communicative strategies to modify and improve the students' communicative performance in daily classroom activities.
3. Identifying the communicative strategies that English instructors prefer to apply in their classes for enhancing the learners' speaking skills.
4. Assessing the learners' speaking abilities and their abilities to communicate by using English language fluently and accurately.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

The researcher has set the following hypotheses:

1. The communicative strategies that are applied for teaching English language are not effective enough to improve the learners' speaking skill.
2. The instructors have lacks concerning the application of the communicative strategies in the classroom.

3. The learners' attitudes are negative in the process of selection the best communicative strategy through a conversation which makes them unable to have the aptitude in certain situation.

1.4 Limits of the Study

1. The study is limited to the instructors and the students of the second stage of English language department / College of Education / Salahaddin University –Erbil for the academic year 2018-2019.

1.5 Definitions of Basic Terms

1.5.1 Communicative language Teaching

1. Savignon (2002, 1) writes that “Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) refers to both processes and goals in classroom learning” and that “the central theoretical concept in CLT is communicative competence”.
2. Brown (2007, 378) states that CLT is “an approach to language teaching methodology that emphasizes authenticity, interaction, student-centered learning, task based activities, and communication for the real world, meaningful purposes” .
3. Hymes (1972, 13) confirms that “Communicative competence should be viewed as “the overall underlying knowledge and ability for language which the speaker-listener possesses”.

1.5.2 Conscious Communication Strategies

1. Tarone (1977, 195) states that “Conscious communication strategies are used by an individual to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual's thought”.

2. Corder, (1981, 103) defines communicative strategies CS as “a systematic technique employed by a speaker to express his (or her) meaning when faced with some difficulty”.
3. Færch and Kasper (1983, 36) define Communicative strategies as “potential conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal”.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Background

2.1 An Overview of Communication Strategies

Sleinker in 1972 was the first who presented the term communicative strategies CS as one of the main processes that has the effect on learning and developing the second language. This term was considered to be essential in the field of learning the second language but it wasn't discussed and researched in details. In the same year Savignon indicated the importance of CS and she referred to this as copying strategies and how they play a great role as a component of language teaching and training. Then other researchers such as Dörnyei and Scott (1997), Færch and Kasper (1983), Tarone (1980) and Nakatani (2010) debated that including communication strategies in any communication process not only solves learners' communication problems, but also supports the learner's interaction in target language , which modifies and increases the learners' oral proficiency. Tarone in 1977 was the first researcher who investigated through an empirical study for the first time about more details of using the CS in the communication with presentation of five new types of CSs which were (avoidance, paraphrase, conscious transfer, appeal for assistance and mime). This classification was considered the starting point in the field of investigation about the nature of CSs. But in 1990 Bialystok's work clarified two important factors that are involved in the process of using CSs which are: taking the psychological process of speech production as a basis for

studying CSs and teaching language structure which led other researchers to explore the relationship between CSs and proficiency level of the learners. Since then, great attention has been given to the instruction of CSs and the techniques that are applied by the instructors to enhance using CSs by the learners (Hmaid, 2014, 16-17).

2.2 Classification of Communicative Strategies

Communication strategies are considered the means to fill the gaps which may occur in oral interaction. So strategies are recalled if the speaker of any second language experiences a problem. The basic assumption concerning the original taxonomies is based on that the speaker has two basic means to deal with a problem faces him during a speech. These two means are either avoiding the problem or trying to use the best what the speaker owns of resources to pass his message clearly and appropriately. Generally CSs can be classified as:

- Reduction strategies: these strategies have influence on forming the goal of the communicative process when the speaker may try to avoid pronouncing certain words which imply particularly difficult sounds that also affect the content of a message. Avoiding a topic is an essential strategy when the speaker does not feel confident to talk about this topic. Even a strategy like topic avoidance can play a role in developing strategic competence since they are difficult to be discovered in actual verbal behavior, but they are essential part of a language learner/user's instinctive source.

- Achievement strategies

The first distinction is appeared between strategies at the word or sentence level and strategies at the discourse level. Using these strategies indicate the speaker's ability to find ways of expressing the meaning of a word when the exact term is not available which are realized during the course of interaction or trying to borrow words from the native language. These

achievement strategies at the discourse level are possibly regular and endless, because they deal with the general ability to manage the interaction which is a very complex and difficult process and contains not only strategic and pragmatic skills, but sociolinguistic and sociocultural conventions as well.

- Cooperative strategies: this is a joint effort between two or more people. Which means that the participants in a conversation share an attempt to agree on a meaning in situations where they do not have the same levels of knowledge and skill (Mariani, 2010, 24).

2.3 Factors Affecting the Learners' Choice of Communicative Strategies

English Language learner is required to implement a series of mental assessment and planning steps before selection a particular strategy in his/her communication. Certain concerns are necessary to be taken into consideration when the learner wants to involve in a communicative situation such as: when and where the communication takes place, what the problem is, what is the nature of the topic and who participates in the communication. There are many factors affecting the use of communicative strategies, such as the learner's level of language proficiency, the learner's personality and communicative experience, a learner's attitude towards communicative strategies, the topic source, and the communication situation. These factors can be categorized into three aspects: learners, learning context and communicative context.

1. Learners

The learners' attitudes, level of language proficiency and their personalities may have some impact on the use of communicative strategies. Learners' attitudes towards a particular strategy affect the use of it. This means that the positive attitude certainly brings high frequency of using it.

Communicative strategies such as cooperative, L1-based strategy and nonverbal are actively used if the learners' attitudes towards them are positive (Wei, 2011 , 29).

2. Learning situation

The traditional teaching methods that are applied in the class and the inadequacy of strategic competence can affect the learner's ability to use the suitable strategies; therefore English language instructor should be able to select the suitable method for teaching that creates and improves the learners' communicative competence by increasing the daily communicative activities in the class. Communication context also has a great role concerning the learner's preference for a specific communicative strategy. The learner should have the communicative experiences that enable him to determine and assess his communicative strategy according to the situation that he needs this strategy to enhance his speech and select the suitable language style whether this communication is with his teacher or with a friend. The learners who have good knowledge about their first language may be able to select the strategies differently from those who are less in their knowledge because the rich knowledge learners are more successful to know which strategy fits the gap that appears in his speech. It is affirmed that each of the factors is not able to determine independently the choice of communicative strategies but the interaction of the factors together leads to choosing the suitable communicative strategies by the learners (Ibid.30).

Chapter Three: Procedures

1.3.1 The Participants

The participants of the study are the instructors and the students of the second stage of English language department / college of Education / Salahaddin University –Erbil for the academic year 2018-2019. In order to reach an accurate data the selection process of the sample is done randomly according to the whole population of the students which is 80 so the researcher selected 20% of the whole society. The sample includes 16 students that is suitable scientific percentage for the aims of the study. While the teachers' sample includes four teachers who are specialized in teaching English language communication subject which is considered one of the basic subjects that is taught in this stage. See Table -1-

Table 1: Description of the participants

Gender	Male 8	Female 8
Average Age	19-20	18-19
Total	8	8

This group of students is selected for certain reasons. Firstly they have different levels in English language since the researcher herself has taught them English language communication subject during the first term and there are a lot of individual differences among them that make them a suitable sample for investigation and gathering data. Some of them showed high levels in trying to improve the main skills of English language. Secondly, they have the desire and to improve themselves in speaking skill since they realize that they have some lacks in vocabulary and grammar which appear clearly in their daily communication.

1.3. 2 The Instruments

The following instruments are applied for gathering data:

1. A questionnaire for English language learners since the application of this kind of instruments is useful and practical in gathering data as Sataya, (2012, 273) states “A questionnaire is the main means of collecting quantitative primary data”.
2. Interviews with English language instructors. According to Burns (1999, 118) contends that “Interviews are a popular and widely used means of collecting qualitative data.”
3. Construction an oral test for the learners so as to assess their speaking skill and the sub-skills that are related to this skill such as the ability to recognize and pronounce the sounds, the ability to recognize and use the stress patterns and the ability to hear and produce the melody of the tunes (the rise and fall of the voice).

4. The Analysis of the Results:

Certain findings have been achieved depending on the aims that the researcher has presented during the study which are exploring the attitudes of the EL learners concerning the effectiveness of applying communicative language strategies in improving their speaking skills. Investigating the effects of the CS to modify and improve the students’ communicative performance in daily classroom activities. Identifying the CS that English instructors prefer to apply in their classes for enhancing the learners’ speaking skills. And assessing English language learners’ speaking abilities to communicate fluently and accurately.

4.1 Results of the Students' Questionnaire

The researcher has applied a questionnaire for the students which includes 27 items investigating about their opinions concerning the methods and the techniques that are applied by EL instructor so as to improve and enhance their abilities to acquire the communicative competence and the ability to use and select the suitable communicative strategies through conversation to overcome the breakdowns that face the learner . Through the application of the statistical formula to percentile ,arithmetic mean and the standard deviation, it has been found that 23 variables have scored high standard deviation, while 4 variables has scored middle standard deviation which means that a significantly greater percentage of the learners in the second grade students have positive attitudes towards being able to master English speaking skill and to employ a high use of communicative strategies to convey a message to his listener in a conversation. Also these scores indicate that the communicative teaching methods supply the opportunities for the leaners to acquire the communicative competence and communicative performance in an effective way. See Table -2-

Table 2 : Results of the Students' Questionnaire

ID	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	level
1	Learning English language is important in my life and I'm interested to learn it.	4	3.9	87	H
2	I need to learn English language to express my ideas and communicate with my classmates.	3	3.8	62	H
3	English communication subject is grammar-focused.	2	0.46	56	H

ID	Variable	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	level
5	I exchange my ideas with my classmates using expressions from communication subject.	3.8	1.57	44	H
6	Group working is applied in communication lectures.	3	0.53	44	H
7	I understand all the dialogues and activities of listening that are available in the course.	3.43	0.46	50	H
8	Our teacher sometimes uses Kurdish language in the lecture.	2.25	0.33	50	H
9	I can write essays, compositions and emails grammatically and without mistakes.	2.00	0.68	56	H
10	Audio-visual aids are used in communication course such as videos pictures or CDs.	3	0.63	62	H
11	Skills and tasks are introduced in a slow and manageable manner till you build confidence in yourself while mastering a skill (scaffolding).	3	0.6	62	H
12	The activities in communication lecture allow interaction with my classmates.	2.88	0.730	56	H
13	The teacher always activates my prior exciting knowledge of any topic is discussed in the class.	3.12	0.816	37	H
14	through extended discussions I can learn English language.	3.25	0.730	50	H
15	The situations of teaching dialogues sound natural and real.	2.75	0.730	62	H
16	My English teachers correct my errors in class	3	0.966	50	H

17	Tasks are authentic which means close to real life situations.	2.375	1.032	62	H
18	Speaking activities are developed to start meaningful communication.	3	0.966	50	H
19	Activities are balanced between individual response, pair and group work	3	0.816	56	H
20	In English communication lessons there are classroom conversations and discussions.	3.5	0.894	62	H
21	We work and talk in small groups in English communication lessons.	1.93	1.4	56	M
22	We use songs and movies to learn English.	2	1.032	44	H
23	EL teacher uses visual materials such as pictures and movies.	1,82	1.095	44	M
24	We do role-plays in speaking activity when you put yourself into an imaginary situation! Imaginary people .	2.125	0.894	44	H
25	We do translation exercises.	1.5	0.856	44	M
26	We do oral presentation in front of the class.	3	0.966	38	H
27	I depend to my native language to understand English language in communication lecture.	2.36	0.966	78	M

4.2 Results Related to the Oral Test

It has been found that construction an oral test for the English language learners is a great means to assess their speaking abilities and to explore the types of the communicative strategies that the learners try to use when they face communicating problems or when they try to fill the gabs that appear in their speech. The

researcher aimed to reach the reliable scores concerning the oral test; therefore a grading rubric is developed for this purpose. The left column in the rubric lists the different areas of language and conversation to be assessed, and the top row provides scores for the extent to which each performance is achieved include poor, acceptable and excellent performance. The rubric also includes the objective behind the test, the student's name and instructions about how to account the scores. Allen (2014,1) asserts that rubrics can provide the criteria for assessing students' production or learning behavior, such as essays, reports, portfolios, oral presentations, performances, and group works. Through the application of the statistical formula to percentile, arithmetic mean and the standard deviation, it has been found most of the students have accepted levels in using grammatical, meaningful, accurate and fluent phrases and sentences in their conversation. See Table (4) and Table (5)

Table 4: The Rubric Form for the Oral Test

Objective of the test: The student is required to communicate in English using communicative strategies				
Date :				
Student's Name :				
10 Marks for the whole Test				
5 marks for each part of the performance				
Performance Area	Poor 1	Acceptable 2	Excellent 3	Comments
Grammatical mistakes in	3	2	0	

the performance				
Vocabulary mistakes in the performance	3	2	1	
Pronunciation mistakes in the performance	4	2	1	
Accuracy mistakes in the performance	4	2	1	
Fluency mistakes in the performance	4	2	1	
Instruction: Put a check mark in the appropriate box for each row. Excellent = Performance is above the expectations stated in the outcomes. Acceptable = Performance meets the expectations stated in the outcomes. Poor = Performance does not meet the expectations stated in the outcomes				

Table 5: The Results of the Oral Test

Domains	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	%	Level
Grammar	16	6	2.0976	60	H
Vocabulary	16	8.87	1.060	88	H
Pronunciation	16	4.5	1.290	50	H
Speaking Accuracy	16	5	1.751	50	H
Speaking Fluency	16	3.93	1.1832	40	H

4.3 Results Related to Teachers' Interviews

Fox (2009, 9) states that “Face-to-face or personal interviews are very labour intensive, but can be the best way of collecting high quality data. Face-to-face interviews are preferable when the subject matter is very sensitive, if the questions are very complex or if the interview is likely to be lengthy”. Interviews have been scheduled with four of English communication subject instructors and two questions are asked which are:

1. What are the techniques that are applied in the class so as to teach the increase the learners' abilities to select the suitable communicative strategies through a conversation?
2. What are the challenges or the difficulties that face the students in learning the communicative strategies?

It has been found through the interviews that the instructors use the Communicative Approach in their classes and they try to integrate English four main skills. Concerning the communicative strategies, the instructors focus on achievement strategies more than the other types of strategies. Techniques such group working, group debates and presentation of thematically projects through seminars.

5.1 Conclusion

It has been concluded that application of traditional methods of teaching English language and teaching communication course cannot be useful any more since the learners are in need to have abilities for communication; therefore most of the students have positive attitudes towards using certain types of communicative strategies so as to have fluent conversation. The most significant point is that the learners try to be confident enough when they are involved in communication in any real-life context. To reach such output English language instructors are required to adopt different communicative teaching methods of teaching English language beside traditional methods of language teaching so that they can motivate their learners to comprehend the different types of communicative strategies and being able to choose spontaneously the suitable communicative strategy during the communication.

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