

Assessing Student Teachers Strategic Competence in Speaking English during Teaching Practice

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Abstract

Students' strategic competence in speaking can be interpreted as their ability to maximize the effective usage of all available language means to realize one's personal aim and the overall purpose of communication process. Teaching is all about communication - listening, speaking, reading, presenting and writing. Teachers who hone their communication skills can effectively instruct, advice and mentor students entrusted in their care. The researcher being a teacher educator wanted to assess strategic competence of the student teachers who belong to the B.Sc. B.Ed integrated programme. To assess Student teachers distinctive peculiarities of strategic competence, the specificity of speaking as a skill to teach and as an activity conducted this research using the modern tendencies in evaluation processes following the criterias- cognitive, communicative, goal-seeking, educational-compensatory with the corresponding indicators for evaluation which was established by Ternopil V. Hnatiuks. This paper aims to assess the strategical competency possessed by student teachers. The researcher being a teacher educator handling communication skills and pedagogy of English to the teacher trainees devoted much of her classes to strategy training to develop language learning. At the end of the fourth year the researcher prepared a tool and administered among the student teachers to assess student teachers strategic competency. It has been found that among nine student teachers five student teachers have excellent ability and three student teachers have sufficient ability and one student teacher have low ability and it is due to low content knowledge, communicative, goal seeking and educational compensatory.

Keywords: *Communication, Communication competence, Strategic Competence, Assessing strategical competence, Student teachers*

Introduction

Communication plays an important role in shaping an individual's life, personal as well as professional. Also it is the backbone of any organisation or institution. Success in life to a considerable extent depends on effective communication skills. In today's world of computers and digital media, a strong communication skill base is essential for learners and for smooth functioning of an organisation. As per the Quality Mandate of University Grant Commission (UGC), UGC needs to take initiatives for providing Life Skills (including soft skills) to students enrolled in Institutions of Higher Education especially at under-graduate level. Life skills, though less tangible traits, play an important role in increasing the employability as well as self esteem of the students. These may include communication skills, interpersonal skills, time management, team work, flexibility, problem solving, professional skills, decision making skills, leadership abilities and universal values among others.

University Grants Commission, has insisted all the universities to include Life skills programme which should aim at inculcating in the students both personal and professional skills in the areas of understanding of self and others, interpersonal skills, high performance teams, leadership potential, communication & presentation skills, techniques of problem solving, decision making, fostering creativity and innovation for personal and professional excellence, stress management, time management and conflict management and inculcation of human values. University Grants Commission suggested to have courses on communication skills, Professional skills a.career skills b.team skills, Leadership skills and management skills, universal human values skill . The objective is to enhance one's ability to be fully self aware by helping oneself to overcome all fears and insecurities and to grow fully from inside out and outside in, to increase one's knowledge and awareness of emotional competency and emotional intelligence at place of study/work, to provide opportunity for realising one's potential through practical experience, to develop interpersonal skills

and adopt good leadership behaviour for empowerment of self and others, to set appropriate goals, manage stress and time effectively, to manage competency- mix at all levels for achieving excellence with ethics.

The expected learning outcome being able to Gain Self Competency and Confidence, Practice Emotional Competency, Gain Intellectual Competency, Gain an edge through Professional Competency, Aim for high sense of Social Competency, Be an integral Human Being. These courses require active participation of the students and the faculty as Facilitator, Mentor and Trainer.

Communicative competence is a term in linguistics which refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. Communicative competence is conceived only in terms of knowledge, a healthy balance of sociolinguistic, discourse, strategic and grammatical competence which is very essential for a teacher.

Strategic competence is defined as 'verbal and non-verbal communication **strategies** that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or due to insufficient **competence**.(cannon 1998) Strategic competence is the knowledge of how to use one's language to communicate intended meaning. Strategic competence, an aspect of communicative competence, refers to the ability to overcome difficulties when communication breakdowns occur. Hence, Communication strategies are important in helping learners to communicate successfully when they are faced with a production problem due to their lack of linguistic knowledge. Both native and non-native speakers use communication strategies, but non native speakers use them more frequently. Language users sometimes struggle to find the appropriate language item or structure when attempting to communicate a particular meaning. As beginners the student teachers struggle to communicate due to fear, lack of content knowledge, less preparation etc. In order to overcome communicative barrier the researcher trained the students to adopt the strategies that lead to understanding and ultimately to learning to teach are

1. Appeal for help
2. Asking for repetition
3. Asking for clarification
4. Asking for confirmation
5. comprehension check
6. guessing

To lead a successful life in the globalised world the process like international relations and mutual dependence among others are intensifying the need for communicative interaction thereby demanding the complexity level of communication. This defines one of the primary tasks of modern English language teaching methodology – teaching students not merely to speak English fluently, but strategically competent. Students' **strategic competence in speaking** can be interpreted as their ability to maximize the effective usage of all available vocabulary and language means to realize one's personal aim and the overall purpose of communication process.

As beginners student teachers do adopt much of strategical competencies during their initial stages of teaching. The researcher observed the communication strategies that are adopted by the student teachers during practice sessions of micro-teaching . The following strategies are adopted by the student teachers while they teach:

1. Circumlocution strategy
2. Word coinage-intended meaning

3. Literal translation
4. Foriengizing
- 5 .Approximation
- 6.Self-correction
- 7.Repetition
- 8.All purpose words strategy
- 9.Mumbling strategy
- 10.Use of similar sounding words
- 11.language switching

Need and significance of the study

Teaching is all about communication - listening, speaking, reading, presenting and writing. Teachers who hone their communication skills are prepared to instruct, advice and mentor students entrusted in their care. Fundamental to teacher and student success is the teacher’s ability to communicate effectively with students, parents and colleagues. Without good communication skills, teachers disable the learning process as well as their own career mobility. Teachers must have good communication skills to help their students achievement in academic success. Developing Student teachers strategic competence is important to improve speaking skills to become effective teachers. As beginners the student teachers struggle to communicate due to fear, lack of content knowledge, less preparation etc. In order to overcome communicative barrier the researcher trained the students to adopt the strategies that lead to understanding and ultimately to learning to teach.

Sample

Nine Student teachers of B.Sc B.Ed IV year during the academic year 2016-20 at Vels Institute of Science Technology and Advanced Studies are taken for the study.

Methodology

Observation technique is used.

Tool

“**Student Teachers Strategic Competence**” self made tool by the researcher.

The researcher wanted to assess strategical competence that the student teachers use during teaching practice. The researcher prepared **Student Teachers Strategic Competence tool**. This tool was made by adopting the suggested criteria for testing strategic competence in speaking for monitoring students’ performance by Ternopil V. Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University.

Criteria for assessing strategic competence in speaking English is based on considering the **the content of strategic competence, peculiarities of speech forms, Curriculum for English Language Development.**

Criteria of Strategic Competence Development in Speaking suggested by Ternopil V. Hnatiuk National Pedagogical University

Criterion Indicators

Cognitive

At the cognitive level if the students teachers are good they will be able to interpret oral speech utterances correctly understand interlocutor’s reaction, provide quick communicative reaction, decision-making, construct images of action results, predict, program meaning, make deep critical analysis and synthesis, evaluate and control one’s actions and communicative situation in general.

Communicative

At communicative level if the student teachers are good they will be able to use broad repertoire of lexico-grammatical structures, link phrases and clichés, adequate pausing, articulatory and intonation

framing of speech, compliance with conventional norms of greeting and parting, relative continuity of speech, relative completion of utterances. They will be good in addressing the audience, clearly express one's own position/idea/etc, provide logical and persuasive arguments, adequateness of language tone and style of communication, present/discuss information on difficult topics linguistically and semantically smoothly. They will also be able to quickly repair communicative, compliance with the public speaking rules, hold attention of listeners during a sufficient amount of time, smoothness and exactness in turn-taking, quick and adequate reaction for difficult /unknown /unexpected turns in communicative behaviour of interlocutors.

Goal-seeking

Student teachers whose goal is higher will manifest personal communicative intentions (tactical purposes), combine different tactics for maximally effective manifestation, manifest one's personal global aim (strategic purpose), realize common global purpose of communicative process like flexible changing of strategies.

Educational compensatory

Student teachers who adequately use non-verbal strategies, explain differently, ask for help, Operate big amounts of information for verbalizing communicative strategies, self-control and self-correction has the quality of educational compensatory.

The researcher since handled communication skill course for B.Sc .B.ed students, trained the students to adopt the strategies that lead to understanding and ultimately to learning to teach in the following areas

- 1.Appeal for help
- 2.Asking for repetition
- 3.Asking for clarification
4. Asking for confirmation
- 5.comprehension check
- 6.guessing

At the end of fifth semester the researcher wanted to diagnose the level of strategic competence among the student teachers. The researcher has developed a self made tool to assess student teachers strategic competence by adapting the suggested criteria to diagnose strategic competence by Ternopil V. Hnatiuk . This is estimated on the basis of the total sum of points (a three point scale rating) for every indicator of the four criteria. Cognitive criterion is represented by 9 indicators, communicative criterion – by 13 indicators (in each form of speech), goal-seeking criterion – by 5 indicators, educational-compensatory criterion – by 5 indicators; the four criteria are represented by 32 indicators. Diagnosing the level of strategic competence development based on the proposed criteria is estimated on the basis of the total sum of points for every indicator of the four criteria. Cognitive criterion is represented by 9 indicators, communicative criterion – by 13 indicators (in each form of speech), goal-seeking criterion – by 5 indicators, educational-compensatory criterion – by 5 indicators; the four criteria are represented by 32 indicators.

The researcher during the student teachers internship programme visited the teaching practice schools and observed all the student teachers classes keeping them informed, using the tool .

The observation has been recorded using the following sheet.
Sample observation of student 1 is shown in the table 1.

Table 1

Student 1 Student 2 Student 3

Category	Statements	N A	P A	S A	E A																
1.Cognitive	To be able to interpret oral speech utterances correctly				3																
2	To be able understand interlocutor's reaction			2																	
3	To be able to provide quick communicative reaction				3																
4	To be able to decide				3																
5	To be able to construct images of action results			2																	
6	To be able predict			2																	
7	To be able to program meaning			2																	
8	To be able to make deep critical analysis and synthesis			2																	
9	To be able to evaluate and control one's actions and communicative situation in general				3																
10 Communi cative	To be able to use freely broad repertoire of lexicogrammatical structures, linking phrases and clichés				3																
11	To be able to give adequate pausing, articulatory and intonation framing of speech			2																	
12	To be able to comply with conventional norms of greeting and parting				3																
13	To be able to use relative continuity of speech			2																	
14	use relative completion of utterances				3																
15	To be able to address the audience				3																
16	To be able to clearly express one's own position/idea/etc.				3																
17	To be able to provide logical and persuasive arguments			2																	
18	To be able to use adequate language tone and style of communication			2																	
19	To be able to present/discuss information on difficult topics linguistically and semantically smoothly			2																	

20	To be able to quickly repair communicative			3															
21	To be able to comply with the public speaking rules			2															
22	To be able to hold attention of listeners during a sufficient amount of time			3															
23	To be able to be smooth and exact in turn-taking			2															
24	To be able to be quick and adequate reaction for difficult /unknown /unexpected turns in communicative behaviour of interlocutors			2															
25 Goal-seeking	To be able to manifest personal communicative intentions (tactical purposes)			3															
26	To be able to combine different tactics for maximally effective manifestation of strategies			2															
27	To be able to manifest one's personal global aim (strategic purpose)			2															
28	To be able to realize of common global purpose of communicative process			3															
29	To be able to make flexibly changes in strategies			2															
28 Educational compensatory	To be able to adequately use non-verbal strategies			2															
29	To be able to explain differently			2															
30	To be able to ask for help			3															

Having observed the student teachers performance in the teaching practice classes during the internship their performance is graded according to a four-point scale (by each indicator) **zero points – no ability**
one point – poor ability
two points - sufficient ability
three points – excellent ability.

Therefore, the maximum amount of points scored equals to 96 points. Depending on the results of students' performance a low (58 points or less), intermediate (82 points or less) or high level (83 or more) of strategic competence is determined.

Results , Discussions and Suggestions

On the analysis made on the observations of nine student teachers during their teaching practice, it has been found that five students have scored more than 83 points and above which shows that they have an excellent ability in their strategic competence. From this it can be interpreted that they are good in content, communication, goal seeking as well as educational compensatory. Three student teachers have scored below 82 points. This shows that they are sufficiently able in strategic competence and scored high in cognitive and communicative criteria alone. One student teacher has

scored just 57 therefore exhibited low level of strategic competence. It has been found that student teacher who has low level of strategic competence has scored very low in all the criteria cognitive, communicative, goal seeking and educational compensatory. Therefore the student has been advised to be more thorough with the content of the pedagogy and also to take more training and to be in the target language conversation to improve communicative competency. To be strategically competent one must be in the target language conversation to improve to the higher level of fluency. The three students who have scored below 82 points are sufficiently able in cognitive and communicative criteria but poor in goal seeking and educational compensatory. Student teachers who have scored higher than 83 points have excellent ability in strategic competence and they have scored very high points in goal seeking and educational compensatory criteria also apart from cognitive and communicative.

Any person who is not a mother-tongue speaker or a true bilingual must rely on some incomplete and imperfect competence. Strategic competency helps to solve communication problems and can contribute to the development of an overall communicative competence. The present study is made to assess strategic competence of only speaking skill in English. Studying specific tasks for assessment and developing tools of evaluating strategic competence in writing and interaction activities open new prospects for further educational research.

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