

Conceptualizing Instructional Strategies Towards Communication Competence Among UiTM Students

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Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this study is to formulate a framework suggesting instructional strategies as an antecedent towards communication competence among students.

Methodology: Five main instructional methods have been studied extensively: Direct Instruction, Indirect Instruction, Interactive Instruction, Independent Study and Experiential Learning. These instructional strategies expected to influence communication competence based on motivation, knowledge, skills and culture. Two main focuses in the pedagogical aspect of instructional methods in teaching and learning are how lessons are transferred to the students and how they applied

Expected implications: The research outcomes will be divided into two main categories. One is for the lecturers to apply specific teaching techniques (either teacher-centered or student-centered or both) to maximize learning experience for their students and to enhance communication competence among them. Second, this study will testify the preferred learning style to enhance students' communication competence according to their fields of studies.

Research implications: This study is significance to both practitioners and theoretical aspects. In the practical aspects, this study provides direct implications towards communication competence. In the theoretical aspect, this study is significant in exploring in depth of instructional strategies which allows the educators to be as creative as possible to encourage students in class involvement that leads the effect towards the communication competences.

Keywords: Instructional Strategies, Communication Competence, Student Engagement

Introduction

In the most western countries, students engagement is the key element in any teaching methodologies, also known as the indirect teaching methodology. Direct teaching is teacher

focused while indirect teaching is student focused and the incidental return is by producing more competent communicators among the students. Hunt (2003) reported that students in general, learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process. This aspect of learning process is not widely applied in Asian classroom settings where learning and instructions are given from teacher to students (teacher-centered). Astin's (1984) theory encouraged student-teacher contact for students for maximizing learning experience which is lacking in Malaysian classes. If these elements are fulfilled, ultimately, students will become better communicators.

Presently, unemployment among the graduates becomes an issue, not only in Malaysia but also worldwide. The Department of Statistics Malaysia (2021) found that the unemployment rate in Malaysia had increased from 3.7 % in 2009 to 4.5% in May 2021. Unemployment among the graduates is highly attributed to their inability to communicate effectively (TalentCorp, 2015). This study shall explore the enhancement of communication among UiTM students in preparation for their working lives through lecturers instructional methods.

Problem Statement

In order to be proficient communicators, students need many opportunities to interact in social and academic situations. Effective teachers are expected to organize and manage the classroom environment as an efficient learning environment to maximize engagement rates and at the same time, encourage their students' participation in classroom discussions, welcome their contributions, and motivate them by engaging in such practices (Cazden, 2001; Stipek, 2002, Kyriakides, 2008). However, many educators often allow their less proficient students to remain silent or to participate less than their English-fluent peers (Wilhelm, 2004). Mohr (2011) reported that students will be more successful if they participated in classrooms. The result was better student engagement and communicator in indirect sequences. Essentially, teachers can elicit more from the less proficient communicator if they considered various response options and teaching instructions. Abdullah (2015) mentioned that the phenomenon of disengagement exists in Malaysian higher institutions and this was supported by Thang and Azarina Alias (2007) that the majority of students in higher education in public and private Malaysian universities were teacher-centred and lacked personal autonomy. Unfortunately, not much attention has been given to the issue of preferred teaching/learning among graduates student at the higher education sector in Malaysia (Hashim, 2014).

Literature Review

Communication Competence

Much work has been done in the area of competence in communication, especially in the competence of interpersonal communication but not necessarily regarding specific methods of education area. Lailawati (2008) regarded communication competence is the demonstration of communication knowledge through the appropriate use of communication skills. Some researchers have united to define and describe the communication competencies considered critical to students' personal, professional, and academic success, while others have studied why communication competence is important for students. Purhonen (2012) stated interpersonal communication competence requires knowledge about effective and appropriate interpersonal communication, motivation to engage in social interaction, meta-cognitive communication skills, as well as the interpersonal communication skills needed to act in a way that the interactants perceive to be both effective and appropriate.

On the other hand, Hanapi (2004) reported a study conducted by Central Bank of Malaysia (2002) also found that the other Malaysian graduates are less skilled as compared to the

international graduates. The skills include technical skills, problem-solving skills and communication skills, especially in English language. In addition to these, a survey conducted by the World Bank and Talent Corporation found that 90% of companies believe that university graduates should have more industrial training by the time they graduate, and 81% of companies surveyed rated communication skills as a major deficit among graduates (Central Bank of Malaysia, 2016).

Hence, the distinction involves both where the learner's attention is concentrated and the pedagogical context in which the opportunity for learning is available. Malaysian students (typically the Malay students) may come from cultures that do not expect them to ask questions during classroom discussions. These students often perceive the teacher to have elevated status and think that they should respectfully listen rather than talk in the company of their teachers (Williams, 2011) and thereby assume a more passive role.

i. Motivation

According to (Alshmemri, 2017) the definition of motivation is 'how to provide something to a person to drive him/her to do something'. Motivation in learning, reflects on students' engagement and contribution in a learning environment. Active and highly motivated students will spontaneously involve in activities without expecting any external rewards (Skinner & Belmont, 1993). Meanwhile to encourage a low motivated student, external rewards are needed to convince students to participate in activities.

ii. Knowledge

Knowledge is a highly valued state in which a person is in cognitive contact with reality. It is, therefore, a relation (Zagzebski, 2017). On one side of the relation is a conscious subject, and on the other side is a portion of reality to which the knower is directly or indirectly related.

iii. Skills

A skill is defined as "an ability to do an activity or job well, especially because one have practised it" (Cambridge Dictionary Online). Bacolod (2009), using Dictionary of Occupational Titles (DOT) variables based on cognitive, people and motor skills found that people in cities are more skilled in small cities.

iv. Culture

Culture is "the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time" (Cambridge Dictionary Online).

Instructional Strategies

Instructional strategy is a concept, guideline, approach, or main line to conduct instruction, measure and evaluation for accomplishing the instructional goals (Seechaliao, 2017). In other words, instructional strategies are the activities used to engage learners in the learning process where these strategies are used to engage learner to become independent, strategic learners through reading, listening, collecting, thinking, etc.

Akdeniz (2016) quoted that instructional strategies refer to individual and specialized fields, which are: direct instruction, indirect instruction, interactive instruction, independent study and experiential instruction.

The literature on instructional characteristics in general education classrooms reveals a prevalent assumption that teachers who assist their students to construct knowledge are more effective than those who transmit it. Effective pedagogy seeks an appropriate balance of direct and indirect teaching in diverse contexts in order to fulfil particular student goals. It helps

identify and make explicit learning goals and empower students to attain those goals. Other methods of teaching which are not fully incorporated in classroom instructions in Malaysian universities are the indirect, experiential, independent and interactive. The bulk of the teaching instruction is conducted through direct teaching (teacher-centered). The issue is the extent to which learners can acquire knowledge incidentally, in the sense of being a by-product of their main learning activity inside or outside the classroom, rather than through activity that is intended to enhance their cognitive skills.

However, many universities, faculties, schools and departments of higher education have been undergoing a significant pedagogical transition from the traditional teacher-centred approach to a student-centred approach to teaching and learning over the past few decades (Lea, 2003). Student-centred learning had been found to be an effective learning approach that develops better study skills among the students such as the higher order thinking skills and the creative thinking skills whereby the students feel it is more fun and allow to provides for sharing ideas (Zain et al., 2012, Krishnan 2015).

Kassim (2014) compared between the traditional teacher-centred and student-centred approach whereby teacher-oriented focus on the teacher as the expert in transmitting knowledge to the student, who is the novice. Meanwhile student-centred approach places the student at the centre of the learning process and is generally intended to provide students with the autonomy to actively seek out and construct meaning from information and previous experience.

i. Direct instruction

Wells (1998) suggests that direct instruction relate with the knowledge of the educators through assisting the students in extending what they understand and are able to do. The approach of this ensure the students consistently engaged in learning basic knowledge through effective lessons, corrective feedback and opportunities for practice. However, it should not be assumed that it is the teacher's responsibility alone. By giving the opportunities and encouragement, students at every age are capable of decision making and of acting to put those decisions into practice. Nevertheless, it is the teacher that must take the lead and set the tone.

ii. Indirect instruction

Böttcher (2013) stated that contrast to direct instruction, in indirect instruction the learning environment contains no information or only parts of the target concepts, such as the goal of the learning process. A well-known approach following the concept of indirect instruction is problem-based teaching (Sutherland 2002; Hmelo-Silver 2004; Gijbels et al. 2005).

iii. Interactive instruction

Interactive instruction is defined in a simpler word: the combination of interactive teaching and interactive learning supported by technological tools (Sessoms 2008). This would allow the opportunities for teachers to teach in interactive learning environment. However, teachers should be guided with appropriate training and support continuously to use such tools to support interactive teaching and learning with digital tools.

iv. Independent study

Johnsen (2009) summarized independent study as a planned research process that is similar to one used by a practicing professional or authentic to the discipline; is facilitated by the teacher; and focuses on lifelike problems that go beyond the regular class setting. It involves many kinds of independent learning activities such as practicing a skill, doing independent research, typing a report and many more.

v. Experiential learning

Experiential learning theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience; thus knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience"(Kolb, 2014). There are three popular forms of experiential learning: action learning, future search and outdoor education. Experiential education, which takes students into the community, helps students both to bridge classroom study and life in the world and to transform inert knowledge into knowledge-in-use (Eyler, 2009). In other words, it is a process whereby the learner relates with the world and combines new learning into old constructs.

Theoretical Framework

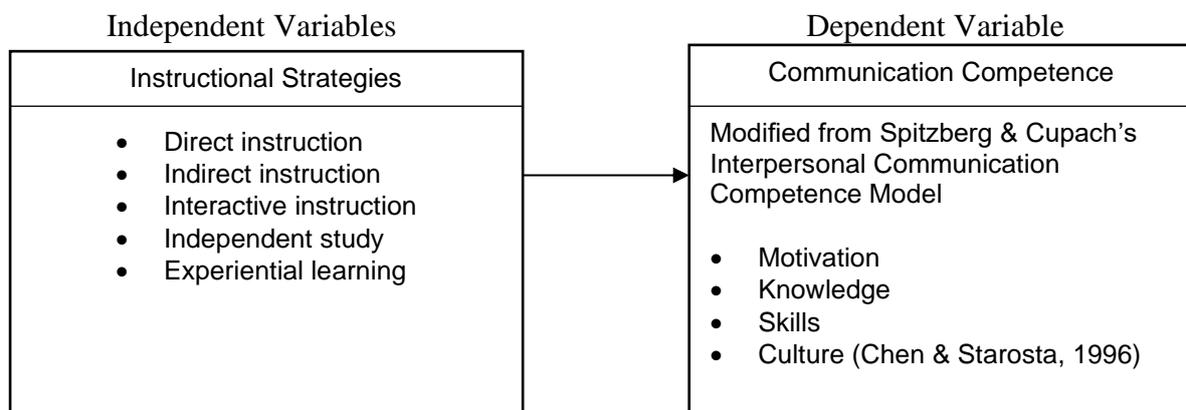


Figure 1: Theoretical Framework

Discussion and Conclusion

As conclusion, this study is significance to both practitioners and theoretical aspects. In the practical aspects, this study provides direct implications towards communication competence. For example, instructional strategy is an entity who involve directly towards communication competence among lecturers. It can be used as an indicator to select the right people to be as an educator. The results shed light on the debate concerning teaching practices, suggesting that there is a need for multiple instructional approaches when teaching students in chosen platform during pandemic situation. Given the significant and direct role of instructional strategies on student learning outcomes, both research and teaching practices should remain focussed on both the suitable strategies that target the whole class, as well as those that target individual students in inclusive groups. In this way, one may understand how educators address diverse learner needs, the factors that influence their teaching practices, as well as how teaching practices evolve over time.

From the theoretical aspect, this study is significant in exploring in depth of instructional strategies which allows the educators to be as creative as possible to encourage students in class involvement that leads the effect towards the communication competences such as motivation, knowledge, skills and culture. Examining this potential relationship further, adding the support by the management would encourage students' involvement to be a step ahead leading the future of learning process.

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