Building Strategic Bridges in Communication: Context of Teaching Strategic Competence among English Language Learners as Basis for a Teaching Framework

Kristel E. Ganado[1]

[1]Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Graduate School Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur, Philippines

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Abstract: This qualitative study examined the communication strategies employed by English language teachers to develop the strategic competence of Grade 11 students in the Senior High Schools of Candon City Division. The study was guided by four key research questions: (1) What communication strategies are employed by the teachers in developing strategic competence among learners?; (2) What challenges do teachers encounter in developing strategic competence among learners?; (3) How do teachers cope in addressing their challenges in developing strategic competence among learners?; and (4) What framework in teaching strategic competence among learners can be developed? Data were gathered through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and video recordings. The study identified four key communication strategies used by teachers to foster strategic competence in students: (1) Achievement Strategies, which involve using paraphrasing and compensation techniques to maintain communication despite language gaps; (2) Stalling Strategies, which are used to manage communication breakdowns by buying time or requesting clarification; (3) Self-Monitoring, where students are encouraged to monitor and correct their language use; and (4) Interactional Strategies, which include requesting feedback, seeking clarification, and confirming understanding during interactions. In exploring the challenges faced by teachers, five key themes emerged from the interviews: (1) Managing students' fear of making mistakes, which inhibits active participation; (2) Dealing with students' limited real-life exposure to English, which affects their ability to use English spontaneously; (3) Lack of clear guidance in teaching communication strategies, indicating a gap in teacher training resources; (4) Pressure from curriculum demands and grammar-focused instruction, which limits the space for teaching communication strategies; and (5) Challenges from large classes and heavy workloads, which hinder personalized attention and strategy-focused teaching. The coping strategies employed by teachers to address these challenges revealed five major themes: (1) Use of scaffolded tools and multimodal resources, such as visual aids, sentence frames, and real-life tasks to support strategic language use; (2) Integration of real-life and meaningful communication tasks, such as role-plays and simulations, to enhance student engagement; (3) Establishment of a supportive and non-judgmental classroom climate, where students are encouraged to take risks and learn from mistakes; (4) Reliance on personal experience and informal learning, wherein teachers use their own linguistic experiences to teach students effective communication strategies; and (5) Reinforcement of student effort and communicative confidence, through positive feedback and recognition of effort over mere accuracy. Based on these findings, a Strategic Competence Teaching Framework (SCTF) was developed, emphasizing the strategic integration of communication strategies into daily teaching practices, the importance of teacher training, and the creation of a supportive learning environment. This framework offers a structured approach to developing strategic competence, ensuring that teachers can effectively support their students in acquiring practical communication skills. The study contributes to the broader discourse on strategic competence in language education, advocating for a more systematic and scaffolded approach to teaching communication strategies in secondary language learning contexts.

Keywords: *Strategic Competence, Communication Strategies, Language Proficiency, Teacher Development, Qualitative Research.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Effective communication in English involves more than linguistic proficiency; it requires strategic competence. This includes skills such as paraphrasing, stalling, and clarification to manage misunderstandings. In multilingual classrooms, especially in the Philippines, this competence is vital. Existing literature emphasizes grammatical and sociolinguistic components but underexplores how teachers foster strategic competence. This study investigates how English teachers in the Candon City Division employ communication strategies to support learners, aiming to propose a framework for strategic competence instruction.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study used a qualitative case study approach involving five weeks of classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with Grade 11 English teachers who have at least three years of experience. Data were gathered using observation protocols, video recordings, and validated through member checking. Thematic analysis was employed, guided by Celce-Murcia's components of strategic competence: avoidance, achievement, stalling, self-monitoring, and interactional strategies.

III. FINDINGS

➢ *Strategies Used*
Teachers primarily used four communication strategies:

- **Achievement Strategies**: Using paraphrasing and compensation techniques to maintain communication despite language gaps.

- **Stalling Strategies**: Managing communication breakdowns by buying time or requesting clarification.

- **Self-Monitoring**: Encouraging students to monitor and correct their language use.

- **Interactional Strategies**: Requesting feedback, seeking clarification, and confirming understanding during interactions.

➢ *Challenges in Teaching Strategic Competence*
Five key challenges emerged:

- **Managing Students' Fear of Making Mistakes**: Inhibits active participation.

- **Limited Real-Life Exposure to English**: Reduces spontaneous language use.

- **Lack of Guidance on Strategy Instruction**: Highlights a training gap.

- **Curriculum Pressure and Grammar-Focused Instruction**: Limits flexibility in teaching communication strategies.

- **Large Classes and Heavy Workloads**: Make personalized instruction difficult.

➢ *Coping Strategies Employed by Teachers*
Teachers employed five major coping strategies:

- **Use of Scaffolded Tools and Multimodal Resources**: Visual aids, sentence frames, and real-life tasks.

- **Integration of Real-Life and Meaningful Tasks**: Role-plays and simulations to engage students.

- **Supportive Classroom Climate**: Encouraging risk-taking and learning from mistakes.

- **Use of Personal Experience and Informal Learning**: Drawing on their own linguistic experiences.

- **Reinforcement of Student Effort and Confidence**: Through positive feedback and recognition.

➢ *Proposed Framework in Teaching Strategic Competence*
The Strategic Competence Teaching Framework (SCTF) includes:

- **Strategic Integration**: Embedding strategies into daily instruction.

- **Authentic Communication Tasks**: Promoting real-life interaction.

- **Teacher Training**: Enhancing teacher capacity to instruct on strategic competence.

- **Supportive Learning Environment**: Encouraging experimentation and confidence-building.

IV. CONCLUSION

Strategic competence is crucial for learners to effectively communicate in English, especially in diverse classroom settings. This study highlights the importance of equipping teachers with the knowledge and tools to integrate communication strategies into daily instruction. By identifying strategies, challenges, coping mechanisms, and a concrete framework, the study offers practical guidance for enhancing communicative ability in Senior High School English classrooms.

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