



The Role of Teachers on Fostering Young Learners' Communication Strategies

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Abstract

In globally developing world, one of the main purposes of teaching English language has been known as improving communication in order to contact easily in all real life contexts such as trading, marketing, using technology and educational atmospheres. In this sense, communication strategies that are known as facilitating communication by releasing problems of L2 learners while learning a new language has gained importance in language learning and teaching studies as stating its necessity to enhance communication effectively. It is also suggested that communication strategies have been thought not only as informal and unconscious actions but also as systematic and conscious processes for learners. Yet, nowadays it has been stated that the use of communication strategies must also be developed for young learners even if those have required meta-cognitive abilities and mental capacity in language learning process, since teaching English to young learners has been a rising concepts in this era and communicating actively has also been a significant task for all language learners regardless of their ages and language proficiencies. However, it is believed that the use of communication strategies cannot be easily developed by young learners' themselves, because they may not have enough cognitive abilities and knowledge on this field. Therefore, teachers have a keystone role on counseling and guiding them on the use of communication strategies in their language learning. For this reason, in this study, the current positions and knowledge of teachers on improving communication strategies in primary schools are tried to be revealed as referring related literature. Then, the role of teachers on fostering young learners' communication strategies in classroom environment is aimed to be determined in terms of teaching English effectively to young learners in primary schools.

Keywords: Communication Strategies, Young Learners, ELT Teachers in Primary Schools

1. Introduction

In producing language, communication is an indispensable part of completing tasks and performing language skills because it generally means contacting with others in an appropriate way. In theory, it is assumed that communication is a term that is used to clarify a basic and special human behavior [1]. When a toddler begins to say a few words in native language, it is believed that parents can communicate with their children and they begin to understand each other during their daily routines. This means that saying just a few words and understanding the words used by others is the first step of communication. However, in learning L2, the process can be seen as more complex by learners, since producing a language or performing language tasks both in and out of classroom consists of communicating effectively. Similarly, one of the most aims of modern language teaching is to motivate learners on communicating competently.

Since 1970s, researchers and educators have been mainly focused on philosophical and educational aspects of communication and language learning because those two phenomenons have been intersected in nearly all language learning studies. After those years, it has been accepted that communicating effectively has been a significant part of language learning and learners have to develop their communicative competence if they want to be good language learners and users. As for communication competence, on the other hand, Canale and Swain (2, 1980) presents commonly accepted four basic aspects known as *grammatical competence*, *socio-cultural competence*, *strategies competence* and *discourse competence*. As it is realized in those aspects, one of the most significant and vital aspects of communicative competence mentioned under the title of *strategic competence* consists of knowing communication strategies and having an ability to use these strategies effectively during the communication. In this sense, it is claimed that language learners have tended to use some strategies during communicating in their target language. According to Canale (1983), language learners have unconsciously been aware of some communication strategies

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and they have used them in their own language process; accordingly, communication strategies should be taught since they are universal and they are picked up in producing L1 [2].

Accordingly, communication strategies are seen as the steps of developing the effectiveness of communication [4], since it can be defined as some techniques that are used to cope with difficulties during the communication in an unknown but needed to be learnt L2. However, Manchon (5, 2000) stated that L2 teaching needs to be enhanced via communication strategies for language learners in order to develop communicating effectively in target language. As for the benefits and necessity of communication strategies, it is generalized that these strategies provides an understanding on the problems which are based on communication while learning a language; they also enhance language learners' confidence [6]; and finally they acknowledge ELT teachers, program administrators and researchers on the properties of communication strategies as displaying the integration of strategy use in classrooms [7].

As referring the advantages mentioned above, it can be said that communication strategies have a significant for teachers who have been aimed to teach L2 effectively to their learners. Similarly, it is known that teachers who know and use strategies into their teaching process can be more successful and attractive for language learners [8]. However, as considering some of the characteristics of communication strategies such as *problematicity*, *consciousness* and *intentionality* [9]; the use of strategies should be guided by teachers, because learners may not have knowledge on the correct use of strategies and they also cannot be aware of communication strategies during the learning process. For this reason, teachers have a key role on enhancing teaching environment in terms of the use of communication strategies and they have to support their learners to use these strategies appropriately.

In this study, due to the key roles of ELT teachers on enhancing language learners' communication strategy use, it is aimed to reveal the current positions and knowledge of teachers on the use of communication strategies. Then, the role of teachers on fostering learners' communication strategy use is also aimed to be discussed to support guidance for teachers on this field. As for the learner group in this study, young learners who have been educated in secondary schools are determined since the importance of enhancing strategy use as early as possible is suggested by many researchers [8,7].

2. Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study is conducted as a qualitative research method in which researchers collect qualitative data as using appropriate data collection instruments for their researches and supplying deep analysis for their studies. In terms of the participants, 58 ELT teachers, 47 females and 11 males, working in secondary state schools in Turkey are selected via convenience sampling method. For the data collection instrument, a semi-structured interview form designed by the researcher is used and the answers of the teachers are coded as referring the related literature on the qualitative data analysis. However, while designing this form, it is realized that there have been a number of taxonomies on communication strategies; as for this study, the taxonomy developed by Oxford (8, 1990) is preferred because it is the mostly used and referred taxonomy on the use of strategies [10]. In this taxonomy, communication strategies are separated into two sub-titles as *guessing intelligently* and *overcoming limitations in speaking and writing*. With regard to this classification, the questions in the semi-structured interview are covered with some basic concepts such as the use of linguistic clues, using bodily movements, and switching to the mother language. At the end of the data collection and data analysis process, the role of teachers on this field are suggested as revealing their ideas and current knowledge on communication strategies.

3. Discussion

In this study, 58 ELT teachers conveniently selected in Turkey were interviewed one by one as using the semi-structured interview form that consisted of 21 questions about the knowledge, awareness and ideas of teachers on the use of communication strategies which were classified by Oxford (8, 1990). At the end of the data collection process, the answers of the teachers were coded and analyzed for the study.

As a result of the data analysis, it was realized that all of the ELT teachers who were participated in this study had problems on the use communication strategies for their young learners. Nearly %78 of the teachers did not know communication strategies and they could not define them for language learning. Surprisingly, nearly %87 of the teachers had not enough knowledge about the necessity and importance of the communication strategies even if they had courses on this theme during their



university years. At the beginning of the study, it was thought that ELT teachers could have been knowledgeable about the strategy use since their age range was determined as 32.8 and they were seen as fresh and motivated teachers; however at the end of this study, it was realized that many of the teachers were not interested in the use of communication strategies during their teaching process. Accordingly, %82 of the participated stated that grammar and vocabulary teaching should be more important than the communicative competence; this result may be caused because of the exam system in Turkey. It means that in Turkey English language proficiency of language learners are determined via different multiple-choice tests and the scores of these tests can be used in many different areas such as being accepted in Master programs, getting a job and being accepted in different certificate programs. For this reasons, ELT teachers in Turkey could be seen as more related to teach grammar and vocabulary than to teach communicative skills.

In another result of this study, it was seen that the participants stated that if they had enough knowledge on the use communicative strategies, they could try to integrate those into their teaching program. Additionally, they suggested that the exam system for language learning should consist of some aspects for speaking skill and communicative competence of learners.

4. Conclusion

This study suggested that ELT teachers have some problems on the use of communication strategies for young learners during language teaching. Even if the results of this study consisted of some local problems that were specific to Turkey, it can be generalized that ELT teachers should be trained to foster the use of communicative strategies for young learners, because these learners cannot be aware of strategy use due to their young age and low language proficiency. In this sense, it is claimed by many researchers that teachers should be knowledgeable on the use of strategies and they have to improve their learners' strategy preferences in order to conduct a more enjoyable and effective teaching environment. All in all, as using different types of communication strategies, as enhancing teaching environment via different teaching instruments that are based on communication strategies and evaluating young learners' strategy use thanks to colorful and attractive techniques, teachers can foster their learners' communication strategy use in language learning.

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