

## **A closer look on Filipino ESL teachers' best practices: A basis for a multiculturally responsive and eclectic teaching approach**

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**Abstract** - English as a Second Language teaching in the Philippines has become popular worldwide, particularly among Asian students. This is a strong indicator that Filipino teachers are able to facilitate effective teaching-learning process amidst the presence of multilingualism and multiculturalism. Banking on this premise, this paper attempted to explore on the best practices of ESL teachers employ in promoting the macro skills among their culturally diverse students. To achieve this objective, a general qualitative inquiry design using a validated structured interview guide served as the primary data collection tool. The study had 8 Filipino ESL teachers who were purposively chosen following criteria set by the researcher. Results showed that the teachers purposely differentiate their approaches depending on the levels, cultural background, learning styles, and preferences of the students. Moreover, these approaches are generally aligned with the aim of scaffolding the students to improve their English language proficiency. Some of these include role-playing, essay writing, book reports, modeling, sentence diagramming, and the like. These results are congruent with the three approaches Martin (2014) claim namely Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT). From these findings, the researcher framed the significance of a multiculturally responsive and eclectic teaching approach. Multiculturalism is found to be a significant factor in the ESL classrooms as it can create an inclusive a classroom atmosphere which can promote successful acquisition and learning of the English language.

**Keywords:** Communicative Language Teaching; ESL; ESP; Task-Based Language Teaching; Localization and Contextualization

## I. INTRODUCTION

Over the past years, the Philippines has been one of the centers for English as a Second Language (ESL) studies across Asian countries. It is mostly chosen by East Asians who aim to develop their communicative competence necessary to the 21<sup>st</sup> century arena. These students explore the English Language for two main reasons – either for further academic studies or a tool for communication. Consistently, this is supported by Schmidt (2021) who mentions that the ever-growing global demand for English teachers has opened doors for employment among Filipinos. Thus, transforming the Philippines to an effective ESL teaching-learning environment considering its English proficiency level.

Similarly, Fran (2022) claims that the Philippines has turned to be one of the most visited places among foreigners to study the English, because it is one of its national languages. Particularly, Cebu, Metro Manila, Baguio, Bacolod, and Boracay are among the top local destinations catering ESL learners. As the mostly visited place popular for its renowned academic institutions, Cebu has QQ English, Philinter, Cebu Globalization Academy, EV Academy, and SMEAG offering high-quality English instructions because of their TESOL-certified and university educated ESL teachers. Moreover, a favorable learning environment coupled with quality English instruction attract foreign learners to visit ESL centers in Boracay like COCO and Paradise English.

Indeed, the Philippines has been a home for foreign students who aim to develop their English Language proficiency. This can be rooted in the idea that teachers essentially use English as a medium of instruction and in the business context making the acquisition process easier (Hallmark Education Consultants). This is an implicature that Filipino ESL teachers employ different approaches in handling students in order to offer the best language education possible.

### *Approaches in Handling ESL Learners*

Every ESL teacher must be equipped with differentiated approaches to effectively facilitate a classroom with diverse students. As a part of pedagogic journey, it is imperative to work out various approaches to scaffold and to gradually release the responsibility in using the English language for communicative competence. Thus, in order to concretize this, Martin (2014) identified three dominant English Language Teaching in the Philippines. These include Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), English for Specific Purposes (ESP), and Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT).

CLT is primarily focused on developing communicative competence through provisions of interactive activities between and among learners. Specific classroom activities aligned with this approach are simulations, role-playing, and discussions. Real-life situations are often given to stimulate real world in using the target language; thus, making the assessment tasks authentic.

Meanwhile, ESP is based on the premise that language teaching should be adjusted based on the specific linguistic needs of the learners. Therefore, in using this approach, ESL teachers should conduct an analysis of the learners' needs related to their future profession, plans, and preferred learning styles in order to come up with appropriate teaching-learning activities (Jezo, 2012).

In addition, the approach centered on developing students to create, produce, or design something using the English Language is known as Task-Based Learning (Corwin, 2022). Strengthened in this approach are the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills like communication, collaboration, critical thinking, and creativity. Willis and Willis (2007) as cited by Corwin (2022), designed a set of criteria in doing Task-Based Teaching. The criteria include assessing

whether or not: the activity is engaging; there is a goal or an outcome; the activity simulates the real-world; and focus on meaning. Furthermore, in using this approach constructive feedback plays a crucial role. Teachers have to validate the learning progress by giving comments, suggestions, and/or recommendations.

The pedagogic argument on which of these approaches work best depend on the profile of the learners. One approach may be best for some, while it is not for others. Implicitly, conducting an analysis among learners should be purposely done. On top of these approaches, certain factors have to be considered to ensure a smooth transmission and transition of language learning. Specifically, considering the different nationalities of potential ESL learners, multiculturalism and multilingualism are inevitable.

#### *Multiculturalism in ESL Education*

In the Philippine contexts, handling ESL students who come from different parts of Asia is different from facilitating learning in regular schools. One obvious challenge can be rooted in the presence of multiculturalism where teachers have to adjust the curriculum in order to partially if not totally cater all the learners. This practice and/or modification belongs to the praxis of multicultural education. Consistent with this, Banks (1995) defines multicultural education as creating teaching-learning opportunities while considering the differences in racial, ethnic, and social groups among students.

Specifically, multicultural education comes in five dimensions namely content integration, the knowledge construction process, prejudice reduction, an equity pedagogy, and an empowering school culture and social structure. Given these dimensions, ESL teachers can integrate or modify any of them to ensure quality language instruction.

#### *Eclectic Teaching Approach*

Considering the parameter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, a single teaching approach may no longer be applicable across learners. With that, ESL teachers have to employ different approaches to effectively immerse the students in the process. Al-Khasawneh (2022) mentions that the theories of English Language teaching constantly change to serve the best education possible for learners by catering their needs. Thus, it is imperative to strategically employ varied approaches anchored on the same content and performance standards to address individual differences.

This phenomenon spawned the idea of eclectic approach in English language teaching. According to Iscan (2017), eclectic approach is used in teaching a second or a foreign language. In using this, different principles of various methods and approaches are combined depending on the differences of students. Overall, accepting the diversity among ESL learners can be the key to effectively delivering quality instructions.

A lot of studies regarding the use of different strategies in handling ESL students have been delved much, but less on combining these approaches framing eclecticism. Thus, this study was conducted to shed light on the possible integration of different viewpoints and beliefs on promoting communication skills among ESL students.

#### **Statement of the Problem**

Specifically, this paper attempts to answer the following questions:

- (1) What are the best practices ESL teachers use to promote communication skills?
- (2) What insight can be framed from these approaches?

#### **Theoretical Underpinnings**

A *structured interview* was employed in the study, where all participants answered the same question. Upon the retrieval of the responses about ESL teaching strategies, there were no follow-up questions. According to George and Merkus (2022), this type of data collection is bias free, due to its nature of having the same set and/or order of questions are asked.

The analysis of the ESL teachers' strategies was anchored on Martin (2014) identified three dominant approaches in English Language teaching which include *Communicative*

*Language Teaching (CLT)*, *English for Specific Purposes (ESP)*, and *Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT)*. The strategies employed by the research participants were organized based on these approaches. However, other strategies not included here were also discussed.

Furthermore, differences in strategies and approaches employed were addressed by understanding the cultural backgrounds, contexts, level, and preferences of the learners; and putting them together to come up with differentiated instruction. This is supported by Iscan's (2017) Eclectic Approach in English as a Second Language teaching in response with multiculturalism and other factors diversifying learners.

### Conceptual Framework

To better understand the processes undertaken in collecting, organizing, and, analyzing data, the following diagram was utilized to serve as the researcher's roadmap.



Figure 1 Paradigm of the Study

## II. METHOD

### 2.1 Research Process

This paper employed appreciate inquiry approach in gathering data; specifically, a structured interview. The ESL teachers were asked of their best practices in promoting the communication skills among students. After that, the researcher synthesized the interview results.

### 2.2 Participants

Considering its nature and parameter, purposive sampling was used in the selection of 8 ESL teachers. The participants were ensured of the confidentiality of their personal information. Furthermore, prior to conducting interview, the research objective was explained. They were reminded that they could withdraw their participation from any point of the process.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section presents the interview results and discussions gathered using appreciative inquiry approach. Different strategies used by the ESL teachers are highlighted in this part. Furthermore, this part presents how ESL teachers become multiculturally responsive.

In promoting the micro skills, ESL teacher 1 uses specific techniques such as basic and particular *discussion* where *question-and-answer* opportunity is given focus in order to allow the student/s participate. Furthermore, this teacher utilizes *white board* writing activities to facilitate and/or sustain active engagement.

*Motivation* and engagement have always been fundamental in the ESL teaching. With that, regarding the macro skills, the teacher believes it is important that the student/s play/s apart in the teaching-learning process; specifically, through *role playing* and allowing the students to explain and give their opinions. These stimulate real communication which can improve oral communication skills. Meanwhile, it is believed that as a teacher, it is necessary to support students' speeches as it helps them persist, create, trust, acknowledge, encourage efforts, and reduce uncertainties.

Parallelism, Meng (2021) mentions that *motivation* is a dominant factor in cultivating learning in ESL classrooms. Teachers play crucial roles in promoting a positive environment resulting to achieving motivation among students. On the other hand, the utilization of role-playing adheres with the idea of Martin (2014) on *Communicative*

**Language Teaching (CLT)**. CLT is primarily focused on developing learners' communicative competence through provisions of interactive activities. Specific classroom activities aligned with this approach are simulation and role-playing and discussions.

Thus, to put these concepts together, motivation is needed in order for the students to develop their communicative competence.

On the other hand, ESL Teacher 2 believes that the *students' levels of understanding and comprehension* should be first assessed in order to give the most appropriate lessons, activities, and assessment tasks. According to this teacher, giving lessons beyond or below the students' level will not promote but impede the macro skills. Specifically, in teaching reading among beginners, the ESL teacher should be good at *the art of questioning* to properly guide and/or scaffold the learners. Meanwhile, in teaching speaking, questions should be related to the *interests* of the students to stimulate class discussions.

This result is supported by Felton (2021) who found in his study that content scaffolding, motivational reading, and effective reading development are used by ESL teachers in order to effectively support students in their proficiency level. Moreover, the practice of this teacher in choosing appropriate lessons is congruent with the idea of Martin (2014) on *English for Specific Purposes (ESP) approach*. Teachers have to give specific language activities depending on their identified needs.

In addition to the above strategies and approaches, ESL Teacher 3 mentions that approaches vary depending on the English proficiency levels of the learners. Specifically, this teacher uses *phonics, word recognition, and CVC patterns* in the fundamentals of reading and promoting speaking among ESL learners. These are done especially if the learners have an English 101 level. For the learners with an intermediate level, *role-playing and scriptwriting* are given in order to practice and test the acquired knowledge. Giving adult roles is essential as it stimulates real word scenario. Consistently, Singh et al. (2022) found in their study that teachers intently give assessment activities to ensure that students *generate ideas, perform adult roles, and produce an output*. Thus, the provision of role-laying and scriptwriting among ESL students is effective in developing English proficiency level.

Meanwhile, ESL Teacher 4 utilizes and integrates skills across the curriculum areas to capture the student's attention. The teacher uses a *Communicative Language approach* and allows students to deal with *contexts in real life*. Furthermore, she ensures to integrate all macro skills and emphasizes the importance of each in order to achieve learning and development. Sharing the same practice, ESL Teacher 5 *contextualizes* learning using authentic materials. In this approach, personalized teaching based on the student's level, needs, and learning style is done. This practice adheres with *differentiate instruction* which can be addressed by using *eclectic teaching approach*. Considering today's learners, this teaching practice is highly in-demand. Similarly, Fermo (2019) found that contextualized learning materials are proven to be helpful among students in the acquisition and development of skills. These materials help learners remember important information. Putting in the context of the Philippine education system, the Department of Education puts a premium on localization and contextualization of materials, activities, and assessments to actively promote learning.

Regarding the vocabulary development, *games* are integrated with sentence construction for communicative practice are prioritized. Nowadays, a lot of scholars have validated the significant impacts of gamification in education. Blankman (2022) believes that *gamification*, if used appropriately, ensures a fun teaching-learning process.

Delving on different strategies and approaches, ESL Teacher 6 employs *sentence diagramming, graphic organizers, punctuation application, narration, note taking, essay writing, book report, varied speech activities, role playing, reader's theater*. Parallelism, Martin (2014) shares the same idea on the utilization of role playing and varied speech activities to promote the communication skills which he coins as *Communicative Language*

*Teaching and Task-based Learning approaches*. Moreover, ESL Teacher 7 utilizes repetition of *discussions* and activities is utilized to promote listening and speaking skills among ESL learners. Furthermore, *role-playing* is done to develop communicative competence.

Unraveling other strategies, ESL Teacher 8 interchangeably employs *concept checking, eliciting, role-playing, pair work, and underlining keywords* in reading passages among students. According to this teacher, *student-centered approaches* have to be differentiated in order to get the most ideas from the ESL learners.

This teacher highlights the importance of designing *student-centered activities*. As a scholarly support, Lawless (2023) believes that designing activities using this framework brings learners to participate actively in the teaching-learning process, since they can relate well. According to him, this approach views learners as active agents. This opposes the idea of behaviorism that sees learners as respondents to external stimuli; thus, becoming traditional in nature.

### **3.1 On Multiculturalism**

**This part collectively discusses the perceptions of ESL teachers on multiculturalism and on how they respond to it.**

Multiculturalism is the acceptance and respect of different cultures and their beliefs. In an ESL classroom, there is a great deal of diversity, as students come from all over the world with different cultural backgrounds. This can be a challenge for teachers, but it can also be an opportunity to learn and grow. Here are some ways that ESL teachers can deal with multiculturalism among students:

- (1) *Be aware of your own cultural biases*. It is important for teachers to be aware of their own cultural biases, as these can influence how they interact with students from different cultures. Teachers should strive to be as objective as possible and to treat all students with respect. Learn about the cultures of your students. This can be done by reading books, articles, and websites about different cultures. It is also helpful to talk to your students about their cultures and to learn about their customs and traditions.
- (2) *Create a welcoming and inclusive classroom environment*. This means creating a space where all students feel comfortable sharing their cultures and where they are not judged for their differences. Teachers can do this by displaying artwork and artifacts from different cultures, by celebrating holidays from different cultures, and by creating opportunities for students to learn about each other's cultures.
- (3) *Use culturally-relevant materials*. When teaching, it is important to use materials that are relevant to the cultures of your students. It can help them connect with the material and see how it relates to their own lives.
- (4) *Encourage students to share their cultures*. This can be done by giving students opportunities to share stories, poems, songs, and other cultural artifacts. It is also helpful to have students work on projects that allow them to explore their cultures.
- (5) *Be patient and understanding*. It is important to be patient and understanding with students who are learning English as a second language. They may make mistakes, but they should be encouraged to keep trying.

In addition to the above, here are some other specific activities that ESL teachers do to promote multiculturalism in their classrooms:

- (1) Read aloud books from different cultures. This is a great way to introduce students to new cultures and to help them learn about different customs and traditions.
- (2) Have students share their own stories and experiences. This can help students to connect with each other and to learn about each other's cultures.
- (3) Play games and do activities that involve different cultures. This is a fun way for students to learn about different cultures and to interact with each other in a positive way.

- (4) Celebrate holidays from different cultures. This is a great way to show students that their cultures are valued and respected.
- (5) Create a classroom library of books and resources from different cultures. This will give students access to information about different cultures and will help them to learn more about the world around them.

### 3.2 Reflections and Insights

The results above delve on the different strategies ESL teachers employ to help elevate the English proficiency levels of their students. These strategies were rooted in the idea that learners have different proficiency levels, learning styles, and preferences. As an intervention, with the presence of this classroom diversities, modification of teaching approaches through localization and contextualization; and the integration of student-centered activities that motivate and stimulate engagement among learners are essential in curriculum implementation.

Considering the objective, nature, and mechanics of the strategies and approaches ESL teacher participants use, they share commonalities with the already existing and proven approaches of Martin (2014) namely CLT, ESP, and TBL. Thus, in designing learning activities and assessments for ESL students, considering these scholarly ideas is recommended to supplement teaching pedagogy. These three approaches target different learning competencies. Therefore, using them interchangeably is a critical decision. It is inappropriate, then, to disregard the uniqueness of each.

On a wider and more practical perspective, eclectic teaching approach can be framed based on the analysis of the strategies per se and the principles behind of their utilization. They may be different, but, as a common denominator, they all aim to scaffold ESL students until they responsibly and proficiently use the language in different contexts. With that, different learners equate not just differentiated but combined or eclectic approaches.

In addition to the above strategies, becoming multiculturally responsive can make ESL students feel welcome and respected. This can lead to a more positive learning experience for all students.

## IV. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study findings, it is undeniable that there is no single best approach in teaching ESL students with the communicative competence. The integration of different language teaching principles and approaches should be used interchangeably to vary instructions. Furthermore, based on the results of this study, one key element to a successful learning is motivation. It is proven effective in actively involving or immersing the students in the teaching-learning process. Considering the tenets of digital society, one of the many factors to achieving motivation is through gamification using technology. With that, the integration of technology or gamification in the discussion can be helpful where teachers pay attention to the equal importance of content knowledge, pedagogy, and technology to effectively promote learning.

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