



RESEARCH ARTICLE

Addressing Time Shortages With Microteaching

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ABSTRACT

This study presents and evaluates the methodology used in a 90-minute microteaching lesson, which was given to a group of fourth year students who are studying English at the University of Sulaimani and who are training to become English teachers. This study aimed to assess the role of the teacher, students, lecture materials, and activities used in the classroom and to address the time shortages experienced during the academic calendar with microteaching. This article provides a brief overview of the topic and the audience at which the lesson was aimed. The methodology section includes details about the method that was used in the study, which was based on communicative language teaching, with the justifications for using it. Details about the analysis of the key features of the lesson plan is subsequently presented and includes justifications for the use of each activity. Finally, an overall evaluation of the lesson is presented and the conclusion that microteaching is the best solution and strategy to develop teaching skill is drawn.

Keywords: Microteaching, Training, Lesson Plan, Communicative Language Teaching, Feedback

1. INTRODUCTION

The issues addressed in this study can be summarized by the following questions: (1) How effective is the microteaching strategy as a technique to improve the teaching skills of the students in the Faculty of Basic Education at the University of Sulaimani? (2) Can the microteaching strategy be used to accommodate the time shortage during an academic year? (3) Is the microteaching approach a better alternative to the traditional process of educating future teachers by using the lecture method in addition to practical presentations at the schools? The outcomes of this study show that microteaching has an important role in education. This method utilizes a straightforward strategy of training students on the proper educational

strategies while receiving immediate feedback from students on whether the required skills were achieved. The topic of the prepared lesson was

“Hollywood films.” The lesson was designed for a group of 30 Kurdish students, aged between 18 and 26 years, at the University of Sulaimani who are training to become English teachers. Their proficiency in the English language is described as intermediate. The topic was deliberately chosen to improve the listening and speaking skills of the students and to enhance their fluency. The topic is appropriate for the ages of the students and their level of proficiency, because it contained simple vocabulary that the students were familiar with. The topic was suited to their needs and interests, because it is interesting and attracted the students' attention and motivated them. According to Harmer (2007), the desire to achieve some goal is the bedrock of motivation, and it may be easier to be extrinsically motivated when the topic is easy and the students can express their ideas about it effectively

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during interactions with teachers and other students because of existing knowledge about the topic. Harmer (2007) further defined extrinsic motivation as being the influence of external factors that come from outside the classroom, such as the attitude of society, family, and others on the student. In contrast, intrinsic motivation is generated by what happens inside the classroom. Students study the English language for specific academic purposes, and because it is compulsory in all schools and universities in Kurdistan. The English language is considered to be an international language, and it is used as a business language throughout the world, implying that proficiency in English is required to obtain higher level jobs. The purpose of studying the English language is to familiarize students with the language and cultures of different countries and to improve their speaking and listening comprehension with the aim of mastering the English language to a high level of accuracy and fluency. Kurdish students need to learn the English language to be successful in effective learning styles to become qualified English teachers who can explain the lessons confidently and who can articulate their desires and needs. Moreover, they need it to strengthen their listening skills and develop their ability to respond appropriately to questions asked in English to pass the official exams of the university. A good grasp of the English language is required to understand American films and English songs and to translate them for the purpose of possible future careers, such as dubbing English films. According to Ala'Alden (2011), the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) sent many students abroad on full-time scholarships to pursue both postgraduate and undergraduate degrees before the financial crisis. To enter the competition, one of the requirements was to have a recognized English qualification that could allow the selected students to study in the United States or the United Kingdom with the aim of improving their English language proficiency and also to improve their own PhD studies. The KRG needs a radical reform in the educational system.

2. METHODOLOGY

The method that was chosen for the microteaching lesson is based on CLT, which is currently considered to be the main method of teaching in developed countries. According to Richards and Renandya (2002), the evolution of CLT started in the late 1970s to challenge the grammar-based approach that was previously used in the teaching of a language. Lightbown & Spada (2006) defined CLT as follows: “[CLT] is based on the premise that successful language learning involves not only a knowledge of the structure and forms of a language, but also the functions and purposes that a language serves in different communicative settings.”

Linguists realized the need to formulate and develop alternative methods of teaching that focused on communicative aptitude rather than on the mere mastery of structures in language teaching, which was considered a high priority (Richards, 2006). CLT-based teaching emphasizes the use of the English language for real communication rather than for the demonstration of perfect grammar, and therefore students are more motivated to learn the language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). According to Kumaravadivelu (2006), the most important characteristic of CLT is that it focuses on communicative competence rather than linguistic competence, implying that language and communication are interdependent. In addition, the primary aim of CLT is to achieve fluency and accuracy, with accuracy being judged in context and not in an abstract setting. Therefore, the target language is learned more optimally through the process of communication, which at first will be difficult but will improve through trial and error, which is the aim of this lesson. Furthermore, during CLT, learners are expected to interact with others through working in pairs and groups to overcome their shyness, which is common among most Kurdish students (Towards a global perspective, 2009). CLT-based methods also improve pronunciation. Finally, CLT allows for the use of the native language, where needed, to enhance the understanding of concepts in a foreign language (Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

A CLT-based method was chosen to provide a high level of student support to remove obstacles that might impede their progress, because Kurdish students are typically not

very confident in listening and speaking. This approach might aid in the transition of the Kurdistan educational system from an isolated entity to an entity that is internationally integrated in the field of academic study. It is designed to meet the specific criteria required to enhance learners' fluency through many opportunities for cooperative interaction with their classmate and the teacher (Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005). It conveys their basic knowledge and ability to interact proficiently, because of its emphasis on the learner's cognitive ability and operational capabilities. Thus, students are taught to express their views in real life scenarios, allowing them to improve their ability to use the language to communicate with others (Kumaravadivelu, 2006). According to Ala'Alden (2011), the KRG began to focus on the quality of outputs rather than on the quantity and they choose the higher education sector as the first to implement their strategy to improve the standard of the outputs. In order to expand the curriculum and to improve skills like critical thinking and learning a second language, many activities and opportunities should be presented to the students, including problem solving activities, role play activities, and attending seminars and conferences, which are examples of CLT activities. The role of the teacher is to facilitate these activities. According to Wilson (2008), there is more room for personal or critical responses to the content and less emphasis on drilling repetition in CLT.

However, selecting CLT as the teaching method employed in this lesson brought its own challenges because of the traditional methods that the Kurdish students are used to. It has the potential of creating cultural and phonological problems and reticence, because they have difficulties in speaking fluently, communicatively, and effectively as required to reach the goal of CLT. Consequently, the role of the teacher was to help the learners in a way that motivated them to interact with the language and incorporate it into their interests until they overcame their concerns (Larsen-Freeman, 2000). Furthermore, teachers might incorporate it gradually. First, they might start with pair work and gradually progress to working in small groups until they

get used to it. Bax (2003) argued that, although CLT has a crucial role in language teaching, it ignores the context, which is an important aspect of language pedagogy. Because the activities employed in CLT require participation in small groups, it might not be the ideal method to use with Kurdish students, owing to the crowded classes in Kurdistan with no means to provide them with good education, in addition to the limited available time to cover the large syllabi (Jamil, cited in Taha, 2010).

Overall, the assumptions and design criteria of the methodology presented here can be performed for research purposes, allowing CLT to be evaluated in systematic outcome testing (Gatbonton and Segalowitz, 2005).

2.1. Analysis

The lesson utilized in this study was focused on listening and speaking, which were both integrated into the lesson. According to Al-Issa (2006), listening will become more interesting, motivating, and effective when it is practiced along with other skills such as the integration with speaking, as experienced in real life scenarios, and will enable the students to develop their abilities and make them more successful and eager to learn than if it is isolated. Therefore, when students are participating in listening activities, speech should also be incorporated, because isolating skills is not an effective way of teaching languages.

2.2. Activating Schema

Initially, some pictures of Hollywood actors were shown, relying on vision to improve the effectiveness of teaching (Barnett and McCormick, 2002). Subsequently, to introduce the students to the subject, various activities were conducted during the lesson's pre-listening tasks, starting with brainstorming information and vocabulary to activate schema, which is defined by Hill (2004) as follows: "brain storm is a personal roadmap to a better understanding of creative thinking and the brainstorming process . . . as an individual or in a group setting, you can

begin generating ideas with the power to change the world around you.” Another element incorporated was the presentation of several trailers, which concluded with answering personalized questions with the aim of activating their schemata, which, according to Wilson (2008), is required to help the students prepare for what they are going to hear and to give them a greater chance of success in any given task. Using the internet as a source of authentic input allowed the students to access a wide range of materials and provided them with virtual access to the target language and in so doing, guided them to collect their own materials for the activities. The students were then asked to articulate what they observed to encourage them to speak (Elliot, 2006). Stempleski (2002) stated that successful teachers select the appropriate videos that connect with the students’ need, promotes active viewing, and integrates the concepts from the video with other areas of the language curriculum. Accordingly, it can be said that microteaching is an operative schema that can develop the teaching skills of the students.

2.3. Listening and Speaking Tasks

According to Richards and Renandya (2002), listening and speaking are supposed to be of greater importance in foreign language classrooms to help the students to speak confidently.

In the “while-listening” activities, students are listening for gist and detail, and they check their answers in groups, which, according to Wilson (2008), provides them with confidence and removes any areas of suspicion. They then listen for a second time either to check their answers or to answer more detailed questions. Wilson (2008) stated that it is important for students to be asked to do different tasks whenever they are listening, especially to the parts they found difficult, with the aim of reducing their anxiety with the guidance of the teacher. For example, when the teacher gives each group a difficult task, such as doing exercises, they start to think and discuss it together as a team, and in so doing, they help each other and reduce the

burden of the individual to perform a task alone, which reduces their anxiety.

Through answering oral questions in pairs or groups and by groups discussions as follow-up tasks, students might learn how to interact without overreacting, because they are speaking about and listening to topics with personal knowledge. This is based on the statement by Flowerdew and Miller (2005) who noted that by extending the discussion, students may learn how to monitor their emotions and reaction to the information about stereotypes.

Using various activities in “while-listening” and follow-up tasks will avoid monotony. Saricoban (1999) observed that by providing a variety of input in the classroom, the students are kept motivated, and it allows students to recycle and revise the language that was already taught for the given skill.

Films and clips from the internet are valuable sources of authentic input which is more practical and provides them with more opportunity to interpret what they have seen. This can certainly raise motivation (Wilson, 2008).

Appropriate listening can be enhanced by other features of a speaker’s behavior. Blumer (2009) noted that the analysis of symbolic interaction is extremely important; it can be seen in the presentation of gestures and postures, such as presented in the game of Charades, that are conveyed to the person who is supposed to respond, and recognize his/her response on the basis of what they mean to him/her. Additionally, using games create a cooperative and joyful atmosphere inside the classroom and motivate the students to learn effectively (Lyster, 2007). Furthermore, questioning plays an important role in listening and can be used to check the students’ comprehension, which is done by asking questions based on a listening activity (Flowerdew and Miller, 2005). Subsequently, by providing positive feedback impacts the students’ performance positively and build their confidence (Cox and Heames 1999). In contrast,

Thornbury (1999) noted that by providing only negative feedback to the students may ultimately be demotivating.

Importantly, personalization should be used in questions and answers in pairs as follow-up tasks. Wilson (2008) stated that, “It seeks to engage the students on a personal level through meaningful interaction and personalization.”

At the end of the lesson, errors that were heard or word that were written down incorrectly were written on the board for correction by the students in pairs and groups with the help of the teacher. According to Mishra (2005): “Recent researches, however, have shifted the responsibility (of correction) to students. Rather a cooperative and collaborative approach has been suggested correction for teachers and students with more active role being assigned to the students.”

Thornbury (2005) believes that if the focus of the activity is more on the meaning, it is perhaps better to correct without interfering too much with the flow of communication, because intervention in learners’ performance might prevent fluency and push them to focus on accuracy. Furthermore, Hedge (2000) believes that in the fluency activity, correction of errors is better to be delayed until the end so as not to interrupt the learners while they are trying to speak.

In CLT, the teacher must encourage the students to engage in conversation by increasing the opportunities for the students to talk and by reducing the amount of talking by the teacher, thereby ensuring that the opportunities are balanced.

3. EVALUATION OF MICROTEACHING

This part is divided into 3 sections. In the first section, the role of the teacher was evaluated through feedback from peers and the tutor who highlighted the strengths of the methods and the areas for improvement. The second section evaluated the students’ performance during the lesson. The final section is an evaluation of the actions

that were employed during the lesson and how these can be adjusted to improve the same lesson based on feedback from the tutor and peers.

3.1. Teacher

According to the feedback from the tutor and peers, there were many strengths in the performance of the teacher. The lesson had a good introduction and employed a good use of visuals, questions, and answers to activate the students’ schemata. According to Scrivener (2005), typical introductions involve showing pictures related to the topic, asking the students some personal questions related to the subject, etcetera and might promote the students’ motivation or interest. Furthermore, by means of the pre-task, students were able to predict the topic.

Another positive point of the lesson was that the teacher’s voice projected clearly from the start to the end of the lesson and effective instructions were provided. This corresponds to Harmer (2007) who stated that the teacher should present the lesson in a confident and authoritative voice and make sure that his/her voice reaches the furthest corner of the class and also avoid repetitive idioms like “OK.”

Every student was addressed by name, ensuring a positive psychological impact on the students, because they felt important to the teacher from the start of the lesson. The teacher made an undeliberate mistake by incorrectly naming one of the students, which annoyed her, but the teacher apologized and corrected that mistake. Therefore, it is important to be aware of such seemingly small things that may have an adverse impact on the psyche of the students.

Furthermore, Cox and Heames (1999) found that by giving positive feedback to the students, their motivation was increased and their confidence boosted. Accordingly, the positive feedback and the amount of praise that were given to the students during the lesson was sufficient to encourage them to actively participate in the lesson. The teacher created a friendly and comfortable atmosphere in

the class and avoided interrupting the students in order not to demotivate them. Moreover, Harmer (2007) stated that one of the teacher's roles is monitoring, which, according to tutor's feedback, was successfully performed while the students were working on their tasks.

Finally, the teacher avoided to correct the students' oral mistakes, because they did not affect their communication, and Hedge (2000) recommended delaying corrections to the end of the lesson in order not to affect their fluency.

Overall, the teacher took into consideration the characteristics of a good teacher and applied these during the lesson, starting from the attitude toward monitoring, guiding, facilitating, etc. to make the lesson as effective as possible.

3.2. Learners

Choosing an interesting topic such as "Hollywood films" was very effective in creating a very lively lesson and motivating the students because they had sufficient knowledge about the topic. Moreover, a very active involvement in some of the students was noted throughout the lesson in individual, pair, and group activities. According to Jacobs and Hall (2002), working in pairs or groups encourages mutual helpfulness among the students and encourages them to participate actively in the lesson. There were lots of opportunities for interaction between the students and the teacher and among the students themselves. This concurs with Laurillard (2000), as cited in the study by Anderson (2003), who said the following: "The university education must go far beyond access to information or content to include engagement with others in the gradual development of their personal understanding".

Students responded positively and actively during the tasks, and they did not have any difficulties in understanding the instructions and the tasks. Although one group was confused about the kinds of films and vocabulary related to filming, the teacher noticed that the

students enjoyed the topic and that most of them enjoyed brainstorming about information and vocabulary.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that there was a good discussion when the students were asked to work in pairs or groups on the questionnaire about their favorite films and to justify why they preferred specific types of films. That showed that they had good background knowledge about the topic and that the lesson was appropriate for their level.

3.3. Action Plan

The overall feedback that was received from the peers and tutor was very positive, and there was no clear negative feedback from them. However, I do not think that there is a perfect teacher. Accordingly, aspects about the teaching style and performance can be improved, including the fast pace of the teacher's speech. At times, the pace was too fast and it became difficult for the students to hear every word that was pronounced. According to Harmer (2007), teachers need to speak in a comprehensible manner to their students to help them better understand the input she or he delivers. Another area of improvement worth mentioning is to better manage the timing of the activities, especially when the students are asked to do certain activities. This was highlighted by the evaluators as an area that can be improved in future lessons. Finally, the teacher noted the importance of building a friendship with the students to improve the student's attitude and, in turn, encourage the students to pay attention during lesson presentations. A strict teacher may cause unhappiness and, consequently, the students might not want to attend his or her lectures and therefore they may fail in their studies. According to Bahjat (2016), microteaching comprises many skills, such as preparation skills, skills to select teaching materials, distribution and organization skills, presentation skills, annotation skills, enhancement skills, skills of posing questions to get the desired responses while taking into account individual differences, the skills of movement, the skills to use teaching techniques, and skills of training and managing time. Microteaching is therefore it considered to be better

than the other traditional ways of teaching. Krpalek et al. (2017) deduced from their study that the efficiency of microteaching over the traditional teaching methods for developing students' professional behaviors and facilitating peer-supported learning should not be underestimated. This was reiterated by Ali (1994), Mohammed (1995), and Hindi (2000) as cited by Bahjat (2016) in their studies on the training of third year students in the Agricultural Department, Faculty of Education in Almena (Ali, 2014), among students of teachers from the Arabic Language Department in the Faculty of Education, King Saud University (Mohammed, 1995), and among students of teachers of agricultural sciences in the Faculty of Education, Bani Suef (Hindi, 2000). According to Alnashef and Winter (2007), "One of the pre-service teachers preparation systems is integrated system, which allows the training of pre-service teachers, and it represented by the content of practical education courses which are taught in the colleges of education, and the content of these materials such as planning, implementation and evaluation skills, which can be trained by the students during their study." As a basic procedure that is applied in the College of Basic Education, especially in the English Department at the Sulaimani University, pre-service teachers are applying what they have been taught in their courses during the four years of their study in primary and intermediate schools in a very limited time. They have to be supervised by their teachers, even in very bad circumstances when schools are shut down, which is really difficult because it needs a lot of time and effort. Teachers have to supervise the trained students, supervise their projects, set 2 term examinations, prepare teachers' portfolios, and many other tasks within a very short time. In addition, trained students need to set plans for their lessons, teach, work on their graduation projects, and prepare themselves for the final examination, which also require a lot of time and effort on the students' behalf. In an attempt to save time and effort for both teachers and students, microteaching offers the best solution to reduce these stresses and ease the loads on teachers' and students' shoulders.

4. CONCLUSION

In light of the analysis and the method that was utilized in this study at the University of Sulaimani, the following conclusions can be drawn. First, microteaching is one of the most effective and crucial strategies that should be utilized in the academic curriculum in place of the traditional methods that have been used in the past. This is because of the benefits observed in this study (Bahjat, 2016). Consequently, CLT can be considered as a proper method that can develop the pre-service teacher's listening and speaking skills because it motivates them to speak fluently. It is also worth mentioning that according to Thornbury, (1999) giving positive feedback is another factor that can assist pre-service teachers to overcome their fears and increase their learning. Finally, to address the shortage of time at the end of the year, it is better to use microteaching in the education faculty at the University of Sulaimani.

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