The BSE-English Program of Ifugao State University, Potia Campus:
A Syllabi Review

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ABSTRACT

This study evaluated the contents, teaching methods and techniques, and instructional materials indicated in 14 specialization course syllabi of the Bachelor of Secondary Education in English program of Ifugao State University (IFSU) Potia Campus. The syllabi were used from Academic Year (AY) 2005-2006 when the New Teacher Education Curriculum (NTEC) was implemented to AY 2011-2012 using the principles of Communicative Competence Theory (CCT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The evaluation reveals that while some of the principles of CCT and CLT were reflected in the syllabi, there were areas that needed to be improved. The areas which needed improvement include the selection of appropriate topics and theories in English studies, advanced pedagogical methods and techniques, and making instructional materials for English training.

Keywords: communicative language teaching, communicative competence, teacher education, syllabus, language teaching

INTRODUCTION

The Ifugao State University (IFSU) is the only higher education institution (HEI) in the province of Ifugao. It offers Bachelor of Secondary Education (BSE), Major in English in three of its campuses; in Lamut, Lagawe, and Potia. IFSU Potia Campus first offered the degree, BSE Major in English in 2003; in 2007, the first batch graduated. Since AY 2005-2006, the New Teacher Education Curriculum (NTEC) has been implemented by virtue of Commission on Higher Education (CHED) Memorandum Order No. 30, series of 2004. The first batch under NTEC – two of them – graduated in 2009. There were five graduates in 2010, four in 2011, six in 2012 and one in 2013.

The graduates are now serving in different secondary schools in the province. Also, the performance of its graduates in the Licensure Examination for Teachers (LET) has always been satisfactory. In the October 2009 examination, 100% of the graduates exceeded the national passing rate was 28.15%. In September 2010, 80% of the 2010 graduates passed while 50% of the 2011 graduates passed in April 2011. These passing rates by passed the national passing rates of 25.86% and 26.28% respectively. Retaking in April 2012, the two 2011 graduates passed. Finally, four of five or 80% of the BSE graduates who took the September 2012 LET passed. The school’s rating was higher than the 43.50% national passing rate. Generally, the graduates’ performance in LET seems better compared to the national passing rate. In addition, according to the Accrediting Agency of Chartered Colleges and Universities in the Philippines (AACCUP) website, the BSE-English program holds “Level II Re-accredited (Assessment ongoing to qualify for Level III. Revisit Area V)” status as of December 31, 2014. This proves that it passed the standards for Level III, however improvement in some areas is required.

In the interest of improving instruction and achieving Level 3 and Level 4 accreditation status, this study was conducted. Ultimately, the future enrollees in this institution will be able to perform their roles well, if a more competitive syllabus will be offered by IFSU.

This study set out to assess the relevance of the syllabi contents, methods and techniques, and instructional materials used in the teaching of the specialization courses of the BSE-English program of IFSU Potia Campus.

Specifically, the study aimed to: (1) evaluate if the contents of the syllabi conform to the principles of Communicative Competence Theory (CCT) and Communicative Language Teaching (CLT); (2) determine if topics and theories on English studies reflecting the provisions of CCT and CLT were adequate to competently train future English teachers; and (3) assess if the syllabi reflect CCT and CLT pedagogical methods, techniques, and instructional materials.

While there were 20 English specialization courses in the BSE-English program under the 2007
NTEC, only 14 have available syllabi on file; these were used in this evaluation. In actuality, the contents, teaching methods and techniques, and teaching materials indicated in the syllabi sometimes vary from the actual deployment of the teachers in the classroom. Given this possibility, the evaluation was limited to the actual prepared and functional syllabi, and did not cover the actual deployment in the classrooms. Finally, although the evaluation focused on the syllabi, 16 graduates of the program from 2009 to 2012 were interviewed; data gathered were treated as feedback indicators only.

To study the syllabi, the researcher applied the principles of the Communicative Competence Theory (CCT) and the teaching approach that espoused Communicative Language Teaching (CLT).

Hymes (1972) coined the term “communicative competence” after he was convinced that Noam Chomsky’s linguistic theory was too limited. A Chomsky Theory likens competence to an idealized speaker-hearer who does not display actual production (speaking, writing) or the comprehension (listening, reading) of linguistic events (Brown, 1994a). Brown also discussed that in the 1970s, communicative competence was distinguished from linguistic competence where in communicative competence refers to the knowledge about language forms while the latter is the “knowledge that enables a person to communicate functionally and interactively” (227).

The developments in second language pedagogy brought about a number of reactions and counter-reactions in methods and approaches in language teaching. When one looks at journals in second language teaching, they reveal quite an array of materials about Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). CLT was developed in different stages and its ideas have been expanded since the mid-1970s (Wong, 2012). As Brown (1994) claims, CLT is a recognized approach, not a method, accepted as norm in the teaching field. This communicative and humanistic method gives “no formal grammar instruction but rather presented quantities of meaning-focused input containing target forms and vocabulary” (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002, p.4). Furthermore, it is claimed that CLT was largely influenced by Krashen’s (1981) Input Hypothesis, which stipulates that second language learning should involve meaningful activities, listening and speaking, and reading for enjoyment. Therefore, CLT does not favor second language teaching through explicit grammar teaching or correcting learning errors.

CLT is different from traditional teaching approaches because learners acquire a second language through interaction with others rather than rote memorization and grammar rule learning—a principle that the CCT advocates. The tasks used in CLT are referred to as ‘communicative task.’ Nunan (1989) defines communicative task as “a piece of classroom work which involves learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interacting in the target language while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form” (p.10). CLT therefore, is not a traditional approach in language teaching but an enlightened one that emphasizes language tasks through real, lifelike activities where students play parts.

Having presented the concepts of CCT and CLT, the following conceptual framework was derived.

![Conceptual Framework](image)

Three components of the syllabi were evaluated namely, contents, methods and techniques, and instructional materials. These components were analyzed using the principles of CCT and CLT. The graduates’ feedback were treated as variables reflecting their satisfaction level; and the effectiveness/ineffectiveness of the course contents, teaching techniques/methods, and instructional materials. They served as feedback indicators only and the details were not utilized in the actual evaluation process of the syllabi. However, these feedback were used to validate or confirm the result of the evaluation.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study followed a one-shot post-observation evaluative design in reviewing the syllabi of the BSE-English program specialization courses of IFSU Potia Campus. This study was primarily evaluative in nature for it assessed the syllabi components, namely: contents, the teaching methods and techniques and instructional materials based on CCT and CLT standards. The syllabi used in the 20 specialization courses of the BSE-English program of IFSU Potia Campus were requested from the Office of the Department Head.
Department of Teacher Education. The researcher personally asked for the copies. fourteen were furnished to the researcher.

It was also a one-shot post-observation study because it involved a group of individuals—the graduates over a single, limited time period. Since they experienced the whole program under study, their feedback were taken as a factor in validating/confirming some outcomes in the study. Necessary in the evaluation were the feedback of the graduates of the program in determining the effectiveness, adequacy, and relevance of the contents of the syllabi, teaching methods and techniques, and instructional materials.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

IFSU has a common format for all syllabi. A syllabus bears the university letterhead, the name of college/department, the course number, and the semester and academic year when it was prepared and utilized. It also contains the vision, mission and goal statements of the university. Furthermore, the course title, description, number of credit units and general objectives also appear in the syllabus. The grading system as well as the course requirements and references were also included.

Contents Reflecting the Principles of CCT and CLT

After reviewing the syllabi of the different specialization courses, ten of the courses appear to be taught using learner-centered and cooperative learning techniques. Among the courses that used cooperative learning are English 104 (Literary Criticism), English 118 (Speech and Stage Arts), English 105 (Afro-Asian Literature), English 114 (Campus Journalism) and English 115 (Remedial Instruction in English). Techniques such as ‘small group’ and ‘group discussions,’ ‘brainstorming,’ ‘peer sharing,’ ‘interview,’ ‘reporting,’ ‘jigsaw puzzles,’ ‘simulation’ and ‘role-playing’ were indicated in the syllabus of these courses.

Several courses were apparently content-centered, that is, content learning and language teaching aims were integrated. They used the target language as the medium to convey content of interest and relevance to the learner. A content-based syllabus was well-embodied in English 117 (English for Specific Purposes), which included topics such as ‘Business Letter Writing with Job Application and Interview,’ parts and forms of business letters, application letter and résumé, and job interview. Also included was a chapter about ‘Telephony and Texting,’ ‘Memorandums and E-mailing,’ ‘Business Meetings,’ and ‘Report Writing.’ The report writing topic included classification, format, writing stages, narrative report writing and writing case studies. These topics were more interesting and relevant to the long term goals of the students because they would soon be using these skills of letter writing and job interview when they apply for jobs and perform their tasks in the future. English 114 (Campus Journalism) was another course that was content-centered in its syllabus.

Another characteristic of a CLT classroom is that it allows for interactive learning, which demonstrates the essential interactive nature of communication. This means that students are engaged in activities that call for contact or communication with each other or one another. English 111 (Language and Literature Assessment) syllabus reveals that ‘micro-teaching,’ ‘reportorial,’ ‘small group discussions,’ ‘group sharing’ and ‘experiential learning’ were the primary teaching strategies used, while majority of the topics in the later part of the syllabus were carried out using ‘group discussion.’ The enrichment activities included ‘brainstorming,’ ‘group sharing,’ ‘engaging in an interview with teachers,’ and ‘peer sharing.’ Another course that uses student interaction as a teaching technique was English 101 (Language Curriculum for Secondary Schools). The syllabus indicated ‘group discussion,’ ‘individual & group interaction,’ and ‘think pair share activities.’ Through interactive activities the teacher talked less; hence, the learning became student-centered.

According to Brown (1994b), using authentic materials is one of the principles of CCT and CLT. Ma (2009, 52) defines authentic materials as “language-based from life” materials or graphic and visual sources around which communicative activities can be built, such as magazines, newspapers, advertisements, maps, pictures, symbols, graphs, and charts.” English 114 (Campus Journalism) was the course that used much authentic materials in its lessons because of its nature. The syllabus contained materials namely, newspaper, tabloid, copies of news articles, copies of editorial pieces, sample column article, editorial cartoon, literary pieces, feature articles, copies of sports articles, articles to be edited and pictures. Although, they were obviously used to demonstrate the nature of the topics in the course such as news writing or feature writing, these materials were indeed authentic since they provided realistic contexts of tasks.

Technology is an indispensable teaching tool in a CLT or CCT classroom (Brown, 1994a). Several studies (Coleman, 2009; Pugsley, 2010; Corbeil, 2007) have proven that PowerPoint presentations enhance instruction and preferred by students. Since six of the courses were taught using PowerPoint presentations, it could be deduced that there were more student participation and interaction in these courses because student attention was directed to the sound, figures, texts or colors in the slides. Some teachers also used emails/internet in enriching their
lessons, such as English 117 (English for Specific Purposes) that included a topic on emailing and its practical applications. In addition, the English 118 syllabus indicated using CDs, tape recorder, microphone and speaker, and tapes as instructional materials. Students were also provided with first-hand experiences in the delivery of speeches using the microphone, speaker and tape recorder.

Contents Falling Short in Meeting CCT and CLT Principles

In the preceding sections, it was presented that the syllabi under evaluation reflected some of the characteristics of a CLT-based classroom. However, despite these advances, there were limitations found in the syllabi in relation to the principles of CCT and CLT.

The researcher noted that Hymes (1972) proposed the communicative competence theory in opposition to linguistic competence, which Chomsky (1965) advocated. Linguistic competence only focuses on “how to say something.” Meaning, the grammatical or linguistic structure of the language is given emphasis. English 102 (Introduction to Linguistics), designed to introduce the students to the “different areas of linguistics, allows for a quick look at the different branches of linguistics and makes students experience how the principles in each branch are carried out” reflects this. The syllabus, however, started with a discussion about language and its origin, definition, function, nature and history and then followed by the ‘different areas of linguistics’ as provided in the course’s description. But it failed to make “students experience how these principles in each branch were carried out.” The lessons included in the syllabus were only geared towards orienting the students about the different branches of linguistics; this only catered to the grammatical competence of the learners.

Other than the inclusion of all the competences in the lessons, both CCT and CLT advocate the use of content-based teaching in language pedagogy. However, English 103 (Structure of English) only provided the outline of the course; thus, it failed to provide the texts to be analyzed or used as springboards, if there were any, in the syllabus. Because of the absence of the reading list, it was impossible to assess the content-centeredness of the course.

Brown (1994b) also discussed that a CLT class is learner-centered, and this kind of teaching applies to both curriculum and teaching techniques. As a curriculum, learner-centered teaching should include the consultation and inputs of students and the content should not presuppose objectives in advance. It is understood that from this point, no syllabus was able to meet such a feature of a learner-centered curriculum and CCT and CLT due to the teacher’s practice of preparing the syllabus ahead of time before the opening of classes.

The idea of culture component in language teaching should not be neglected in the discussion because it is helpful in the attainment of communicative competence. This principle could have been applied in the discussions of English 113 (Mythology and Folklore). Barton (n.d.) wrote that the Ifugao people have a huge number of myths used in nearly every ritual; legends, and other folkloric stories that can be discussed in this course. In fact, the Ifugao also have their version of the creation myth (Dulawan, n.d.). These could be prioritized over other myths and legends of the Philippines and of other countries, or could be discussed as an introduction. In this way, the specific cultural components of the students (or most of them) (i.e., myths and legends) are brought out and used in the discussion and learning of the target language.

With regards to teaching methods and techniques, it was found out that all the syllabi favored two teaching methods for the entire course. These were lecture and discussion methods. There were, however, instances when other methods such as demonstration and reporting strategies were utilized. Although these methods are time-tested, they are considered as traditional methods (Lardizabal et al., 1991). Since lecture and discussion methods are teacher-centered, they are not recommended for constant use in CLT and CCT classrooms because these classrooms require active learner participation. English 105 (Afro-Asian Literature) syllabus, for example, showed that only ‘lecture and discussion’ methods were used to teach the course, though there were times when ‘oral reporting’ was utilized.

Finally, in terms of the instructional materials, it was found out that majority of the courses evaluated were delivered using traditional instructional materials (i.e., textbook, lecture notes and chalkboard). This is contrary to CCT and CLT advocacies for text-based, task-based, authentic and educational technology materials. For example, English 113 (Mythology and Folklore) syllabus indicated using ‘books and handouts’ as the only instructional materials.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

From the data gathered and evaluation conducted, the questions that this study raised can be answered.

First, it was found out that the syllabi content were not learner-centered because the students were not involved in the preparation or identification of the topics to be discussed. In terms of the principle of content-centeredness, it was seen that a number of courses used this principle given their respective natures and objectives.
The courses that followed content-centered teaching were literature and literature-related courses only.

Second, the topics and theories found in the syllabi contain basics of English studies as well as application in the teaching profession. The contents of the syllabi proved adequate to achieve communicative competence, which is the goal of CCT and CLT.

Third, by evaluating the teaching methods and techniques provided in the syllabi, it was found out that traditional methods, lecture and discussion methods-were widely and frequently used as all the syllabi indicated using these. However, a good number of learner-centered, cooperative and interactive teaching techniques were found in the syllabi too. Also, CCT and CLT-advocated instructional materials such as authentic and educational technology materials were reflected in the different syllabi. However, traditional materials such as chalk and board, lecture notes and ‘handouts’ still dominated the materials teachers used.

Finally, no cultural objects, materials or texts were used in the discussion of the lessons despite the fact that Ifugao is rich in cultural heritage and oral tradition.

Based on the results presented, the following recommendations were derived from the problems encountered, observations and evaluation results. These recommendations are offered for the improvement of the course syllabi, instruction and BSE-English program as a whole.

First, to achieve the learner-centeredness of the syllabi, it is suggested that students evaluate the syllabus/course at the end of the semester since the university rules do not allow them to be directly involved in planning/preparing the syllabus.

Second, the teachers may consider making the syllabi content-centered by providing content topics in courses whose nature does not necessarily call for such.

Third, culture content in language and literature courses should be included given the fact that most of the teachers and learners have common cultural heritage.

Fourth, teachers should be encouraged to use engaging teaching methods and techniques/activities in teaching the lessons.

Fifth, it is recommended that the teachers use text-based, task-based, authentic objects/materials such as scripts, cue cards, newspaper articles, songs, poems, magazines, and the like whenever it is applicable in teaching the language courses.

Sixth, the university library should provide more textbooks for the courses offered in the program. In this connection, the teachers should not rely so much on internet sources that all or majority the topics are taken from the web.

Finally, to come up with better and complete syllabi, all English teachers may meet together and prepare a syllabi for general use. It would even be better if all the English teachers in the university, not only at Potia Campus, collaborate to prepare the syllabi for the BSE English program for all campuses to utilize.

LITERATURE CITED


