
EMPOWERING STUDENTS' LANGUAGE COMPETENCE AND CULTURAL AWARENESS THROUGH COMMUNICATIVE APPROACH

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ABSTRACT

The communicative approach to learning language aims to improve students' communication skills, both orally and in writing. This approach focuses on developing four language skills: listening, reading, speaking, and writing. In the communicative approach, students can use language actively in communicative situations. This study used classroom action research to improve students' language competence and cultural awareness by implementing a communicative approach. Data from the study were collected through pretest, post-test, and questionnaire. The results showed that the student's language competence and cultural awareness improved significantly through a communicative approach. Therefore, communicative learning is effective for improving language competence and cultural awareness. This study implies that teachers should consider using a communicative approach in developing students' language competence and cultural awareness.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In essence, language is a means of communication between members of society. Communicating means expressing information, thoughts, and feelings. Communication activities are realized in the act of understanding and expressing nuances of meaning through spoken and written media, which are influenced, among other things, by the situation, the people involved in the communication, the topic, and the psychological condition of the people involved. In communication. Through language as the primary means of communication (Farida et al., 2024), we can develop science, technology, and culture primarily through language. In an educational context, this language is a communication tool to access, store, and share information. In everyday life, it functions as a tool for establishing interpersonal relationships, exchanging information, and enjoying the beautiful aspects of language (Planas & Pimm, 2024).

Based on its function, the objectives of teaching language in the current curriculum include: (1) developing communication skills, both oral and written. These abilities include listening, speaking, reading, and writing; (2) increasing awareness of the nature and importance of communicative competence; developing an understanding of the relationship between language and culture; and broadening cultural horizons (Mubarok & Qamariah, 2024). This way, students have cross-cultural insight and involve themselves in cultural diversity. As an effort to achieve the objectives of teaching language, linkages are needed between components in the curriculum, namely the objectives of teaching in the context of the current curriculum and in line with the content standards that are then explicitly formulated in the form of indicators that are used as consideration in selecting and developing other curriculum components (Erlina et al., 2024).

In the competency-based curriculum, the language teaching approach is communicative (Hladkoskok et al., 2024). This communicative approach aims to train students to use the target language according to their abilities and levels. The communicative approach in language teaching focuses on active communication between speaker and listener, writer and reader, or creating active interaction between the two. In this communication, the priority is mutual understanding between both parties by carrying out meaningful social interactions through practical communication activities emphasizing meaning and not grammar (Morales Figueroa & Urdiales Panimboza, 2024). However, at a higher level, the accuracy or correctness of grammatical use can also reflect effective and efficient communication skills.

The communicative approach is a communication skill. Learning activities with a communicative approach can be studied in real situations where messages are exchanged (Karataş et al., 2024). The communicative approach is that a foreign language can only be learned in real communication situations where real messages are exchanged. The communicative approach is a way or approach to language teaching that focuses on natural active interaction between speakers and listeners or writers and readers. So, people speak to convey something to others (Widiastuti et al., 2021).

Therefore, in communicating, the speaker and active listener interact naturally so that their communication runs effectively and efficiently (Mantra et al., 2023). However, communication could be deliberately created according to conditions and situations. The communication learning process contains a series of stages: 1) Providing skills and 2) Using skills. A prominent characteristic of the communicative approach is a shift in the focus of attention in language teaching, namely, attention to students as the central point (Suparsa & Mantra, 2024). As a result, much research on the learning and language acquisition processes occurs within oneself (Mantra et al., 2022).

Thus, it can be said that in the communicative approach, the priority is the relationship between the two parties involved by the context, situation, and feelings when the communication occurs (Mantra, 2024). The emergence of feelings in communication will undoubtedly increase the activeness of the communication process. With the communication aspects mentioned above, it will be easier to expect regular communication interactions to occur (Huang et al., 2024).

Communication using the target language cannot be separated between language skills and another but must be closely related (Salfin et al., 2024). The close relationship between the four language skills and other language elements in various interaction situations in language teaching is also called integrated proficiency. These four language skills are taught in an integrated manner and are not taught separately (Maspul, 2024). For example, in teaching listening, you can teach that skill, but inevitably, other skills, such as speaking, will be carried over. So, when teaching listening, speaking, or writing, you are involved so that communication in that language can be carried out actively (Rahman et al., 2024).

Apart from that, in communicative language teaching, we also emphasize the need to know grammatical rules and be able to use them effectively and correctly. We need to know various grammatical forms and use them effectively and appropriately when we communicate. In this regard, something we do in class must be supported by beliefs about language rules, how to learn language, and its application in communication (Degtiarova et al., 2023). Apart from combining these four skills, as previously explained, students' skills, needs, psychological factors, and characteristics must also be considered. Looking at students' needs in communicative language teaching is essential (Qasserras, 2023).

Based on the views and opinions of the language and education experts mentioned above, it can be said that the consequence of language teaching is that there must be an interaction between language speakers and listeners or language writers and readers so that both can interact actively. The four language skills were taught in an integrated way, integrated, and adapted to their situation and needs. Language learners develop attitudes and habits that are considered when teaching and learning languages.

Various studies have been conducted regarding communicative learning in improving students' abilities, which shows an increase in student abilities and student motivation, especially in junior and senior high schools. Still, only a few studies have been conducted in universities. In this research's learning process, the teaching materials were designed to integrate foreign cultures to increase students' language competence and awareness of foreign cultures.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This research is classroom action research. It consisted of a cyclical process. Each cycle had four interconnected activities: planning, implementing actions, observing, and reflecting. Action research begins with communication and agreement between people who want to change something together. It explains that there must be an agreement between researchers and participants to solve a particular problem in society (Cohen et al., 2017).



Regarding classroom action research, the problem to be researched is the gap faced by students and teachers in the teaching and learning process. Based on the explanation above, classroom action research was used in this research. The teaching and learning process was divided into two cycles. Each cycle consisted of two sessions, each consisting of four interconnected activities. The four interrelated activities are planning, action, observation, and reflection. The results of reflection and observation from the first cycle were used to revise the planning for the second cycle. Researchers used three instruments to collect data for this classroom action research: pretest, post-test, and questionnaire.

The data needed to answer the research questions was collected through pretests, post-tests, and questionnaires administered to fifth-semester English Education Study Program students at Mahasaraswati University, Denpasar, Bali. The pretest was provided before teaching was carried out. The pretest score determines the students' pre-existing abilities. Then, after students were taught through communicative learning, a post-test was carried out to determine the results of the action. A questionnaire was given in the last cycle to determine how they perceived learning activities through a communicative approach.

The data obtained in this classroom action research was analyzed descriptively to reveal the extent of the student's learning progress or improvement in language proficiency and cultural awareness through a communicative approach. The most critical data needed to answer the research questions was collected through pretests and post-tests. In addition, additional supporting data was collected by administering questionnaires to research students at the end of the last cycle.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the research findings and discussion of the findings are presented briefly to provide readers with a clearer understanding of this research.

Findings

The pre-cycle was the first step in collecting data, which was carried out through administration of pretest and administering a pretest. Initial reflections indicated that students needed higher language skills and cultural awareness. Apart from that, to support the data collected by interviewing lecturers, researchers conducted a pretest to ensure that problems occurred in this research. In the pretest, researchers asked students to answer 20 test questions to identify their pre-existing language proficiency and cultural awareness.

Students took the pretest within 50 minutes. The average pretest mean score was 50. In addition, only two research students reached the minimum passing standard. Most students needed serious improvement in their language proficiency and cultural awareness. The average mean score of the first post-test was 70. The results showed an increase from the pretest results. The data also indicated that 14 students achieved the minimum completion standard in the first post-test. However, because the students' competence was still low in the first cycle, the second cycle was carried out to get better improvement.

After the preparations were complete, the action of the second cycle was carried out according to the learning plan. The teaching and learning process in the second cycle was similar to that in the first cycle. In the second cycle, the researcher's main task was to carry out all the planning made previously and teach students using a communicative approach. The researcher showed several related pictures to explore the student's knowledge. The average mean score of the second post-test was 85. More than 80% of students passed the minimum passing grade criterion.

From the questionnaire data, it is known that 45% of students strongly agree, 40% agree, 15% agree, and no one disagrees with implementing a communicative approach in teaching language skills and cultural awareness; this also clearly showed the students' positive attitude towards increasing students' language competence and cultural understanding through a communicative approach.

Discussion

This research was intended to increase students' language competence and cultural awareness through a communicative approach. Based on the post-test results in two cycles, students' language competence and cultural understanding could significantly improve by applying a communicative approach.

In the pre-cycle, researchers gave an initial test. The average mean score in language competence and cultural awareness students was still low; only two students could get a standard passing grade score. Most students needed improved vocabulary, understanding of the discussed topics, and communication skills.

In the first cycle, researchers taught students through collaborative learning. In session 1, several students made a fuss during the teaching and learning process because they were unfamiliar with the applied techniques. In session 2, the students were more active than in the previous session. After teaching the subject with a

communicative approach, a post-test was carried out at the end of the cycle. The post-test results showed increasing numbers. The average post-test score obtained was higher than the average pretest score.

In the second cycle, students were taught the same technique as in the first cycle. Students were active and enjoyed the teaching and learning process. In this cycle, researchers strengthened students' language competence and cultural awareness. In the second cycle, the average mean score was much higher than in the first cycle. It means there was a significant increase from the first cycle to the second cycle. The higher average mean score shows that improving language competence and cultural awareness in the second cycle through a communicative approach was more effective than the first cycle because the teaching scenario in the second cycle was revised based on some weaknesses of the first cycle, namely, students were still reluctant to engage themselves in learning activities, they were still worried of making mistakes, and they were lack of vocabulary.

The percentage of questionnaires obtained for the current classroom action research showed that the students studied responded positively. Their attitudes and motivation changed after their language competence and cultural awareness were improved through a communicative approach.

Positive responses are based on the percentage of items that strongly agree and of items that agree. It can be seen that the items in the questions have the same rate, meaning that half of the students studied thought that this activity was quite enjoyable during the teaching and learning process through collaborative learning. In addition, based on several criteria in the questionnaire, the students were taught that this technique also motivates them to improve their language competence and cultural awareness through a communicative approach. These results indicated that the students positively responded to implementing a communicative approach in the classroom.

In the communicative approach, the main goal is to present the lesson in a natural context or setting. So, an approach can be defined as a series of conscious efforts teachers make toward students to achieve learning goals. Professional educators often use a learning approach with a communicative approach. It aims to form habits by practicing directly in a tangible form. Communicative learning encourages students to speak the target language, especially in situational contexts (Sitoy & Sonsona, 2024). Observational support showed increased improvement in students' language competence and cultural awareness, which can be seen from their active participation in activities in class.

The communicative approach also emphasizes engaging students in activities to be active learners. Students show improvement in understanding instructions and conversations and can respond to questions correctly. Moreover, it increases student self-confidence (Taridi et al., 2024). Communicative learning allows students to practice without fear of making mistakes because the main focus is communication rather than grammar (Al Nahar et al., 2024). Students who initially weren't confident in speaking were more open and braver to participate more actively. This method allows students to learn a language realistically, making it more relevant and interesting.

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this research, a communicative approach can be implemented to increase students' language competence and cultural awareness through a communicative approach. Primary data for this classroom action research was collected by giving pretests and post-tests to the students studied. At the end of the second cycle, it was carried out to improve the student's language competence and cultural awareness through a communicative approach. Moreover, based on the questionnaire administered in the second cycle, it was found that there was an improvement in students' interests, motivation, and attitudes toward learning language and cultural awareness. The questionnaire showed students were interested in learning language and cultural awareness through a communicative approach. Therefore, this research suggests that the communicative approach should be maximized, and its application should be intensified in language learning.

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