

Exploring College Freshmen's Preference on English Teaching Strategies

Myra A. Tamondong

Abstract—Language teaching has shifted its paradigm from teacher-centered class to a student-centered class. Since a learner-centered classroom focuses on the learners, there should have been enough strategies to be used during the teaching-learning process abreast to the present era. Thus, this study investigated the teachers' strategies used in teaching English and the students' preferences and whether students' performance in English is affected by their preferences. Two sets of questionnaires were administered to 218 students enrolled in English 12 and five English teachers who teach the subject at Quirino State University. Some students were also interviewed. Results show that despite of the digital age, students preferred traditional teaching strategies. Furthermore, significant results were also noted on some teaching strategies in relation to the different variables in the study, as well as the students' preference and their performance.

Keywords—Students' preferences, teaching strategies, language teaching, digital age.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE shift in language teaching paradigm from teacher-centered class to a student-centered class is prominent nowadays. In a classroom, varied instructional strategies are used by teachers. *Strategies* are defined as the specific methods of approaching a problem or task, the modes of operation for achieving a particular end and the planned designs for controlling and manipulating certain information [1].

Language teaching has been explicated of what teachers do – the actions and activities they carry out in the classroom and their effects on learners [2]. The teacher is normally challenged with the following kinds of tasks: selecting learning activities, preparing students for new learning, presenting learning activities, asking questions, conducting drills, checking students' understanding, providing opportunities for practice of new items, monitoring students' learning, giving feedback on student learning, and reviewing and reteaching when necessary.

Yet, studies have been focused mainly on teachers' pedagogical actions and how these actions take effect on learners. The variety of strategies, methods, and techniques used in classroom teaching is done by the teacher. Nonetheless, not to be overlooked is learners' preference of how the English language is taught. Learners carry to

education their own beliefs attitudes and choices about the teaching and learning process which prompt students how they approach learning [3]. Undeniably, people have their own beliefs and preferences in their approaches to learning tasks.

In a learner-centered classroom, the learners are the epicenter of the teaching-learning process. Their multiplicity in learning is salient in English language teaching. Learners' attitude is a factor that governs one's achievement in language learning [4]. Attitudes to the language, its speakers, as well as the learning milieu all play some part in determining their success or failure.

The power of students' voice has been recognized by teachers in improving teaching and learning. When such a voice is valued for its noteworthy impact on second language learners, second language teachers will better understand the learners' learning preferences while learning English. If these preferences are met, it can upgrade the drive to learn English. In this concept, students will have higher performance in the second language if they really want to learn English.

Several studies have verified that students are more involved in learning when they actively participate and have some choice (on their preference) over the learning process and related concern. Other studies have investigated on learners' beliefs and attitudes towards classroom activities and on comparing learners' and teachers' views. Most of these studies have found some evidence on learners' conflict against the current communicative practice and possible mismatch between teachers and learners.

An Iranian study showed that a mismatch between the reality of the grammar classes and the preferences of the students and teachers seemed to occur [5].

Additionally, there were some contrasts with the students' and teachers' beliefs about which procedures were most effective in realizing language learning [6]. Varied areas of language learning namely, grammar teaching, error correction, culture, target language use, computer-based technology, communicative language teaching strategies and assessment were investigated. When the students' and teachers' answers were compared, it was revealed that the teachers strongly emphasized use of communicative activities. Teachers favored real-life activities – those which primarily aim to exchange information using paired or group work. However, the students seemed not realize the value of communicative activities since they still wanted activities which are focused mainly on grammatical items. A possible reason highlighted is that these respondents belonged to junior class where most of their language involvement was restricted to high school life that

Myra A. Tamondong is a faculty teaching English subjects at Quirino State University, Diffun, Quirino, Philippines 3401 (corresponding author's phone: +639059178375; e-mail: tamondong.myra@yahoo.com).

depended on rote learning and repetition drills; communicative activities were not given enough emphasis.

Furthermore, learners and the goal of language teaching must be based on the preference of what and how to teach to get learners actively involved in the learning process – learning by doing [7]. In addition, if a teacher understands the way students learn, that understanding would result in the improvement of selection of teaching strategies appropriate to student learning. These notions support a framework that empowers teachers to skillfully develop a variation of instructional strategies that are beneficial for students [8].

Since learners learn differently, teachers need to be informed about learners' preferences so that they can better understand and manage their teaching as well as their students' learning. Being informed of the students' choice on teaching strategies, language teachers can design and modify their way of teaching.

The theory on learner-centered education is the main basis of this study. It states that the reference on what will be taught, how and when it will be taught, and how it will be assessed is the learners.

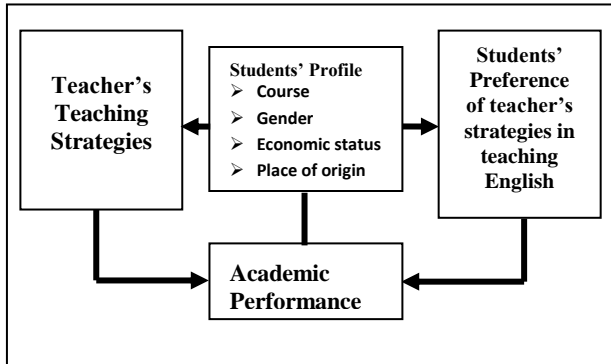


Fig. 1 Conceptual paradigm showing the relationship between and among the variable in the study

As indicated in the center box of the framework, the study focused on students' profile which includes course, gender, economic status, and place of origin. These may be related to the teachers' use of strategies in the language classroom, as shown in the left box of the illustration. In addition, the same variables may bear signify differences in relation to the students' preferences of teaching strategies as contained in the right box. These three variables, students' profile, teachers' teaching strategies, and students' preferences of teaching strategies may be related to the respondents' academic performance in the subject.

By examining learners' and teachers' preferences, particularly described classroom activities, this study sought to provide an insight on students' preferences on teaching strategies.

Particularly, the present research aimed the following objectives:

1. determine the profile of the respondents;
2. compare the students' preferences of teaching strategies in teaching English, actual strategies used in class and strategies used as perceived by the teachers; and

3. identify the significant differences on students' profile and English performance along choices on English teaching strategies.

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was a descriptive research to determine the students' preferences on English teaching strategies. Other variables described in the study were course, sex, economic status, place of origin, and academic performance. It involved a sample of 218 first year students who were enrolled in second semester, School Year 2012-2013 in English —for freshmen in Quirino State University (Diffun Campus).

Slovin's formula was used to determine the population in this study. Students enrolled in bachelor in Secondary Education (n=38), Bachelor in Elementary Education (n=40), Bachelor of Science in Agriculture (n=56), Bachelor of Science in Criminology (n=45) and Bachelor of Science in Hospitality Management (n=39) were the respondents of the study. The respondents were enrolled in English 12 (Writing in the Discipline). Included in the study were three instructors teaching English 12 in the same university.

Data to answer the research questions were generated through questionnaires and some interviews.

Two questionnaires were devised: a questionnaire for the students and one for teachers. The questionnaire for students consists of four parts: Part 1 included questions needed for the profile of the participants such as course, gender, family economic status, and place of origin. The family economic status was categorized through the family's income such as: *have much money or very sufficient income and can save money, family income is just sufficient for family's need but can hardly save, and family income is little or very little and is not or not always enough for the family*. The place of origin is grouped into two: rural and urban. Part 2 consisted of items to bring out the classroom strategies used by the English instructors; and Part 3 consisted of the respondents' preferences on teaching strategies of English teachers. In Parts 2 and 3, the respondents rated the frequency of use of the teaching strategy. Students' preferences and teachers' strategies towards English Teaching were coded through the use of a 4-point Likert Scale with 4=Always, 3=Often, 2=Seldom, and 1=Never.

Moreover, the questionnaire for teachers consisted of items to identify the teaching strategies used in the classroom.

Interviews to selected respondents were conducted to justify their choice of strategies in English teaching.

The steps followed in gathering the data for the study are as follows: preparation of questionnaire, floating of questionnaire; recording and tabulating, statistical computations, interpretations and recommendations. Two sets of questionnaire were prepared: one for the students' profile and their preferences and one for teachers' strategies. These were shown to the adviser for evaluation and suggestions. After the approval, a permit to administer the questionnaire was requested from the University President and from the respective Deans of the different institutes of Quirino State University. After which, the researcher administered the questionnaire to the freshmen and to their English Instructors

of the said school. To cull the students' performance in English, the grades were obtained from the Office of the University Registrar. The data were then tabulated in a master data sheet for analysis.

To analyze the profile of the respondents, teaching strategies used by the teachers as perceived by the students, and teaching strategies as perceived by teachers, simple frequency counts and percentages were used. Inferential statistics like Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) or F-test and *t*-test were used to determine the significant difference between and among variables such as course, gender, economic status, and place of origin. In addition, Chi-square test was used to identify if there is a significant relation between students' preferred strategies and students' performance in the English subject. Furthermore, in comparing the students' preference and the strategies used as perceived by teachers, mean method was used since there were only five teacher-respondents which cannot be compared to the number of student-respondents.

As to the academic performance of the respondents in English, this scale is used by the University as indicated in the QSU Student Handbook [9].

TABLE I
SCALE USED IN DETERMINING THE ENGLISH ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Grade	Description
1.00-1.50	Excellent
1.51-2.00	Very Satisfactory
2.01-2.50	Satisfactory
2.50-3.00	Fair

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The findings of the study is presented in the following order: (1) profile of the respondents; (2) comparison of the students' preference on the teaching strategies, strategies actually used as perceived by students and strategies used as perceived by teachers; and (3) test on the significant differences between students' profile and performance and their preferred teaching strategies.

TABLE II
PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

Profile	Frequency	Percentage	
Course	BSEd	38	17.43
	BEEd	40	18.35
	BSA	56	25.69
	BSCrim	45	20.64
	BSHM	39	17.89
Sex	Female	139	63.76
	Male	79	36.24
Family Income	Have much money and properties than they need; income is very sufficient; can buy whatever they like; can save money	46	21.10
	Income is just sufficient for family's need; but can hardly save	98	45.00
	Income is very little, sometimes not or not always enough for family	74	33.90
Place of origin	Rural	148	67.89
	Urban	70	32.11
Total	218	100.00	

The table presents the frequency distribution of the respondents when they are grouped by course, sex, family economic status and place of origin.

As to course, the most numbered participants belonged to Bachelor of Science in Agriculture since the university is an agricultural school.

On sex, female dominates male in terms of number.

On family economic status, the overall results imply that most of the population belonged to the average class. Considering that the school is a public school, it is expected that there is a larger number of students who belong to families with average income.

Meanwhile, on the place of origin, more than half of the respondents belonged to rural areas. As such, most of the respondents were from Quirino Province; some reside in nearby provinces such as Isabela and only a few are from Nueva Vizcaya.

TABLE III
COMPARISON OF ACTUAL STRATEGIES PERCEIVED BY STUDENTS, STUDENTS' PREFERENCE AND STRATEGIES USED AS PERCEIVED BY TEACHERS

Strategy	Actual strategies used perceived by students		Students' Preference		Teachers' responses	
	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD	\bar{x}	QD
	1. Lecture	3.76	Always	3.73	Always	3.67
2. Question and Answer	3.11	Often	3.03	Often	3.67	Always
3. Film/ Video	1.86	Seldom	2.30	Seldom	2.67	Often
4. PowerPoint Presentation	2.29	Seldom	2.74	Often	2.00	Seldom
5. Visual Aids/ Printed Materials	1.61	Never	2.13	Seldom	1.67	Seldom
6. Music	1.29	Never	1.80	Seldom	1.67	Seldom
7. Worksheets or Handouts	2.88	Often	3.16	Often	3.33	Often
8. Dictation	2.72	Often	2.62	Often	2.67	Often
9. White/ Blackboard	2.45	Seldom	2.68	Often	3.67	Always
10. Essay writing	2.78	Often	2.72	Often	3.67	Always
11. Exam (paper)	2.97	Often	3.04	Often	3.00	Often
12. Homework	2.78	Often	2.83	Often	3.67	Always
13. Experiment	1.34	Never	2.00	Seldom	1.33	Never
14. Case studies	1.83	Seldom	2.10	Seldom	2.00	Seldom
15. Learning through Internet	2.15	Seldom	2.76	Often	2.33	Seldom
16. One-to-one tutoring	1.37	Never	2.13	Seldom	2.00	Seldom
17. Debate	1.56	Seldom	2.12	Seldom	2.33	Seldom
18. Games	1.27	Never	1.87	Seldom	2.33	Seldom
19. Demonstration from other teacher	1.49	Never	2.03	Seldom	1.00	Never
20. Role Play	1.39	Never	1.95	Seldom	2.33	Seldom
21. Student presentation/ individual	2.48	Seldom	2.56	Often	3.33	Often
22. Student presentation/in groups	2.44	Seldom	2.72	Often	2.67	Often
23. Drills	2.44	Seldom	2.66	Often	4.00	Always

Legend: \bar{x} =mean
1.00-1.49 – Never; 1.50-2.49 – Seldom; 2.50-3.49 – Often; 3.50-4.00 – Always

Unanimously, the most liked strategy is lecture which was rated *Always* while the least preferred strategy is music with a mean of 1.80 and was rated *Seldom*. These high ratings of the

freshmen on *lecture* could be attributed to the fact that despite of its being a traditional strategy, students still find lecture effective and helpful in their studies.

Seven strategies were unanimously rated by the teacher- and student-respondents. It is, indeed, noticeable that is still used by language teachers and is preferred by students. Reference [10] found that traditional methods are preferred than that of the modern strategies. These findings imply a balance between the student preference and teaching strategies.

However, the students' perception and teachers' responses differ on some strategies. Freshmen's choice on the frequency of these strategies shows a positive result.

Noticeably, the frequency of use for blackboard and drills differed among the students' and teachers' responses. With the forgoing results, there seemed to be a mismatch on the frequency of use of these teaching strategies. Found by Reference [5] is a mismatch between the reality of the grammar classes and the preferences of the students and teachers.

TABLE IV
TEST OF SIGNIFICANCE ON THE PROFILE AND ENGLISH PERFORMANCE
ALONG STUDENTS' PREFERENCE ON TEACHING STRATEGIES

Strategies	Course	Sex	Family status	Place of origin	Academic performance in English	Significance
1. Lecture	0.63	0.74	0.57	0.01*	0.02*	
2. Question and Answer	0.37	0.08	0.01*	0.57	0.04*	
3. Film/ Video	0.00*	0.40	0.13	0.74	0.04*	
4. PowerPoint Presentation	0.00*	0.71	0.04*	0.96	0.67	
5. Visual Aids/ Printed Materials	0.01*	0.19	0.33	0.92	0.02*	
6. Music	0.49	0.02*	0.06	0.24	0.25	
7. Worksheets or Handouts	0.00*	0.76	0.22	0.95	0.75	
8. Dictation	0.00*	0.00*	0.22	0.36	0.92	
9. White/ Blackboard	0.02*	0.62	0.63	0.55	0.18	
10. Essay writing	0.01*	0.52	0.05*	0.56	0.01*	
11. Exam (paper)	0.08	0.14	0.07	0.65	0.52	
12. Homework	0.55	0.08	0.21	0.55	0.33	
13. Experiment	0.65	0.11	0.00*	0.43	0.43	
14. Case studies	0.51	0.04*	0.32	0.77	0.27	
15. Learning through Internet	0.00*	0.19	0.21	0.72	0.45	
16. One-to-one tutoring	0.38	0.97	0.01*	0.09	0.78	
17. Debate	0.08	0.52	0.25	0.27	0.10	
18. Games	0.19	0.45	0.276	0.01*	0.43	
19. Demonstration from other teacher	0.30	0.19	0.51	0.55	0.93	
20. Role Play	0.13	0.86	0.91	0.84	0.51	
21. Student presentation/ individual	0.00*	0.15	0.06	0.39	0.32	
22. Student presentation/in groups	0.01*	0.40	0.05	0.09	0.29	
23. Drills	0.23	0.02*	0.12	0.74	0.79	

*-significant at 0.05 level

The table 3 shows the test of significant differences as regards the respondents' preference on teaching strategies when they were grouped by profile and academic English performance. Significant results were computed in the strategy using film, PowerPoint Presentation, visual aids (printed materials), worksheets or handouts, white/blackboard, dictation, essay writing, learning through the use of internet, individual student presentation, and in-group student presentation.

Although the participants gave unanimous answer which is *often* for PowerPoint presentation, there was a big distinction between the answers of BEEd and BSEd respondents. As revealed in their responses, BEEd students claimed that this strategy can aid the instruction and that when there is something seen, they can easily grasp the lesson. While BSEd students thought that using PowerPoint presentations can only be a detriment to learning because some teachers just read what is projected on the screen. This can be a possible reason for the BSEd students to prefer that this strategy be used *often*.

Meanwhile, despite of its being traditional, the use of visual aids (printed materials) was preferred by BSA respondents, which answer is in contrast with the BSHM respondents. They reasoned that this strategy is time-consuming on the part of the teacher and probably that they find it ineffective in a classroom setting.

On worksheet, an obvious difference between the answer of BSHM and BEEd participants is seen. This is because of the latter's current experience that their teacher provides worksheets or handouts as a supplement to her lecture. Based on the answers given in the use of worksheet, the respondents found it to be useful for review purposes. On the other hand, the interview revealed that the former believed that listening to the lecture would help them so much to cope with their lessons. Besides, according to one of the respondents, he does not read the handout (if there is) because he has already written the lessons in his notes. He added that the handout will just confuse him during review sessions.

On dictation, BSHM respondents said that it is not easy to cope with the dictation especially if the dictation is done fast. However, BEEd respondents liked to take note the details of the lesson in order for them to have a reviewer for the examination.

Also, essay writing results found to be worth-noting. BSEd students realized the essence of essay writing. This is evident because they were enrolled in Writing in the Discipline which required them to really write essays on narration, description, exposition, argumentation, as well as a research paper to complete the subject. Yet, BSA respondents were also taking the same subject and same requirements were given to them; however, they seemed to not realize the importance of it because they found writing to be a boring task.

On learning through the internet, BEEd students were more adaptive to technology than BSA students. According to the interview, they are excited to learn internet features. Consequently, BSA students said that learning through the internet is expensive. Aside from that, a student said that sometimes the teacher will just give the activity through the internet, and then let them do it. Furthermore, not everyone has

a computer and if ever that they use the computer in the school laboratory, not everyone can use it because there is only a limited number of computers. This implies that although these students are in the 21st century, they found less importance on the use of technologies as integration to teaching.

It further implies that students' preference to teaching strategies differ as to course.

As to sex and preferences, the results were significant only the use of music, dictation, case studies and drills. Most of the female respondents did not like music and dictation while male participants were more adaptive on the said strategies. Therefore, gender influences the teaching strategy preference specifically the use of music in class.

As to economic status and preferences, significant results were obtained in the strategies question and answer, PowerPoint presentation, essay writing, experiment, and one-to-one tutoring. There was a noticeable difference between the preference of respondents who belonged to families with very sufficient income and those who belonged to families with little or very little income when it comes to question and answer. The former likes this strategy more than the latter. It is believed that they want question and answer to countercheck if they really understand the lesson. It is a strategy for the teacher to assure that the topic is well exhausted. In that way, learning is further evaluated. Moreover, it also boosts their self-confidence and sharpens my mind when answering questions. However, respondents whose family income was little or very little were hesitant to the use of this strategy. Respondents said that answering a question is so tiring. Aside from that, they feel pressured because they are scored and if the student cannot answer, they do not want to be embarrassed in class.

While PowerPoint presentation results show unanimous qualitative description among the respondents, a very minimal deviation between respondents with little or very little family income and very sufficient family income was established. Respondents whose family income was little or very little favored PowerPoint presentation over those whose family income was very sufficient. The former reasoned that they were interested of what they see and through that they can clearly understand the topic. They thought that this strategy helps them to comprehend what the teacher is saying. They can also see the correct spelling of words. Consequently, respondents with sufficient family income claimed that *—instead of listening to the one who is speaking, students rather choose to copy in the power point.* Another added, *—sometimes „some“ teacher just read the lecture and turn to the next slide.* These show that there is no difference if the teacher uses such strategy or not.

On place of origin, lecture and games display significant results. Respondents from urban liked games and lecture more than those from rural. However, there was only a slight difference between their preferences. To quote, a rural respondent answered: *“the students would love to play than to learn.”* Yet, respondents from urban areas liked games because it keeps them alive especially if the game is exciting and is related to the subject. Hence, the place of origin is a factor in the teaching strategy preference of the respondents as to lecture and games.

On students' preferences and academic performance, significant results are evident on teaching strategies like lecture, question and answer, film, visual aids, and essay writing. Students who liked lecture and essay had very satisfactory grade as compared to those whose grade was fair. Likewise, students with excellent grades prefer the use of the visual aids than those who perform fairly. On the strategies visual aids and film, only minimal difference among the respondents' answers was noted.

In general, students and teachers still prefer the use of traditional strategies in teaching English; however, their attitude towards modern strategies is varied. Since preference is noted to have a vital role in language teaching, it is recommended that teachers be aware of the preferences. There is also a need to conduct needs assessment to be able to know the level of the students in English. In addition, the use of varied teaching strategies is also encouraged among teachers in order to be abreast to the new trends of language teaching.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks to the Quirino State University administration for giving the researcher an opportunity for such paper presentation endeavor and to Ms Zayda J. Asuncion for the improvement of this paper. Especially, thanks to God Almighty.

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Myra A. Tamondong is a faculty teaching English subjects at Quirino State University. Her research entices her because of the existence of paradigm shift in language teaching. Among her research interests are Second Language (L2) Pedagogy, materials development, Philippine English variety and attitude and motivation towards learning L2.