



INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF EDUCATION, PSYCHOLOGY AND COUNSELLING (IJEPC)

www.ijepe.com



REFORMULATING COMMUNICATION STRATEGY TRAINING TO REDUCE TOPIC FRONTING AMONG TESL TEACHERS IN MALAYSIA

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Article Info:

Article history:

Received date: 15.09.2022

Revised date: 10.10.2022

Accepted date: 30.11.2022

Published date: 15.12.2022

To cite this document:

Soekarno, M., Othman, I. W., Ab Aziz, A. A., & Nik Mohamed, N. Z. (2022). Reformulating Communication Strategy Training to Reduce Topic Fronting among TESL Teachers in Malaysia. *International Journal of Education, Psychology and Counseling*, 7 (48), 126-140.

DOI: 10.35631/IJEPC.748009

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Abstract:

Communication strategies involves the vast range of linguistic and paralinguistic techniques such as the use of negotiation of meaning to the very complex facial expressions. Despite being highly human based, the use of communication strategies needs to be learned and developed. The Malaysian classified variety, topic fronting, is a highly utilised communication strategy. However, despite being an achievement strategy, topic fronting does not abide by the English language grammatical rule. Although one of the primary factors of communication strategy is the independence from linguistic rules, a rampant use of this strategy among ESL learners might affect them adversely especially in academic discourse. This study looked into this strategy among the TESL practitioners from Universiti Malaysia Sabah. The findings obtained from their focus group discussions (FGD) identified four themes in the utilisation of topic fronting methods of overcoming it as well as the inculcation of suitable communication strategies. This study's findings show that low utilisation of topic fronting should be able to allow the reformulation of the current communication strategy training.

Keywords:

Communication Strategies, Focus Group Discussion, Topic Fronting

Introduction

When we talk about innovation in education or 21st century learning, most people will think about the use of technology in outreaching and learning. There is a stereotype regarding the word “innovation”, circulating in advances in technology, utilisation of gadgetry in learning and the rampant dependence on internet in material source and the pandemic induced online learning. Vettorel (2019) stated that research into communication strategies and English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) is a thriving area of investigation, superseding the initial impression of innovation. We have now looked into cooperative strategies leading to successful communication and mutual understanding, or how miscommunication is resolved, above all in academic as well as business ELF (BELF) contexts, and, more recently, international students’ communities.

ELF interactions have been shown to be characterized by the speakers’ mutual cooperation in the co-construction of meaning. Repetition, paraphrasing, as well as self- and other-repair and pre-emptive moves have emerged as important strategies, together with the exploitation of multilingual resources and repertoires. Communication strategies, rather than a mere compensation device, are thus to be considered an essential element in the process of effective communication, in that they are strategically used by speakers as part of “communicative capability.” Regardless of the language domain, language source, or field of specialisation, Soekarno’s (2019) thesis showed that communication strategy training (CST) is an effective method to implement the use of achievement strategies in technical interactions. This study has supported and expanded the field of communicative competence.

Several studies have looked into elements of communication strategies such as Zhu, Liao, and Cheong (2019), who found that the high-performing students used the clarification strategy significantly more frequently than the medium-performing students. In another study conducted on Taiwanese EFL college students, Tsai (2018) found that in terms of their speaking anxiety and strategy use, the lower proficiency group responded better to the communication strategy training than the intermediate and higher proficiency groups. Some studies were also conducted specifically on the topic fronting (Benson, 1990; Ting & Kho, 2008; Ting & Phan, 2008; Soekarno, Othman, Ab Aziz & Nik Mohamed, 2021) and the latest study by Soekarno et.al. (2021) reflected on the adversity of topic fronting.

Background of the Study

Two critical reasons sustaining the need in strengthening undergraduates’ soft skills especially teacher trainees in Institutes of Higher Learning (Ngang et.al, 2015). Firstly, criticisms from school administrators that novice teachers are generally academically proficient but lack in soft skills such as communication skill, professional skills, ethics and moral, critical thinking and problem-solving skills, team work skill including leadership skill (Tang & Tan, 2015). Secondly, the increasing globalization of the work force and job market imposes much more competitive skills on our graduate teachers (Shakir, 2009).

The Collins English Dictionary (2022) defines the term "soft skills" as "desirable qualities for certain forms of employment that do not depend on acquired knowledge: they include common sense, the ability to deal with people, and a positive flexible attitude." Soft skills are a composite expression, and each of the two words explains a defining aspect of the

concept. The word “skill” highlights the practical function. The term alone has a broad meaning, and describes a particular ability to complete tasks ranging from easier ones like “learning how to kick a ball” to harder ones like “learning how to be creative.” In this specific instance, the word “skill” has to be interpreted as the ability to master hardly controlled actions. The word “soft” is the opposite of “hard”, may appear to mean “subjective, fuzzy, and unreliable,” but, “calling these skills soft or noncognitive belies their importance.” Due to their subjectivity, soft skills are often not assessed and yet many in business consulting argue that they lie at the foundation of what makes a leader and will determine if an employee will rise to a leadership position. Soft skills represent personal skills necessary for such activities as team work and motivating others.

Soft skills are a combination of people skills, social skills, communication skills, character or personality traits, attitudes, mindsets, career attributes, social intelligence and emotional intelligence quotients, among others, that enable people to navigate their environment, work well with others, perform well, and achieve their goals with complementing hard skills. Due to their rising importance, the need to teach soft skills has become a major concern for educators and employers all over the world. As it is a poorly defined set of skills, teaching them is more challenging, compared to classical skills.

With this in mind, teaching the use of communication strategies would also need to change. One of the aspects that is in need of change is the acceptance towards an obsolete norm, the use of topic fronting which was cited as a characteristic of the Malaysian variety of English by Benson (1990). Topic fronting is a communication strategy where the speaker makes use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to parcel up information to emphasise the topic. This is derived from Clennell’s (1995) Discourse-Based perspective communication strategies which uses topic plus comment syntactic structures to portion information. However, topic fronting is a deviation from acceptable Native speaker use of English. The outcome of this research should inculcate the use of suitable achievement strategies among Teaching English as Second Language (TESL) practitioners which will be transferred to future ESL learners’ post-Pandemic utilisation.

Research Objective

This research was an exploratory case study on the use of topic fronting communication strategy in a TESL programme during a COVID-19 lockdown and its aftermath. The objective of the research was to reformulate the communication strategy training based on the examination of the use of topic fronting among TESL practitioners in Malaysia. To address this objective, the study had obtained the opinion of the participants through several sessions of focus group discussion (FGD). The topics that served as the research questions were:

Session 1: Are the TESL practitioners aware of the use of topic fronting among themselves?

Session 2: Would the TESL practitioners accommodate the use of topic fronting in their interactions with future ESL learners?

Session 3: Would the TESL practitioners inculcate the use of alternative achievement-based communication strategy in their interactions with future ESL learners?

The utilisation of the opinionnaire from Soekarno's (2019) study, the Oral Communication Strategies Inventory (OCSI) serves as a supporting instrument to familiarise the participants with the communication strategies by allowing their self-reports of the frequency of their use of communication strategies. Learners' awareness is an important element in gauging the effectiveness of the FGD in a sense that a higher awareness especially in more matured learners would create more confident interlocutors. This response will allow the researchers to reformulate the existing CST following the post-Pandemic condition.

Research Gap

The post pandemic situation is forcing us to eradicate topic fronting as we face virtual interactions with a higher number of Native speakers than ever before. Past research had identified that topic fronting is a part of the communication strategy grouped as collaborative strategies together with tonicity devices and fillers, which are used in conversational maintenance. A useful strategy that emphasises the topic in order to prepare the interlocutor for details to follow, topic fronting is generally accepted as a Malaysian communication strategy. However, one still has to concede that despite its usefulness, topic fronting is a deviation from acceptable Native speaker use of English.

The Issues of Topic Fronting in Malaysia

Many second learners regard speaking ability as the measure of knowing a language and value ability to converse more than the ability to read write or comprehend oral language. When a communicative difficulty crops up in a conversation, interactional modifications are utilised to bridge the gap and continue the conversation. Among the most prevalent of these interactional modification or communication strategies used among Malaysians are the use of fillers (Soekarno & Ting, 2014), code switching (David, 2013; Then & Ting, 2010) and topic fronting (Benson, 1990; Ting & Kho, 2008; Ting & Phan, 2008; Soekarno, Othman, Ab Aziz & Nik Mohamed, 2021; Soekarno, 2019).

Fronting generally refers to any construction in which a word group that customarily follows the verb is placed at the beginning of a sentence under the English grammar (Nordquist, 2020). Identified as "front-focus" or "preposing", this type of fronting has a variation of purposes in discourse, especially in the conservation of cohesion. It can be used to maintain the movement of textual information, express contrast, and provide emphasis to specific elements. When utilised in dialogues, topic fronting allows the speaker to place the focus at the beginning of a sentence to make a story more dramatic. However, fronting can also trigger something called inverted subject-verb order (Pearce, 2007). By moving the subject out of its natural environment, it involves a shift of emphasis and represents another aspect to this focus device. This technique is a very common feature in Old English and this inverted order had an extensive dramatic force and was very distinctive of lively narrative sequences. A sample that still retained a kind of mock dramatic effect is shown here in Tolkien's work:

Deep down here by the dark water lived Old Gollum, a small slimy creature.
Suddenly came Gollum and whispered and hissed.

(Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, chp. 5 p. 77)

As the above example illustrates, this construction always involves fronted phrases (e.g., directional and positional adverbials) and the verbs are intransitive (typical verbs of movement or location). In these examples, the verbs “lived” and “came” have shifted to precede their subject Old Gollum and Gollum. Further example of topic fronting from Wolcott and Vinciguerra (2011) shows that it is not suitable for technical utterances and second language teaching as this will create confusion especially among limited proficiency learners and absolute beginners.

Cited as a characteristic of the Malaysian variety of English by Benson (1990), topic fronting is where the speaker makes use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to portion the message by emphasising the topic. A deviation from acceptable native speaker use of English, but in the context of communication strategy use, topic fronting was viewed positively as it facilitated information transfer (Ting & Kho, 2009). They also stated that Clennell (1995) had identified this specific method of information transmission was familiar to his participant who was a Malay learner. The speaker made use of subject plus predicate syntactic structure to parcel up information to emphasise the topic (Ting & Phan, 2008) producing utterances such as, “The scope, it intends to find out the problem faced by them during teaching practice, and their effort in seeking help.” Soekarno and Ting (2016) reported that since proficient speakers are better at using discourse strategies for meaning enhancement (Ting & Phan, 2008), it is beneficial to train less proficient speakers to develop “collaborative discourse skills” (Clennell, 1995, p.16). Nakatani (2010) also focussed on only achievement strategies, and this was the approach used in the present study.

All these studies have shown the success of communication strategy training in both ESL and EFL contexts (Kaivanpanah & Yamouty, 2009) while Soekarno’s (2019) study expands the domain to the EOP context involving technical further than the general English language. At the end of her research, Soekarno (2019) indicates that for communication strategy training to be effective, it is better to commence with the tonicity devices, moving on to time management, then to lexical repetition before proceeding to the negotiation of meaning strategies and finally concluding with lexical strategies to suit the learners with lower-level language proficiency or the absolute beginner. These group of learners are similar to the ESL learners that the current research participants are facing.

Conceptual Framework

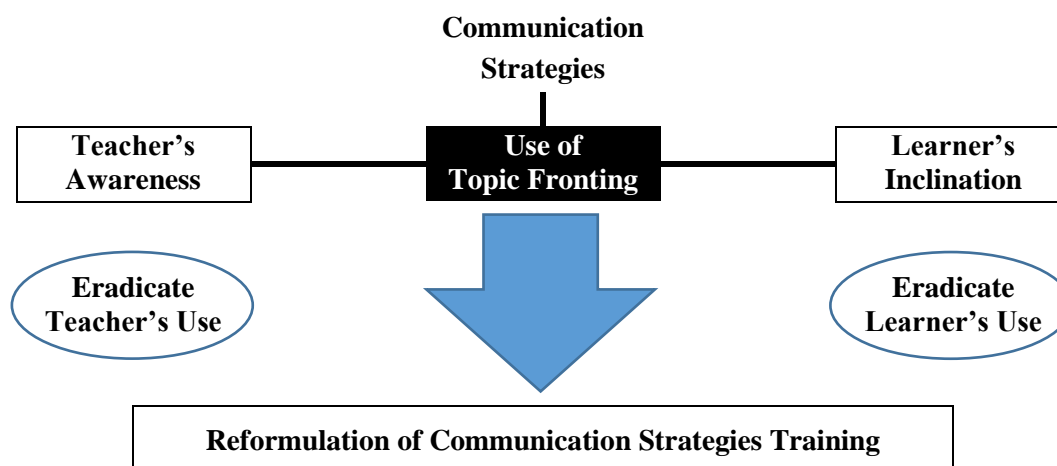


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework represents the development in the study of the topic fronting strategy within the language learning classroom. On one hand we have the teacher's awareness of the use of topic fronting while on the other hand involves the learners' inclination to use topic fronting in their production of English as influenced by their native Malaysian speech pattern. The concept of this research is to propose that both teacher's and learner's use of topic fronting would require some modification to the existing communication strategy training proposed by Soekarno in 2019.

Methodology

This research used the qualitative approach that utilised the FGD, aimed to explore the nature of the phenomenon of concern or learn about the views of individuals with the researcher as the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Creswell, 2012, 2003; Zhu & Carless, 2018;). The discussions were conducted in a predetermined period based on the agreement with the participants from 1/10/2021 – 31/10/2021. These FGD data were then transcribed and analysed thematically. Thematic analysis as summarised by Caulfield (2020) is a deductive method that involves approaching the data with some predetermined themes one expects to find reflected there, based on existing theories or knowledge thus attaining the study confirmability. This technique also ensured the dependability of the findings in a sense that these findings can be replicated.

Research Participants

Given that one of the biggest areas impacted is the educational domain, this study looked into groups of participants representing one of the highest COVID-19 state in Malaysia, Sabah. This population is represented by TESL students from Universiti Malaysia Sabah, Kota Kinabalu. The number of participants chosen for the study was based on the suggestion provided by Morse (1994) of six respondents for qualitative studies. Thus, this paper had two focus groups of 10 participants of similar level of English proficiency as well as areas of specialisation which is in linguistics and pedagogy. This focus group comprised 10 in-service teachers and academic personnel with Bachelor of Education (TESL) who were

selected through purposive sampling. The researcher has observed from her participation in the TESL programme that absolute beginners is quite a common group in multiple schools in the state of Sabah and would be rampant topic fronting user.

Research Instruments

A focus group is a small, but demographically diverse group of people whose reactions are studied through interactive and directed discussions by a researcher (Morgan, 1996). It is a form of qualitative research consisting of interviews on perceptions, opinions, beliefs, and attitudes towards a product, service, concept or an idea. This study utilised Google Meet as its online platform and adapt the procedure from Beltis' (2019) procedure for conducting a focus group discussion.

The probe questions look into the practitioners' opinions and responses yet at the same time identify their use of communication strategies. During this process, the researchers took notes and recorded the vital data. This study used a focus group that should not have any reliance on the use of topic fronting due to their higher, homogeneous proficiency and awareness of Native English speech pattern. The FGDs were recorded and transcribed for the thematic analysis of the participants' response, opinion and perception. This is the rationale behind the verbatim transcription that refers to the word-for-word reproduction of verbal data, where the written words are an exact replication of the audio recorded words (Poland, 1995).

Data Analysis

This research followed the Braun and Clarke's (2006) well established Thematic Analysis. They suggest that it is the first qualitative method that should be learned as "it provides core skills that will be useful for conducting many other kinds of analysis" (p.78). Unlike the other qualitative methodologies, it is not tied to a particular epistemological or theoretical perspective.

They detailed the 2 levels of themes, semantic and latent where semantic themes look at the surface meanings of the data whereas the latent level "identify or examine the underlying ideas, assumptions, and conceptualisations – and ideologies - that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data" (p.84). The recorded presentations were transcribed as close to the speakers' articulation as possible to identify any subtle changes. This was necessary to identify the difference of frequency in communication strategy usage for the various functions and purpose within its context. The initial unit for the frequency count of communication strategies was based on total words spoken to accommodate the fillers which were a part of communication strategies. The coding was conducted by applying the inductive approach which involves allowing the data to determine the themes. The study found six themes from the transcriptions of both universities' FGDs. The findings are then presented as they emerged from the transcriptions.

Findings and Discussion

The discussion of the findings in this study answers to three research questions. The following excerpts are samples of the transcripts obtained during the FGD sessions and are submitted in verbatim to show the authenticity of the data. There is general agreement among qualitative scholars that quotes should be presented verbatim as much as possible, and those

engaged in discourse and narrative analysis will necessarily analyse such hesitations as part of the meaning (Corden & Sainsbury, 2006; Lingard, 2019).

S1 RQ1: Are the TESL practitioners aware of the use of topic fronting among themselves?

Theme 1:

Trainees' awareness on the use of topic fronting

Excerpt 1

...I didn't notice that I use this this topic fronting during my teaching or during my during my, my second language kind of usage. But yeah, I did notice some of the some situation it used. Okay! But not not that you not that frequently. Yeah.

(CG: FGD1 – subconscious experience)

Excerpt 2

...Doesn't really emphasize on this this issue. Yes, topic fronting. Okay. But I do know a little bit about this topic fronting. Okay, it's like and it's like to expose the younger, young generations of future education, education and everything to be more understanding of the, I guess the older English, right? The... if you could say in Malay something like ermm something like 'puitis' with something like that. It's not like I talked with this, I don't know the the perfect term for that one.

(CG: FGD1 – lack of exposure)

Excerpt 3

I'm more than agree to Diana's Diana's point because you know, in Chinese we tend to put the subject, the most important event at the front part, then we will like building a castle like the Sun Castle add-on, add-on, add on and on some information at the back side

(CG: FGD1 – L1 interference)

As the response to the first research question (RQ1), these participants were unaware of their use of topic fronting. One primary element that stands under this lack of awareness on the use of topic fronting is the lack of exposure while another factor relates to the first language interference by the participants. Similar to the influence of Malay in the study by Soekarno et. al., (2021), the findings in this study shows the same interference among the Chinese (ref: Excerpt 3).

S2 RQ2: Would the TESL practitioners accommodate the use of topic fronting in their interactions with future ESL learners?

Theme 2:

Controlling or reducing the use of topic fronting in interaction

Excerpt 4

Yeah, it looks since our face to face interacting but what I say if I want to control myself, usually I, what I did is using repetition, I guess other words fit with topic fronting. Meaning like, like if there one like like sit down, like “Sit down, Ali” or something like that. Usually, I just take keep quiet and then I said to keep the people's name. I mean, they understood certain words or when I talk to them, when I want them to be in control. I don't use like the “S, SVO”. I just highlighted certain work that I want them to do. Uh, yeah.

(CG: FGD2 – simplify language or phrases)

Excerpt 5

As the person, as the people who should be delivering, or teach the others, about the beauty and introduce the beauty of the language to other people, I think it is better for us to use the correct, correct... How do I say this? Correct syntax. What is the point of what is the point of we learn the syntax? How, I mean, how we create correct sentences. If we don't apply it, how can we teach our students. For future. if we didn't do the right things, I mean, we also do the, I'm not saying that topic fronting is wrong, but as you can see for syntax, it's rules of syntax, it's we can see that it is wrong. Because we know that subject matter, followed by verb and then the verb must be followed by the objective or complement and everything. If we, if we restructure it, we have brought, we have brought the rules of the language itself, the rules of syntax.

(CG: FGD2 – peer modelling)

Excerpt 6

Okay. So for me, I want to support the point because like what they say about the sentence order and the syntax like What happened with my kids, what I did was I I make them practice and repeated the practice, using the, the sentence order, like the “SVO”. I mean, okay. The point is because like what they say about the sentence order and the syntax, like what happened with my kids, what I did was I, I make them practice and repeated the practice, using the, the sentence order like the “SVO”. I mean, the simple one, the simple one. So, every lesson they need to know the subject and the work. So, whenever we do activities they have to, okay, so they have to recognize which are the verbs, which are the subject. Because for me those are the basic things in writing or in communication.

(CG: FGD2 – apply repetition)

As the response to RQ2, TESL teachers could overcome the use of topic fronting communication strategy by avoiding from normalising it in their teaching. Excerpt 5 shows that the participant reflected on the necessity of being a role model to the students such as, “I think it is better for us to use the correct, correct... How do I say this? Correct syntax. What is the point of what is the point of we learn the syntax? How, I mean, how we create correct sentences. If we don't apply it, how can we teach our students.” This participant believes among other things the importance of producing the correct syntax to be emulated by the learners. This finding also shows the application of other communication strategies such as lexical repetition. The participant in Excerpt 6 believes that repetition can be utilised

with the students and studies have shown how repetition can improve a high number of issues in discourse due to its multifaceted nature (Clennell, 1995; Soekarno & Ting, 2016). As the response to RQ2, this is the type of communication strategy that TESL practitioners could utilise as it is not only an achievement strategy, it also does not deviate from the Native speakers' speech pattern.

S3 RQ3: Would the TESL practitioners inculcate the use of alternative achievement-based communication strategy in their interactions with future ESL learners?

For the final question, this study finds two themes that reflect the participants' opinion on the need for alternative communication strategies in their future interactions. This question is an extremely significant element in this research as this look into the possibilities or potentials of alternative communication strategies that could and should replace topic fronting which is ingrained in the Malaysian communication strategy classification. Theme 3 represents the training of proper sentences while Theme 4 looks into the utilisation of non-verbal communication strategies.

Theme 3:

Training proper sentences

Excerpt 7

Okay. I'm still struggling, struggling with the ideas too, but okay, how to reduce topic fronting as a TESL trainees? Mmm. Okay, maybe we can do like, you know, as a TESL trainee, we must have this like a sense of self-consciousness that we are sort of that we are the TESL trainees. So when we communicate with each other, we should, we should use, you know, properly, a proper sentences to our peers, to our colleagues, and even among us as a trainees. So, in conjunction with that, I usually use for example like aa... way that to remind him or her that we we should use, you know, properly English language when we talk. So, in order to reduce topic fronting during speaking, maybe I could like sort of train or reprimand him or her in a good way or in a soft way to remind her that we should use, you know proper English language when we talk. So I guess when he or she replied to me, so I will listen carefully. And after that, I will try to extract the jist from, from the communication and if I, if there's an alarm that for example, that he or she might be using topic fronting, I will like trying to, try to rephrase, rephrase the sentence, oh, in a good manner. For example, like "Do you mean that...? Are you saying that...? Something like that without being so strict to him or her.

(CG: FGD3 – training)

Excerpt 8

So, I think among three types of conditioning theory. I choose two of them, which are classical and operant conditioning. Because these are because these both theories related to some kind of associative learning in which associations are actually made between events that occur together. One, one simple example that I can relate, Okay, when you come home, wearing... "Ah no! When you come home, bringing a shopping bag, you take your cousin, let's say if you need

to. So, whenever whenever you whenever your nephew or niece sees you come home with a shopping bag, he or she will feel excited because your nephew, or your niece has associated your shopping bag with a trip to a shopping mall. So, this learning, by association is classical conditioning, and I think, this situation can indirectly overcome the use of topic fronting. Maybe.

(CG: FGD3 – conditioning)

Excerpt 9

I'll look myself as an example. I will set an example for them that they, without, without a, you know, without consciously with it. Yeah! Like, you know, indirectly telling them this, this is the way you should speak. So, it is not so clear that that is wrong, that this is the way you should speak. But I will try to rephrase them, rephrase the sentences or yeah, by saying that you might be meaning. Like the, "You might mean like this?" or "Are you saying it is like this?" So I will try to rephrase what he or she has said. Something like that.

(CG: FGD3 – modelling)

Theme 4:

Non-verbal communication strategies

Excerpt 10

Yeah, I and I believe that if we, if we put some gesture or body language into our ins in our instruction, it might help us. Actually like, for example like we are "Okay, please submit your work!" And then we will take the book, "Please submit/Give it to me!" And we show them the gesture. They might get it. Yeah.

(CG: FGD3 – body language)

Excerpt 11

So the students with the poor with the low level of frequency and understood them and then a better way to do that is to use the rhythm and intonations to emphasize on the topics. And then we repeat that so that the students would get the intent. Meanings. And the receiver will understand the message of our, our lessons, without the use of topic fronting, and this will help to reduce and curve the problem. Yeah. That's all. Thank you.

You can just use the intonation. That is the English English setting. That is one advantage of, in that is the interesting setting in English language. So, you can just stress it use the rhythm. Yeah, to make your sentence like a song. Good freedom. So just, it's explain it to the students.

(CG: FGD3 – intonation)

As the response to RQ3, this FGD looked into how TESL practitioners inculcate the use of suitable communication strategy in the interactions of ESL learners to overcome the use of topic fronting. Themes 3 and 4 show that these teachers would utilise suitable communication strategies and other linguistics strategies to control the use of topic fronting and eventually eradicate them. As the response to the research question, nonverbal strategies are the type of communication strategies that TESL teachers could utilise as it is not only an achievement strategy, it also does not deviate from the Native speakers' speech pattern. If

the use of topic fronting communication strategy among TESL practitioners has made them oblivious to it, they should participate in communication strategy training to be more familiarised to alternative strategies such as the revised module proposed in this research.

Revision of Communication Strategy Training to Minimise Topic Fronting Use

Table 1: Revised Communication Strategy Training

Session	Topics	Learning Activities			Formative Assessment			Total SLT
		E-learning	Online Discussion	Preparatory Activity	Strategy Journal	Simulation	Presentation	
1	Course Overview and Introduction to Communication Strategies	1						1
2	Appeal for assistance	1	1		1			3
3	Offer help	1	1		1			3
4	Clarification requests	1	1		1			3
5	Confirmation checks	1	1		1			3
6	Comprehension checks	1	1		1			3
7	Response utterance	1	1		1			3
8	Assessment 1			3.5		1		4.5
9	Lexical repetition	1	1		1			3
10	Circumlocution	1	1		1			3
11	Approximation	1	1		1			3
12	Restructuring	1	1		1			3
13	Assessment 2			3.5			1	4.5
	Total Student Learning Time	11	10	7	10	1	1	40

Past research from 2019 to 2021 had shown that CST had been contributing in the development of pedagogical technology in teacher training programmes which includes the TESL programme. In Soekarno and Said (2022) study, they offered an online CST which covered 10 communication strategies compared to the initial 13 communication strategies (Soekarno, 2019). It also comprises 2 formative assessments of simulation and presentation tasks. The total student learning time (SLT) for this online CST is 40 hours instead of the more open time allocated in the initial EOP programme. ADDIE was used to design and develop the Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) where with Schoology, they ensured that accompanying materials such as videos and other resources were being utilised in a multifaceted immersive language learning. Their innovation showed that online CST has the potential for a bigger implication through the use of the MOOC in creating a lifelong learning environment for the TESL practitioners.

To summarise the findings in this study, the use of topic fronting communication strategy among TESL practitioners was not something that they were aware of before their participation in the study. It was quite disconcerting to observe that a majority of our English teachers are not aware of the existence of topic fronting despite having gone a lengthy and comprehensive undergraduate study. In the end, they came up with a consensus to avoid the use of topic fronting in their future teaching altogether, with the exclusion of extremely lower proficiency ESL learners such as absolute beginners. The FGD findings in this study

identified that in order to inculcate the awareness towards topic fronting, the module presented by Soekarno in 2019 needed to be reformulated in the actual removal of the topic fronting (Session 8) strategy.

Conclusion

Communication strategy has been identified as a concept through which language users, particularly second users get their intended meanings across whenever they are having difficulties which include confusion about the right choice of phrases for a particular message. These strategies range from self-solving strategies to interactional strategies and unfortunately, also include the use of topic fronting which have been identified by scholars as the traditional convention among Malaysian speakers of English. The revision work of the original work has to remove topic fronting strategies and reassess the interlinking works with the remaining strategies and the potential replacement as the classification of topic fronting strategy as a Malaysian based strategy among ESL learners. This to some would be akin to ripping a limb from a sociocultural context.

Acknowledgement

Grant

The Influence of Topic Fronting Communication Strategy among TESL Trainees in the Post-Pandemic Era (SPLB FASA 1/2021 Research: SLB2102) from Universiti Malaysia Sabah

co-Researcher

Aaron Charles

SK Palak, Pulau Banggi, Kudat

The authors also would like to acknowledge Global Academic Excellence (M) Sdn Bhd, who granted the Publication Grant Scheme for this project.

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