



**CRITICAL ANALYSIS IN USE OF COMMUNICATIVE
COMPETENCE TO IMPROVE TEACHER TRAINEES' ORAL ABILITY
AND TEACHING OF ENGLISH AT THE TEACHER TRAINING
COLLEGES IN ZAMBÉZIA, MOZAMBIQUE**

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Abstract

English language teachers' trainees at Zambézia Colleges have difficulties in English language speech, which is shown through lack of confidence and fluency when teaching in classes during the teaching practices. This is a topic built on the basis of the frequent interactions with the teacher trainees and observations made through English language teaching practices and PhD research work. Thus, the paper is about critical analysis in use of communicative competence to improve teacher trainees' oral abilities and teaching of English language at the teacher training Colleges in Zambézia province. Dell Hymes (1972) is the proponent of the communicative competence approach under the Sociolinguistics perspective, which later was framed under English language teaching by Canale and Swain (1980) and Canale (1983). It is a fact that the English teacher trainees and teacher trainers need to be helped with current Communicative Language Teaching and Learning Approaches to enhance the quality of their speech as teachers as well as language communicators. The qualitative approach was chosen for this study based on discussions and review of several authors who have written about communicative competence, communicative language teaching and current training procedures to bring out solid suggestions for further improvements on the English language teacher training process so that the trainees must have oral fluency in English language. The current study found out that clear and several teaching activities that can help the teacher trainees to perform fluently and competently during and when and start teaching in the schools.

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Resumo:

Os estudantes do curso de Inglês nos institutos de formação de professores na Zambézia têm dificuldades no discurso da língua inglesa, o que é demonstrado pela falta de segurança e fluência durante as práticas pedagógicas. Este é um artigo construído com base nas interações frequentes com os formandos e observações feitas através de práticas de ensino de língua inglesa e do trabalho de pesquisa de doutoramento. Assim, o artigo faz uma análise crítica no uso da competência comunicativa para melhoria das capacidades orais dos formandos e o ensino da língua inglesa nos institutos de formação de professores na província da Zambézia. Dell Hymes (1972) é o proponente da abordagem da competência comunicativa, sob a perspectiva Sociolinguística, que mais tarde foi enquadrada no ensino da língua inglesa por Canale e Swain (1980) e Canale (1983). É um facto que os formandos de professores de inglês e formadores de professores precisam de apoio didáctico-pedagógico com as actuais abordagens de ensino e aprendizagem de ensino de inglês para a melhoria da qualidade do discurso como professores e também como comunicadores de línguas. A abordagem qualitativa foi escolhida para este estudo com base nas discussões e revisão de vários autores que escreveram sobre competência comunicativa, ensino da linguagem comunicativa e procedimentos de formação mais adequados para melhorias no processo de formação de professores de língua inglesa. O presente estudo constata que há actividades de ensino bem claras e diversas que podem ajudar os professores de inglês em formação a aquisição de desempenho fluente e com competência durante a formação e no processo de leccionação nas escolas primárias.

Palavras-chave: competência, comunicativa, língua, ensino, formação

1. Introduction

From the observations during the micro-teaching sessions and simulations done in the classroom, there were typical problems noticed, that militated against the competence in English language. Interview with teacher trainers and teacher trainees, plus the observations during micro-teaching sessions revealed that the number of those who were considered to be competent after finishing their training programme was small. Through the interviews, teacher trainers claimed that one of the problems which negatively affected the training competence of the teacher trainees and undermined the programme is the criteria for the selection of the candidates.

1.1 Competences of the English language teachers in the 10 + 1 model

Surprisingly, some of the candidates with low performance in the interviews for admission into the programme were admitted into the training programme because they had higher marks in the written examination while the others with good

performance in oral interviews were not admitted because they got lower marks in the written examination. These findings are in agreement with what one of the teacher trainers referred to regarding lack of transparent results of the candidates.

"The process is done obeying the rules that government asked us to do[set] yeah but there is a time that for example they prepare themselves in order to write the exams even for the time of interview, but when they get [selected] they don't follow those rules reason why sometimes you may find here people who are here inside even the level of English you wonder why is this guy here." [TT1 - TTC C - 18/07/2017]

"The type of the entrance exam based on multiple choice, sometimes there are candidates who pass by luck when they come for the interview, they don't speak the language. The direction members should be serious in selection, there is a big number of candidates who pass because of their relationship with the members of the direction" [TT2ⁱⁱ - TTC C - 18/07/2017]

Teacher trainers, graduate teachers and teacher trainees did not understand how some candidates got into the programme without English language competence as a basis. This situation opens space for further research or implication for this study. Candidates who had problems in speaking English language, could not do well and improve their language if they only took English course within eight months. As they were being prepared to be professional teachers, they could not meet the expectation which was to finish the training programme with abilities to teach, communicate and make their pupils communicate in English. Surprisingly for the teacher trainers, when the teacher trainees did tests in class, they got good results that enabled them proceed with their training.

It is really important that the teacher trainees understand the English grammar well and have adequate knowledge of English to acquire communicative and teaching competence.

Dubin and Olshtain (2002) reveal that:

"A scientific grammar, which is the objective of theoretical linguistics, must be translated into a pedagogical grammar before it can be used for materials development. Such a pedagogical grammar takes into account the learning process, interferences from the first language, complexity of forms, frequency of occurrences and other relevant factors, which bear on the acquisition of the new language." (pp. 26-27)

ⁱⁱ TTs- Teacher Trainers; FGDs-Focus Group Discussions; GELT-Graduate English Language Teachers.
ⁱⁱ TTC A-Teacher Training College A; TTC B-Teacher Training College B; and TTC C-Teacher Training College C.

The trainees' competence is discussed in this section as a means to analyse the extent to which it affects the quality of the English language teacher training programme. There was state of fear and doubt by some teacher trainers to affirm that teacher trainees become efficient English language teachers as a result of the training they undergo. Table 11 presents the views of the teacher trainers regarding the assessment of the teacher trainees teaching competence and efficiency as they finish the training programme.

Table 2: Appreciation the English language teacher teaching efficiency and competence after training

No.	Interviewees	Teacher competence efficiency after training	No. of /TTs
01	TT1-TTCA, TT2, TT3-TTCC	Some overcome problems and are able to teach, some still continue weaker and sent to schools	3
02	TT2, TT4-TTCA, TT1-TTCB	They need to learn more about English language	3
03	TT2-TTCB	Some are able to plan the lesson and teach others are able to plan the lessons and not to teach.	1
04	TT1-TTCC	Ready to teach, although not well shaped with some language problems	1

Source: Researcher's analysed field data, 2017.

It is important that some teacher trainees acquire the teaching competences when they finish their training programme without which they cannot deal with different learners and different contexts. The following statements are teacher trainers who affirmed that the trainees had competences to teach English in primary schools, though with a state of doubt.

"Although some of the problems are not shaped in the course According to their level I think that they show that they have English language competence". [TT1 - TTC B - 01/09/2017]

"They get ready to teach, although not well shaped with some problems at least they are able to plan a lesson and stand in the classroom. I don't have anything to add just we need more time for training". [TT1 - TTC C - 18/07/2017]

It was also pointed out by the TT2 at TTC C that there are trainees who, for example, when they get into the training programme, their main concern is to learn the language, and they improve their language but not the teaching skills as such. Nevertheless, it is good that they do so for the kind of teacher trainee whose interest is to improve English and English language teaching competences. Teacher trainees should be encouraged and motivated to listen to news in English, listen to music tracked in English language, read poems, short stories, greet, discuss, and talk in English every time they have opportunity and such opportunities should be maximised.

For example, teacher trainees should meet foreign people, have or create strong relationship with Malawians, Tanzanians, South Africans, Zimbabwean, and Zambian living in the districts where the TTCs are based in.

While it may be true that some teacher trainees acquire some teaching competence to teach English in primary schools, the interaction with the researcher during the research period showed that they lack communicative competences, due to language problems based on basic grammar errors and mistakes. Moreover, during the micro-teaching the teacher trainees had several problems such as: of managing the classes, correcting students errors and mistakes, lack of confidence which made some teacher trainees avoid micro-teaching with no specific reason and lack of communicative competence. Hymes (1972) considers *“competence as dependent upon both (tacit) knowledge and (ability for) use. Knowledge is distinct, then, both from competence (as its part) and from systemic possibility (to which its relation is an empirical matter)”* (p.282).

Due to lower performance of the English language, teachers trained at the three teacher training colleges, school directors and the deputy directors suggest to them to teach Portuguese or other subjects different from English. This is substantiated by TT4 from Teacher Training College A and TT2 from Teacher Training College B as follows:

“They are not good...difficult.... For example I tried to meet with some of them, they are facing problems when they go to the field, they are dealing with English but there at the field they teach other subjects”. [TT4 - TTC A - 25/08/2017]

“.....We know teachers trained in our colleges who are not teaching English because the school directors do not trust them, they prefer other people who speak good English, but not trained”. [TT2 -TTC B - 18/09/2017]

Looking at the gaps which were described so far, it is important to trace what really is important for a good teacher. UNESCO (2005) suggests the following components for a teacher which can also work for the teacher trainees:

“practical knowledge – the teacher’s repertoire of classroom techniques and strategies; content knowledge – the teacher’s competence of grammar, phonology, second language acquisition and teaching theories; contextual knowledge – familiarity with the school context, norms, cultural and other relevant information; pedagogical knowledge – ability to restructure content knowledge for teaching purposes and to plan, adapt, improvise; personal knowledge – the teacher’s personal beliefs and principles, and her/his individual approach to teaching; and reflexive knowledge – the teacher’s capacity to reflect on and access his or her own practice when describing teacher’s skills.” (p.85)

With the proposed elements: practical knowledge, content knowledge, contextual knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, personal knowledge and reflexive knowledge, English language teacher trainees would have been equipped with

necessary tools by the end of their training process as to attain the communicative and teaching competences of English as a language and a subject in a Zambézia context, where the English is taught and learnt in the schools as a foreign language for communication.

The following statements reveal what constituted the main gaps which affected the English language teacher training programme:

“According to my experience since I have started teaching, what could have been filled in along the training process is to maximise more English subjects, than Portuguese subjects, giving students more time to practise the language instead of sending them to the field to teach as soon as possible”. [GELT1 - TTC A - 05/10/2017]

“The aspect I think constitutes gaps which could have been filled in along the training process is under literature....literature is an area which should have been covered, I mean that the programme should have topics regarding the teaching of literature for grades 6 and 7”. [GELT5 - TTC B - 03/10/2017]

“The trainers should be very well trained professionally with specific methodology, fluent trainers, approachable, and familiarised with each and every content. A good trainer should be a good advisor, guider and a good monitor”. [GELT6 - TTC C - 22/09/2017]

The suggestion of adding more subjects areas to the English language teacher training programme would enrich the knowledge of English language that the teacher trainees need. It would help with the basics of English language and improve the trainees' pronunciation through the practice of word stress, intonation, the differentiation between short and long vowel sounds in words like *ship* and *sheep*; the practice of consonant clusters in words like: *throughout* and *brought*. As it has been observed by Hymes (1972) that *“communicative behaviour within a community is analysable in terms of determinate ways of speaking that the communicative competence of persons comprises in part knowledge of determinate ways of speaking”* (p.58), thus, knowledge of the English language and competence in its use are of vital importance for teacher trainees as future English language teachers.

Typical aspects which undermined the quality of the teacher trainees' linguistic performance were: verb subject agreement, slight problems with oral stress, adequate language regarding the register (formal and informal language).

During the lessons observed in TTC A or TTC B the teacher trainers did not worry about the teacher trainees' language problems. The researcher's main concern is with the language errors and mistakes that were made by the trainees which did not have a special treatment as part of one of the stages of the lesson. Though trainees were actively engaged in tasks and participating, considerable difficulties were encountered by teacher trainers and trainees. The problems experienced by trainees generally included pronunciation, use of grammar, mix up of formal and informal language with

no clear paradigms and lack of strategies use of proper words during the interaction, thus affecting the discourse competence and the quality of the English language teacher in Zambezia province.

Accordingly, Sanyal (2013) observes that, *“it is not just any teacher that can make education happen, it has to be the effective teacher, who benefits from quality professional preparation and is systematically supported by quality career-long professional development”* (p.7).

Through lesson observation, it was noted that there were limitations by many trainees, mix up of formal and informal language in expressions like problems regarding language accuracy, lack of correction management of the language problems. From the responses during interviews with teacher trainers and teacher trainees it was evident that most teacher trainees got into the programme with several language challenges and it was not easy to isolate a major one. Table 3 summarises the typical problems experienced by teacher trainees in the training programme.

Table 3: Description of typical problems faced by the teacher trainees

No.	Interviewees	Typical language problems brought by trainees into the college	No. of TTs & FGDs
01	TT1-TTCA, TT2-TTC3	Listening, speaking, pronunciation, writing mainly the logic of the contents	2/0
02	TT2, TT3-TTC1, TT1-TTCB	Pronunciation and lack of vocabulary	3/0
03	TT4, FGD1-TTCA, TT1-TTCC	Low background knowledge and misbehavior	2 /1
04	TT1-TTCC	Pronunciation, reading, speaking, writing but there are a lot of problems in speaking	1/0
05	FGD2-TTCA, FGD1-TTCB, FGD1-TTCC	Grammar use, reading, writing, spelling, pronunciation, lack of confidence in speech, accent and sentence agreement.	0/3

Source: Researcher’s analysed field data, 2017.

Although teacher trainees were presented with many language problems, teacher trainers found pronunciation and grammar problems as the most critical issue in teacher trainees. Errors and mistakes were the most frequent source of language problems in sentences like: *“I have twenty three years old”* it becomes evident that the teacher trainee in this sentence used the Portuguese language structure and form to produce the English sentence where the age was expressed with verb *to have* in English and not verb *to be*. Similarly, some teacher trainees failed to use the *-ing* form in sentences like: *“I am writing a composition”*; and would say *“I am write a composition”*, which the language structure/form in Portuguese is correct *“Estou a escrever uma composição”*. Hymes (1973, p.229) notes that *“it is the task of the linguist to exclude what is wrong, ill-formed, ungrammatical, so that data that is right, well-formed, grammatical, can clearly reveal structure”*.

Furthermore, some teacher trainees took the Portuguese present continuous language structure and used it to express ideas in English, and it became inadequate in a sentence like: *"He is talk to the teacher"*. This sentence translated into Portuguese does not cause any grammatical problem. There was also a tendency to overgeneralise pronunciation rules in words like "live" where the I is short sound when used in third person the "I" would sound as "ai" like *"he laives in Coalane B. "I laive in Pebane"*. The other overgeneralisation which affected the teacher trainees' communicative competence is the use of regular verbs when forming the past simple. The teacher trainees tended to add ED for some irregular verbs in sentences like *"I sleped very well yesterday I don't know your side"; "She bringed the duster"*. It becomes obvious that the misuse of the past simple verbs with words like *"sleep and bring"* which would be *"slept and brought"* are due to past simple regular verbs. Similarly, there were some language errors committed by teacher trainees due to overgeneralisations or lack of knowledge in plural words like *"womans, mans"*, which are false hypothesised concepts. Thus, if teacher trainees mastered well the linguistic/grammatical and strategic competences would avoid such language pitfalls. Teacher trainees also showed difficulties in pronouncing consonant cluster in words like *brought, thought, throughout*, due to non-existence of consonant clusters in Portuguese words. In parallel, the teacher trainees also had problems in pronouncing silent letters in words like *cough, plough, tooth, teeth*. For example, the word *"think"* was pronounced by some teacher trainees with /f/ and /t/ *fink or tink*.

Pronunciation plays a very important role in clearly understanding the meaning of the words said or spoken by someone, as Vernon (2006, p.45) remarks, *"pronunciation as speaking skill enable us to speak clearly and understood well by our listener through three main aspects, sounds, stress and intonation"*. Thus, incorrect pronunciation may produce communication breakdown as the listener may misunderstand what is being said. Although there were no books in Zambézia colleges with focus on pronunciation, several methodology books present some chapters regarding pronunciation which teacher trainers could explore and produce handouts to use in the classroom. Apart from the existing books, pronunciation demands more practice, listening to native speakers, drilling words as a whole class, learning the stress and intonation of the words with clear adequate plans by teacher trainers dealing with Speaking course would help much the teacher trainees.

Another aspect has to do with inconsistencies of the same English vowel. Hassan (2014, p.34) observes that *"one of the problems faced by the learners of English in general is that each English vowel sound has more than just one pronunciation"*. This was actually a problem for the teacher trainees. For example, the vowel u in words like *book [ʊ], look [ʊ], cook [ʊ]* do not sound equally as in *flood [ʌ], blood [ʌ]*, neither in *floor [ɔ:]*, although they have similar vowel distribution. Yet, another case is that of *u* sounding differently in words like, *study [ʌ], summer [ʌ], population [ju], university [ju], computer[ju] and Thursday [ɜ:]*. As result, as teacher trainees lacked knowledge of this inconsistency, this led them to wrong pronunciation. Certainly, teacher trainers dealing with language use

need to teach pronunciation as fundamental speaking skill so that teacher trainees are able to differentiate, for example, words between sounds as: *sit* and *seat*, *live* and *leave* which both are homophonies with different meaning and spelling.

The reasons for the existing problems are simple, English is taught in primary and secondary schools as a subject and as a foreign language. The candidates applied for the English language teacher training programme with a plethora of language problems. The following statement constituted evidence of problems encountered.

"The problems that they bring is [are linked to] speaking skills, apart from speaking even listening skills, because students think that they are coming here just to learn about grammar language use, but when they come here they discover that we [they] have to speak we [they] have to master the way of writing.....". [TT2 - TTC B - 18/07/2017]

"...but, sometimes we get surprised with the examination results by the way that some candidates who did not meet all the requirements are included in the list of those who have been selected to attend the Course". [TT1 - TTC B - 01/09/2017]

The first quote above is in agreement with what the Focus Group Discussions and teacher trainers who asserted that most of the trainees were not competently prepared to take the training programme as their linguistic repertoire was very low. The quotation proves that some teacher trainees, had simply elementary and others basic aspects of the English language and they could not be trained within a year. However, having two or three year teacher training programme would enhance and foster the quality of the programme itself and the teacher trainees teaching and speaking competences. In terms of language problems, it was important to analyse how the strategies for treatment of language errors and mistakes affected the quality of the English language teacher training course and the programme as whole. In each college, mistakes and errors were treated in different ways.

2. Conclusion

The paramount goal for language learning is communication based on communicative competence, therefore teacher trainees and learners of English as a foreign language should be aware of communicative language learning activities, approaches and methods. Other topics were dealt with in subjects such as reading, listening speaking and writing. The researcher found through lesson observation and syllabuses analyses that speaking and listening had the same content and it made the teacher trainees exhausted dealing with discussions based on the same topics. Therefore, adding more subjects to the training programme would demand the curriculum designers to reformulate the programme in order to meet the demand for the quality of the teacher trainees. Otherwise, if the duration of the programme is not extended, more subjects cannot be added due to the fact that the contents are not covered successfully taking

into account the trainees' linguistic problems. The fact that the curriculum, according to the training programme, has too much content to be covered within a year, does not help neither the teacher trainers nor the trainees in the sense that the trainers struggle to teach all the content, when in fact the teachers trainees need particular attention on the language challenges to be overcome.

About the Author

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