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Facilitating Quality Teaching and Meaningful Learning Through Kumaravadivelu's Macro Strategies

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Abstract: This paper reports six EFL teachers' perceptions on how they implemented some of the Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies; and the perceptions they held on the influence of these macro strategies had in terms of students' learning. Participants implemented three macro strategies, as follows: four teachers adopted 'Facilitating Negotiated Learning'; two opted for 'Integrating Skills' strategy; and one teacher chose 'Foster Language Awareness' as the basis to plan and execute their micro strategies. This study adopted an action research to guarantee more rigorous and systematic ways of reflection to favor meaningful learning and teaching opportunities. In addition, the implementation of an action research allowed the participants to play two roles of teachers and researchers. The former reflected in the way the teacher researchers implemented their pedagogical intervention (planning, designing and implementing micro-strategies); the latter in the way they collected and interpreted data in order to become more aware of what was going on in their classrooms. Findings are shown in two main categories. First, The Power of Transcending Routine Teaching, revealed that an outsider's feedback allows a better understanding of what actually happens in an EFL classroom. Second, Teachers' Perceptions on Facilitating Quality Learning, showed that when EFL teachers create friendly and safe ambiance inside their classrooms, learners engage in meaningful interactions that facilitate language growth and course content comprehension.

Keywords: Macro Strategies, Micro Strategies, Meaningful Learning

1. Introduction

While taking part in a three-week professional training at Southampton University, I had the opportunity to become familiar with Kumaravadivelu's ten macro strategies. I realized that that macro strategies are "…general plans derived from theoretical, empirical and pedagogical knowledge related to L2 teaching and learning." [1] (p. 32). [2].

Although teachers at the Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) in foreign languages at the Universidad de Pamplona, where this research took place, have been committed to implement several approaches, methods, designs and techniques to teach English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and French as a Foreign Language (FFL.), they were not fully aware of the underpinnings of implementing Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies. Therefore, upon my return, after having invited 22 teachers from this B.A., six teachers consented to participate in

an action research on a voluntary basis. The low level of participation was mostly caused by the unsatisfactory past experiences with research most of them had gone through. As the participating teachers expressed, their previous experiences had let them with a sense of frustration and unwillingness, because after having favored the used of myriad resources, class activities, and practices; they were not certain of having provided their students with meaningful learning opportunities. However, the idea of embarking upon an action research motivated them because they came to understand that, opposed to what they had experienced, they would be able to reflect on their own realities based on their experience, knowledge and the particularities of their teaching and learning contexts.

Although no studies have been conducted on the implementation on macro-strategies and micro-strategies in foreign language classrooms in Colombia, some studies have been carried out overseas [2−5]. The importance of implementing Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies relies on

the idea that this framework "…seeks to transform classroom practitioners into strategic thinkers, strategic teachers, and strategic explorers…" [1] (p. 42).

Once the teachers consented to participate, as a leading researcher, I invited them to a meeting to explain the big scope of the research. For example, I explained that each one of us would be a co-researcher, and I would not play a hierarchical role within the group. As co-researchers, we would play a dual role of the teacher and researcher. We agreed on adopting action research to guarantee more rigorous and systematic ways of reflection. Second, we decided to implement Kumaravadivelu's ten macro strategies, broadly defined as "... a broad guideline based on which teachers can construct their situation-specific, need-based micro strategies or classroom procedures." [1] (p. 38).

Although the participants critically reviewed the ten macro strategies, listed below: Maximize learning opportunities, minimize perceptual mismatches, facilitated negotiated

interaction, promote learner autonomy, foster language awareness, activate intuitive heuristics, contextualize linguistic input, integrate language skills, ensure social relevance, and raise cultural awareness; only three were adopted, as follows: four teachers adopted 'Facilitating Negotiated Learning'; two opted for 'Integrating Skills' strategy; and one teacher chose 'Foster Language Awareness' as the basis to plan and execute their micro strategies. Participating teachers chose these three macro strategies (see table 1) because the applicability to their teaching scenarios. For example, having selected 'Facilitating Negotiated Learning' allowed teachers to have a learner-centered classroom, and engaged students into interactive activities; while 'Integrating Skills' and 'Fostering Language Awareness' allowed the learners to use the language holistically when accomplishing tasks "not exclusively language-related" (CEFR), and that involved the use of integrated language skills to understand the course content, or to successfully complete a task, for example.

Table 1. Describes macro strategies and micro strategies used.

Macro Strategies	Micro Strategies
Facilitating Negotiated Learning "One of the aspects of learning to talk in an L2 is talking to learn." [6] p. 101.)	" Micro strategies for facilitating negotiated interaction must be designed in such a way as to provide opportunities for learners to stretch their linguistic repertoire, sharpen their conversational capacities, and share their individual experiences" [6] (p. 124)
Integrating Language Skills "It is likely that the learning of and use of any one skill can trigger cognitive and communicative associations with the others." [6] (p. 228)	"…the micro strategies, and the project proposals is that integration of language is natural to language communication." [6] (p. 238)
Fostering Language Awareness "It is only natural for language learners to expect some logic in the way a language operates." [6] (p. 159)	While language awareness activities are commonly associated with the development of advanced skills in critical thinking, reading, and writing, they are useful in grammar learning and teaching as well. [6] (p. 175)

Having adopted this framework would allow us to reflect on classrooms specific situations; design micro strategies; and assess the outcomes of how the activities unfold. Therefore, this research attempted to answer two broad questions: How do six foreign language teachers implement Kumaravadivelu's three macro strategies? And what perceptions do six foreign language teachers hold on the influence, if any, these macro strategies have in terms of students' learning?

2. Methodology

This study adopted an action research design, "…characterized as research that is done by teachers for themselves. It is truly a systematic inquiry into one's own practice (Johnson, 2005, [7] p. 2.). This distinguishing feature of action research was reflected in the way the teacher researchers implemented their pedagogical intervention (planning, designing and implementing micro-strategies); and

collected and interpreted data in order to become more aware of what was going on in their classrooms.

During a 10-week process, participants engaged in three different types of activities: 1) individual activities: Reading and designing the micro-strategy. 2) Pair-work: Classroom observations and reflections on the implementation of the micro-strategy. 3) Group activities, weekly group discussions.

Participants chose a research partner based on the courses they were teaching, and their affinities (see table 2). Three pairs of research partners were formed, as follows: Pair One: participants 1 & 2, two participants teaching A1-level English courses; Pair Two: participants 3 & 4, two participants teaching: B1-level courses, and Pair Three: Participants 5 & 6, two participants teaching content specific courses to learners with B2-level of English proficiency.

Each participating teacher planned and designed the micro strategies to be implemented based on their background knowledge, personal experience and actual classroom particularities.

Table 2. Describes participants' characteristics.

Participants / Characteristics	Level of Proficiency	Education	Years of Teaching Experience
Participant 1	C1	Ph.D. Candidate	20
Participant 2	Native	Master's	10
Participant 3	B2	B.A in languages	3
Participant 4	B2	B.A. in languages	1
Participant 5	B2	Master's	25
Participant 6	C1	Ph.D.	22

Generally speaking, based on these three macro strategies, teachers planned and implemented six micro strategies, which involved cooperative activities that allowed learners to: ask and answer questions based on reading and videos; integrate more than one language skills (reading, writing and speaking); agree or disagree while completing an activity, and assign and accept roles depending on a given task.

The design and implementation of each micro strategy was framed under the idea of Critical Learning Episode (CLE), which helped participants to better prepare their lessons and to have a mindful performance in class, designed and centered on "…short, isolated units of practice which make visible key teaching skills." [8] p. 11. In addition, the CLE enabled the research partner to know in advance what section of the class to pay attention to. The lesson included "…a segment of interaction in the classroom which has: Boundaries, clear start and a finish; a centre of gravity, a single, unifying theme; significance, the importance for learning [8]. This lesson plan (see appendix 1) describes how a participating teacher wrote a lesson plan based on "Foster Language Awareness" macro strategy; and based the classroom development on the three key elements of a Critical Learning Episode. The activities teachers designed were flexible, adaptable and relevant to the courses they were teaching. Although the participants to the present study comprised both novice and experienced teachers, one of the goals was to hone their teaching competences mainly relying on the classroom observations, and group discussions. In addition, each pair of teachers met on a regular basis to agree on the specificities and how's to they would settle upon the hour and setting in which the class would take place.

Once the micro strategies were completed, participants took part in group discussions to share insights and experiences in a relaxed, flexible and safe environment that allowed them to reflect on the nuances of implementing the macro strategies. According to Kiely, Davis, and Wheeler (2011) "[t]he role of episodes here is to promote analysis and reflection, so that teachers can gain novel insights into their own professional practice, and draw on these to enrich their learning and the development of their teaching." [8] (p. 11). Hence, teacher researchers contrasted their personal points of view and those ones of the observers. During group discussion, participants were asked to provide their partners with effective feedback, on how the micro-strategy had been implemented; the strategies used; and the teacher's role while implementing the strategies. [13].

With regard to data collection, data was gathered through two classroom observations, teachers' field notes, and reflections; and the feedback provided during group discussions. Data was analyzed following Hatch's typological analysis, which involved "…dividing the overall data set into categories or groups based on predetermined typologies." [9] (p. 152). Therefore, two typologies were identified and reflect the two major topics of the research questions, as follows: First, the power of transcending routine teaching, which explains how the participating teachers

implemented three Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies; and second, facilitating quality learning, which describes the participating teachers' perceptions on the influence of these macro strategies had on their students' learning. MAXQDA, qualitative data analysis software, was used to organize and code the data gathered from the different sources.

3. Findings

3.1. The Power of Transcending Routine Teaching

According to the participants' perceptions, they purposely sought to implement micro strategies to provide their students with opportunities to interplay through varied learning opportunities that fostered meaning negotiation skills and linguistic growth.

Based on the content of the courses and the students' proficiency level, participants, designed six micro-strategies in the light of three of the Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies. Most of those activities involved the use of videos, pair and small group discussions and games that according to the teachers' perceptions enhanced learning capabilities and facilitated quality learning within a friendly and safe ambiance that provided students with non-threatening opportunities to express themselves.

While observing participant five, her research partner realized that the way she taught the lesson easily coupled Kumaravadivelu's macro strategy five: Facilitating Negotiated Interaction; and a discussion activity aimed at introducing a new topic. As the learners took part in the cooperative activity the teacher completed in class, they were allowed to freely ask and answer questions without the teacher's pressure to use a specific language structure. The main concern was the content, although the teacher started asking questions, the students freely asked clarification questions and follow-up questions to complete ideas and content.

As the observer stated in his field notes, "…in this oral activity, the students discussed, interacted and participated in the whole activity by answering different questions posed by their peers." Through this excerpt, it can be interpreted that implementing such micro strategies equipped the learners with the skills they needed to not only "…stretch their linguistic repertoire, [and] sharpen their conversational capacities…" [5] p. 24). but also to expand their knowledge on a specific topic. In other words, this exemplifies that student-to-student interactions facilitated negotiated learning, and that "one of the aspects of learning to talk in an L2 is talking to learn." [5] p. 101).

The way the design of micro strategies honed learners' learning capabilities is illustrated in the feedback provided by participant five's research partner.

"… [A] lthough the teacher asked a threaded-set of questions, students did not feel bombarded. Conversely, the calm and controlled pace of asking questions allowed the

students to jump into the conversation at their own pace; and to expand previously discussed ideas or to introduce their new thoughts and comments."

The observers' remarks are backed up by what the participant five stated during a discussion session. As she explained, after having watched the video, she found that once she asked a question based on a new idea, some students continued asking follow-up questions that helped them to develop a conversation from different angles and to thoroughly discuss the topic.

Furthermore, she realized that she had allocated enough answering time for her learners to process information more effectively instead of venturing a pointless answer. Although it may be seen as non-spontaneous speech, these sorts of activities strengthened learners' communicative competence and the integration of language skills through a negotiated interaction. It is also important to remark that the way participant 5 promoted negotiated interaction through this class activity may explain the concept of negotiated interaction that according to Zheng (2014) "…it has to include the creation of opportunities for the learners to share their own individual perspectives on issues that matter to them, and to share in a way that makes sense to them." [5] (p. 115). In other words, this explains how participant five rooted her lesson in the macro-strategy number two, 'Facilitating Negotiated Interaction', which allowed her students to engage in a spontaneous interaction in which they prompted their peers to compare or contrast their ideas with their own.

In regards to fostering linguistic growth, when participant three observed her colleague teaching some writing techniques to intermediate EFL learners, she realized that when activities are carefully prepared, the students are given opportunities to use the language naturally. In this case, and according to participant four's reflections, she decided to base her lesson on macro-strategy number five, 'Fostering Language Awareness' because as she stated:

"…The importance of helping my students to sensitize themselves to aspects such as "Language Awareness (LA) which combines the notion of consciousness-raising (Rutherford, 1987; Sharwood Smith, 1981, and input enhancement Sharwood Smith, 1991", as cited in [1], p. 37) helps them to face and improve their writing process by accurately quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing source material and to avoid plagiarism which was present in their last assignment."

This statement signaled the importance of raising learners' consciousness not only about how the target language operates (e.g. including information from outside sources) but also about ethical issues related to poor citation practices. It is important to note that when teachers help learners become linguistically aware, they able to grasp the nuances of the social and ethical implications of inappropriate citation practices, for example.

3.2. Teachers' Perceptions on Facilitating Quality Learning

According to the participating teachers' perceptions,

having implemented three of the Kumaravadivelu's macro strategies enabled them to plan and carry out some micro-strategies that attempted to actively engaged students in meaningful learning activities. For example, participant one strategically planned a lesson that involved, watching a three-minute video on solar eclipse, followed by a written response based on their prior experiences with these natural phenomena; and an oral exercise that required students to ask and answer questions about the video. The next passage describes the reflections participant one went through while planning this lesson in the light of the macro strategy Integrating Language Skills.

"…Through this micro-strategy, I will integrate reading, speaking, listening and writing into a video activity. In doing so, the student will have the opportunity to see the language holistically; and to negotiate meaning while constructing their own knowledge and strengthening their communicative skills."

According to Kumaravadivelu (1994) "[t] heoretical as well as experiential knowledge overwhelmingly point to the importance of integrating language skills." [1] (p. 228). The way participant one implemented this micro strategy illustrates that a well-planned task may integrate various language skills (e.g. listening, writing and speaking). Moreover, it explains that planning a lesson embraces reflection. While planning, participant one took into account the reasons behind the selection of teaching materials, the type of interactions, and the expected outcomes on the students' part. The participating teachers' perceptions have illustrated how the implementation of macro/micro strategies helped them to go beyond customary teaching and favor quality learning.

Likewise, other perceptions revealed the value of groups discussions. Not surprisingly, during the group discussions, participants realized that watching others in action, and getting peers to observe their teaching revealed several aspects that otherwise would have been overlooked. While discussing the feedback given, it was customary to hear participants expressing their uncertainty after being asked the reasons behind decisions they had made while teaching, or certain reactions on the students' part.

After having read the feedback provided by his research partner, participant six realized that he had repeatedly focused his attention only towards the right side of the classroom. To confirm what his research partner had observed, he watched the video recording. In his reflection he wrote:

"That I hadn't realized that I centered my attention on one side of the classroom might reveal an absence of self-awareness, on my part, while teaching. I do not know how much this has affected my students' response to class. However, I wouldn't say that it is related to a selective discrimination, nor a laterality problem. However, from now on, I would need to be mindful and be purposefully aware of interacting with everybody in the classroom."

Participant six went on to explain that watching the video was what triggered an in-depth reflection on past actions. He concluded that self-recording his classes would become a

habitual practice in order to analyze his decision making process while teaching and potentially improve the effectiveness of his lessons. As he argued, once the drawbacks were identified, he decided to change his posture in class so as to better acknowledge everyone's needs.

Similarly, after having read the feedback on a micro-strategy implemented around a video clip, participant four identified the cause of some students' reactions during the class. As he explained,

"…This activity permits the students to be actively engaged where they feel comfortable to participate. Regrettably, not all the students participated as expected. But this was not the teacher's fault; I blame "the camera factor" directly."

While teaching, although he had talked to his students about the reasons for the presence of another teacher from the FL program, and the video recording, he did not realize that it would negatively affect the natural pace of the class. Based on this feedback, the teacher came to understand the importance of reflection in prompting change and improvement inside a classroom. He also realized that minor changes may cause a tremendous impact on the acceptance and better understanding on the students' part. As a result, he stated that during the next class, he would need to further explain to his students the benefits of recording. As he said, he would engage his students in a video-watching session to help them understand their strengths and weaknesses. In a way, he believed that it would minimize the negative impact of having a camera in the classroom.

All in all, group discussions and reflections exemplify the significance of having an etic perspective inside the classroom. However, that an outsider helps to realize what goes on inside a classroom is worthier only if it unleashes one's emic perspective. In other words, the outsider and insider's points of view complement each other to deepen the understanding of the various factors that might affect student-teacher interaction. It also explains that minor changes may make a tremendous impact in the students' learning process.

4. Conclusions

This action research engaged participating teachers in a dual role; on one hand, as implementers, they designed and put into play the pedagogical intervention. On the other hand, as researchers, they reflected on what happened in their classrooms based on the feedback provided by their research partners. Having adopted CLE gave participants the basis and common procedures to prepare, to teach, to reflect, to provide feedback and to base the group discussions on. This structure allowed each pair of teachers not only to prepare a lesson and to implement it, but also to know in advance what to pay attention to while observing a lesson.

Some concluding remarks will be given in the light of the research questions. In regards to the first research question, how do six foreign language teachers implement Kumaravadivelu's three macro-strategies? the way participants implemented these strategies can be condensed

into two broad ways. To some extent, the participants' teaching practices were strengthened by the feedback provided by their research partners. Hence, the weekly discussions served a twofold purpose. First, although there were some subtle changes caused by the presence of a third party in the class, it allowed several aspects to surface that would otherwise remain unnoticed. Second, having had an external point of view contributed to accept constructive criticism towards a potential transformation of the practice. Based on the research partners' assessments, it was triggered a self-reflective process that contributed to enhancing their teaching and to redirecting certain procedures in the classroom. This might echo what Castro Garcés, & Martínez Granada found in regard to the importance of valuing "…their partners and themselves as reflective practitioners who have the capacity to find solutions to problems that arise in their classrooms by means of a study group and with the support of colleagues." [10] (p. 41). That is precisely what this action research provided participants with, an opportunity to ponder externa points of view about teaching practices, and to assess others' teaching skills and styles to have a better understanding of what actually happened in their EFL classrooms. Eventually, this reflective practice would allow them to arrive at a better position to take concrete actions to overcome certain obstacles, and to take developmental steps to bring their performance closer to the ideal potential.

As regards the second research question aimed at identifying whether improvements were made while implementing Kumaravadivelu's macro-strategies, participants collaboratively worked together towards the improvement of their students' learning processes involved inside their classrooms. In terms of learning, participating teachers created a friendly and safe ambiance that provided students with non-threatening opportunities to express themselves, and to confirm their understanding with that of their classmates. In addition, beyond language growth, students were engaged in meaning negotiation and meaningful interactions that contributed to better comprehend the course content.

Finally, although this action research offered participating teachers an opportunity to reflect on what they did inside their classrooms, often the daily routine and the heavy loads of work severely restricted the possibilities to critically discuss their practice and the ability to make connections with others. Before this action research had been implemented, sometimes participants were unaware of the factors that negatively affected their classes, resulting in mindless repetition of lessons and activities. With this, I am not saying that teachers acted mindlessly or carelessly in the microcosms of their classrooms, but rather that they had unconsciously fallen into a routine of teaching without self-examination that might have improved their performance in lessons.

Appendix

Teacher: XXX - Course: Applied Linguistics-

I decided to use a macro-strategy called *Foster Language Awareness* proposed by Kumaravadivelu (1994) in his article "The Postmethod Condition: (E) merging Strategies for Second/Foreign Language Teaching" where he explores L2 pedagogy from the conventional concept of method toward a "postmethod condition" as pointed out in this article.

From this range of possibilities, *Macrostrategy 5: Foster Language Awareness* called my attention to be implemented in my course due to the importance of helping my students to sensitize themselves to aspects such as Language Awareness (LA) which combines the notion of consciousness-raising (Rutherford, 1987; Sharwood Smith, 1981) and input enhancement (Sharwood Smith, 1991) in order to help them to face and improve their writing process by accurately quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing source material and to avoid plagiarism which were present in their last assignment.

Topic of the Class: Paraphrase: Write It in Your Own Words

Objectives: at the end of the lesson the students will be able to:

1 To know the differences among quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing;
2 To compare and contrast the three terms by practicing these skills in a written example;
3 To raise Language Awareness (LA) and consciousness-raising on the importance of quoting, paraphrasing and summarizing from a source;
4 To learn to borrow from a source without plagiarizing.
5 To help them to face the intellectual challenge of developing strategies for knowing how to avoid plagiarism.

The class-episode will have into account the following segments: *(1) boundaries, (2) center of gravity; and (3) significance*, in a strategy I decide to implement called "Think-Pair-Share" with the following characteristics: Students learn from each other; every student participates in discussions; students have the opportunity for reflection.

This strategy has four steps: Teacher poses a question; students think individually, each student discusses his or her answer with a fellow student, and students share their answers with the whole class.

By focusing on the *class-episode* the class have the following segments:

1. *Boundaries:* the teacher will explain today´s class purpose by posing a question to be discussed among the students, e.g., what´s the importance of writing? Why do we need good writing skills? What makes writing so important? Then the teacher will ask the students to work in pairs and to brainstorm ideas dealing with the questions
2. *Center of Gravity:* after a limited amount of time to think of their own answer the teacher will ask some pair- groups to give an answer by telling them that while there may be no one right answer there must be some reasonable answer to the question (s). After that, the teacher will explain the topic of the class which deals with "Paraphrase: Write It in Your Own Words"

by giving the students a handout with the basic information of the topic as well as some examples to compare and contrast the three terms used to avoid plagiarism when reporting/ writing a paper professionally and academically. They will read the information, share some ideas and develop the proposed activities in order to improve the efficiency and organization of their writing process. Following the 3rd step of the "Think-Pair-Share" strategy, the students will begin working with one other student to reach consensus on an answer to the question (s) by reformulating a common answer based on their collective insights to possible solutions to the problem: it would lead to refine their thoughts before sharing them with the whole group in the 4th final step: students share their answers with the whole class.

3. *Significance:* this strategy of Think-Pair-Share has several benefits to all students. They see the same concepts expressed in several ways by providing them the opportunity to find new ways of answering questions from their own point of view and experience rather than the language of textbook or teacher; also, they can present solutions to a problem that they are experiencing during their learning process such as *plagiarism* and the *"cutting-and-paste"* tendency. At the same time, they will be aware of the consequences of copying an entire paper or article from the Web, including some other aspects such as buying, stealing, or borrowing a paper and copying large sections of text from a source without quotation marks or proper citation.

With this exercise I hope to help the students to sensitize themselves to the formal properties of their L2 in order to increase their language awareness and to promote L2 learning in a more meaningful way.

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[12] You may read about Kumaravadivelu's Ten Macro Strategies at http://www.ugr.es/~isanz/archivos_m3thodology/kumaravid elulibrocap1.pdf.

[13] Along with the discussions, participants were asked: 1) to critically read three documents: 1) Kumaravadivelu (1994) Postmethod Pedagogy: Challenges, Opportunities and Empowerment, 2) Mark King's paper on samples of micro strategies, and 3) Kumaravadivelu, The Postmethod Condition: Emerging Strategies for Second/Foreign Language Teaching. These documents helped participants to build their knowledge and epistemological foundations of the project, participants not only took part in workshops but also actively contributed with their own ideas, background knowledge and professional experience in order to find ways to integrate the ten macro strategies in their teaching.