Article

Scenario-Based Instruction: The Case of Foreign Language Training at Multidisciplinary University

Nadezhda Almazova [1], Anna Rubtsova [1,*], Nora Kats [1,*], Yuri Eremin [2] and Natalia Smolskaia [1]

[1] Graduate School of Applied Linguistics, Translation and Interpreting, Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University, 195251 St Petersburg, Russia; almazovanadia1@yandex.ru (N.A.); smolskaia_nb@spbstu.ru (N.S.)

[2] Department of Methodology in Foreign Languages Teaching, Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia, 191186 St Petersburg, Russia; eremin37@mail.ru

[*] Correspondence: annarub2011@yandex.ru (A.R.); katsnora@gmail.com (N.K.)

Abstract: Strong communication skills, in varied professional settings, have become an absolute necessity for young professionals. Therefore, university educators are challenged to provide novice specialists with the effective foreign language training that could bring the real professional world into the classroom. This study suggests an innovative method for teaching communication skills to students, through the use of real-life scenarios, drawn from the professional context. The core objective of the research was to define whether the scenario-based instruction could effectively enhance the development of professional communication skills of students in the context of university foreign language training. The data were collected through active observation and critical incidents technique, analyzed and summarized by means of descriptive statistics. The results of the study indicate the efficacy of scenario-based communication training in higher education. However, scenario-based instruction requires careful assessment of learners' needs and expectations, thoughtful selection and design of teaching materials, and the development of an active learning environment.

1. Introduction

1.1. Communication Skills and Communicative Competence

New graduates are supposed to possess a broad set of cognitive, affective, personal, social, and communication skills that should help them achieve their full potential in varied social contexts, as well as adjust to rapidly changing environments and labor market demands. This broad set of skills, referred to as "21st century skills", is valued in educational and professional environments and, therefore, becomes pivotal for academic and career success of individuals. The need to develop a sound theoretical framework, embracing the diversity of 21st century skills, resulted in a growing number of studies, suggesting varied sets of skills from different theoretical perspectives. It is stated that these skills should be developed in the context of teaching core subject areas and should equip students with the competencies necessary for their personal and professional well-being. It becomes evident that students cannot acquire these skills when exposed to traditional, for academic institutions, methods of instruction. On that account, teaching students the skills for the future poses a challenge for educators, raising several questions: Which skills should be considered as critical in educational context? Which instructional methods could be used to foster the development of necessary skills? What sort of content should be delivered to students?

The majority of studies propose that communication skills are the backbone of skills for the future, as they are "a gateway to developing other soft skills" [1] (p. 11). Communication, in broad terms, is the process (or act) of sharing concepts and ideas, exchanging

feelings and emotions through different means in order to develop meaning and create shared understanding among specific groups in varied contexts. Having a complex nature, communication has been studied from varied perspectives, which resulted in creating a wide range of communication models [2]. From the language teaching perspective, it is commonly thought that communication comprises several basic domains, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking. However, communication is a more complex phenomenon. Communication might occur in varied social and cultural contexts and might serve different goals. It means that, in order to communicate effectively, a person needs to interpret social contexts and cultural clues to understand the intentions of other participants, to decode the messages, and derive appropriate meaning. Communication also stipulates the ability to express ideas clearly and in a coherent manner, motivate others through speech, deliver instructions, negotiate, persuade etc. [3]. Hence, communication skills go far beyond the purely linguistic proficiency to include pragmatic, strategic, discursive, and cultural aspects. In this regard, effective communication might be interpreted as communication that helps achieve desired outcomes [4]. For this reason, strong communication skills are highly valued in a professional environment [5]; they have a significant impact on students' academic success [6].

In terms of foreign language (FL) teaching, instructional strategies and learning approaches are primarily focused on the development of communicative competence, since the ability to converse with others, to accurately use the linguistic systems in an effective manner, is recognized as the strategic goal of foreign language training. The concept of communicative competence has been disclosed in the literature from different theoretical perspectives, primarily behavioral, cognitive, and social [7–9].

Varied theoretical views on the essence of communicative competence in practice have led to generating different frameworks of its components. For instance, Canale, Swain, Savignon proposed a model of communicative competence which comprised three core components: grammatical competence—referred to as the knowledge of morphological, syntactic, semantic, phonetic, orthographic rules, and "lexical items"; sociolinguistic competence—perceived as the knowledge required for effective interaction in different cultures, contexts, and situations; strategic competence—the knowledge of how to use language resources in order to communicate intended meaning [10]. In later works of Canale, "discourse competence" as the knowledge of varied connections among utterances in the text, necessary to generate a meaningful whole, was proposed as the fourth component of communicative competence. In the framework of language testing, Bachman and Palmer took a broader perspective on language proficiency and communicative competence, suggesting to consider the communicative language ability as well as to recognize the importance of context beyond the sentence and its impact on the appropriate language usage. Thus, it subsumes two core components: strategic competence (metacognitive strategies) and language knowledge. Strategic competence addresses a set of metacognitive components which ensure cognitive management function in language use, for instance, goal setting, assessment, and planning. Language knowledge embodies organizational knowledge (grammatical and textual knowledge) and pragmatic knowledge (functional knowledge and sociolinguistic knowledge) [11]. In this model, strategic competence constitutes a core component of communicative competence alongside language competence, as it might include the strategies that are not purely linguistic. In recent works of Celce-Murcia et al. and Littlewood, communicative competence has been considered as a construct comprising linguistic, discourse, actional, sociocultural and strategic competences [12]; or linguistic discourse, pragmatic, sociolinguistic, and sociocultural competences [13]. Multiple theories of communicative competence recognize the importance of strategic competence. In some, it appears to be at the core of communicative competence, tying up all other components in one balanced whole. However, most of the frameworks tend to focus on an individual producing the language rather than on individuals who interact to reach mutual understanding. Meanwhile, namely the strategic competence, as a set of skills to plan, assess, evaluate, monitor, select the language patterns

appropriate to the context, to achieve intended goals, to produce accurate utterances, and is at the forefront of improving the communicative competence and interactional abilities of a learner.

1.2. Strategic Competence and Communication Strategies

In the university practice of foreign language teaching and learning, a great deal of attention is given to the development of linguistic knowledge and accuracy, and considerably less attention is paid to fostering strategic competence [14]. There might be various reasons for this. Firstly, there are several approaches to define the concept of strategic competence. For instance, it is defined as: (a) verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are used to compensate for breakdowns in interaction, especially when there is a deficit in one of the other competencies [15]; (b) as metacognitive strategies, namely cognitive management, function in language use, that help to relate language knowledge (competence) to the context the language is used in and to the discourse, deriving from interaction [11]; (c) as a combination of metacognitive strategies that ensures the mental processes of planning, assessing, monitoring, testing, and evaluating in communication and cognitive strategies that enable the processing of information at different stages and solve problems encountered in the process of communication and actual language use [16]; (d) as a construct that comprises sociolinguistic competence aimed at adapting oral interaction, and the ability to tie this competence to the knowledge of the context and discourse while communicating [17]. Secondly, it was prior assumed that the strategic competence could be transferred from L1 to L2 [18]. Given that teaching the foreign language did not imply any specific attention to the development of strategic competence in a foreign language classroom.

Thirdly, acknowledging the fact that real time communication in foreign language is cognitively demanding, as participants are exposed to coding and decoding messages, conveying and interpreting the meaning, accomplishing personal communicative goals, and adjusting to social contexts and communicative goals of other participants, the interaction process involves not only the sole usage of linguistic resources but also specific strategies that could ensure the effectiveness of communication in varied settings. In the field of applied linguistics, strategic competence has been associated with the use of oral communication strategies, however, to date there is no agreement on their taxonomy.

Several approaches have been taken to the identification and classification of communication strategies, namely "psycholinguistic" and "interactional." From the psychological problem-solving perspective, speakers, when they lack the linguistic resources, address communication strategies to resolve their communicative problems. Besides that, the psycholinguistic approach tends to explain the usage of communication strategies with regard to the model depicting the inner processes of speech production. This perspective limits the research to the problem-solution approach which cannot clearly articulate the nature of reciprocal engagement in communication aimed at developing mutual understanding. Moreover, the significance of metacognition, which is involved in the process of regulating the communication flow, remains unaddressed. In line with the interactional perspective, the attention is mainly directed to the interactional essence of communication, and therefore, the strategic competence is defined as an attempt to generate mutual understanding and meaning among several interlocutors. In broad terms, it is possible to define two major types of communication strategies: message adjustment strategies, also referred to as reduction and avoidance strategies, and resource expansion strategies, also termed as achievement strategies [14]. There is a number of taxonomies that support the current research on strategic competence. Thus, one of Tarone's pioneering works contained the following classification of communication strategies: (1) avoidance (topic avoidance or message abandonment); (2) paraphrase (approximation, word coinage, circumlocution); (3) borrowing (literal translation, language mix); (4) appeal for assistance; (5) mime [10]. Although Tarone advocated an interactional approach to the research of communication strategies, the author's taxonomy was primarily focused on the problem resolving pro-

cedures employed by a speaker–foreign language learner. Other taxonomies, developed by Poulisse and Dornyei, embodied compensatory strategies, conceptual strategies, and linguistic strategies, as well as interactional strategies, such as checking for understanding or asking for clarification, and indirect strategies which are employed to maintain the conversation flow or gain time using fillers and hesitation [14]. The authors mostly focused on practical solutions of how to introduce the training of strategic competence (communication strategies) in a foreign language classroom. Another taxonomy, which strongly emphasized the interactional perspective on communication, was introduced by Nakatani [19]. The author suggested a set of the oral communication strategies for coping with listening (negotiation for meaning while listening strategies, fluency-maintaining strategies, scanning strategies, getting the gist strategies, nonverbal strategies while listening, less active listener strategies, word-oriented strategies) and speech production problems (social affective strategies, fluency-oriented strategies, negotiation for meaning while speaking strategies, accuracy-oriented strategies, message reduction and alteration strategies, nonverbal strategies while speaking, message abandonment strategies, attempt to think in English strategies) [19].

The fourth point to be mentioned is referred to the "teachability of communication strategies" (Dörnyei). Some studies reveal that communication strategies could be and should be taught in a foreign language classroom, besides that, the explicit instruction (direct approach) is considered to be the most preferable and effective [20]. However, there is still no agreement on the rationale for introducing strategy-oriented training in a foreign language classroom as a few studies have evaluated its effectiveness from a pedagogical perspective as well as few studies have investigated the effectiveness of strategic language training in the context of students' future professions [21]. It should also be stated that not all communication strategies, commonly used by foreign language learners, should be taught in the classroom. For instance, strategies such as word coinage, code switching, foreignizing, or borrowing might not appear beneficial in the process of communication, especially in a professional setting. Meanwhile, some strategies such as approximation, paraphrase, use of fillers/hesitation devices, checking for understanding, asking for clarification, or non-verbal strategies might contribute to effective communication.

In this study, strategic competence is defined as a set of specific skills that allows an individual to use verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that are appropriate to a certain social context.

Communication strategies are of particular importance in a professional environment, especially for those whose profession is tightly connected with effective communication. We believe that some communication strategies are "universal" and are used in L1 and L2 by speakers, specifically those that are employed at metacognitive level. Such strategies are involved in the processes of planning communication, assessing actual communication, evaluating the appropriateness of the language produced, improvising in the course of communication. Yet, there are some strategies that are important for foreign language users that reflect and reconstruct the strategic and interactional essence of communication. In this study, we focus on pre-service language teachers (teacher-students) and the communication strategies and skills they need to achieve desired outcomes in a foreign language classroom.

Communication is at the heart of the teaching profession. Moreover, studies have shown that effective teachers' performance in the classroom and students' academic achievement significantly depend on communication skills of a teacher [22]. Classroom communication is a complex phenomenon which is rather different from other types of communication between people. Firstly, it is quite regulated, as educators and students are supposed to follow certain behavioral patterns conditioned by their social statuses and specific social and educational contexts [23]. Secondly, being multiple goals-oriented, communication in the classroom aims at instructing, informing, explaining, responding to the needs of a learner, eliciting, modelling, giving feedback, managing the learners, encouraging, and assessing. Thirdly, communication in the classroom might be quite

unpredictable as well as plan driven. This demands from a teacher that they demonstrate both good improvisational and planning skills while interacting with learners.

The analysis of observation reports of pre-service FL teachers' activity in the classroom, as a matter of their teaching practice, for several months allowed us to determine a set of core communication strategies that novice teachers had struggled to use in the classroom discourse and, therefore, should be trained on in order to be more resultative and confident in communication with learners. We assume that the core difficulties in the course of their teaching practice are attributed to the following reasons: (1) little exposure to "true-to-life" situations that occur in a professional setting: (2) the lack of necessary skills for planning classroom communication as a communicative event, as well as for assessing the effectiveness of communication and reflecting on positive and negative practices; (3) poor professional communication skills that are required to support the educational goals of a teacher; (4) little exposure to the authentic classroom language that is used by native FL teachers. Being language learners themselves, non-native novice FL teachers appeared to be challenged organizing interactive oral communication in the classroom. To this end, training novice teachers in paraphrasing, questioning, maintaining the conversation flow, maintaining fluency, and accuracy becomes of primary importance.

The necessity to develop professionally bound communication skills raises a question on methods, techniques, and assessment procedures that could be productive in FL communication training at a university level. In this regard, we hypothesized that students could be effectively trained to use professional communication strategies if they were exposed to real or close-to-real scenarios that might occur in their professional sphere.

1.3. Scenario-Based Communication Training in Higher Education

Teacher training programs employ multiple approaches, such as lectures, role-plays, and seminars, to prepare pre-service teachers for varied and challenging classroom contexts [24]. However, the traditional "transmission of knowledge" model is still predominating in the practice of Higher education [25]. To this end, students report "a lack of connection between what is learned in university and what they come to encounter in 'real life' situations" [25] (p. 193). As a result, students feel unprepared for their future roles as they have not had enough exposure to the context of their future professions. It calls for the necessity to introduce students to active learning strategies, which allow them to take a more active role in their studies. Scenario-based learning is reported to be an important component of multiple active learning approaches [25].

The term "scenario" has numerous definitions and is used in varied contexts, for instance, in performing arts, literature, strategic planning, etc. Scenarios are also used as tools to define the plausibility of some future situations linked to certain circumstances as well as to provide a number of likely outcomes regarding specific issues [26].

In teaching practice, scenario-based learning (SBL) is defined as any educational approach that stipulates the usage of scenario in order to "bring about desired learning intentions" [27] (p. 2). Scenarios may include multiple things, for instance, a set of circumstances, a description of people's behavior, a story or an outline of events, an incident in the professional setting, a dilemma, but each should carry a learning experience. In scenario-based learning, students are exposed to a scenario that might contain several questions to guide their inquiry. Students explore a scenario from different perspectives, being placed in a position where they should demonstrate varied skills or procedures, speculate on professional knowledge, or tackle a problem or an issue. Scenarios create a safe learning environment. Even in the situation of a wrong choice/move/decision, students do not experience the consequences that might occur in a real professional setting. Scenarios are quite often scaffolded by guided observation, discussion, paired deliberations, debate, role-plays, teamwork, and periods of reflection [28]. The choice of scaffolding correlates with the specific aspects of professional settings. Thus, for pre-service teachers, a classroom setting is the most engaging way to experience the issues that might occur in daily professional routines. Overall, SBL helps students to bridge the gap between the

theory and the reality of professional practice as it provides authentic or realistic contexts for learning, to experience real life situations of future profession via simulating activities, to analyze gained experiences, to make decisions and evaluate their appropriateness, and to practice professional collaboration [27].

There are several types of scenarios that could be used by university educators: skills-based scenarios, problem-based scenarios, issue-based scenarios, or speculative-based scenarios. Each scenario aims at fostering specific aspects of students' quasi professional activity. Thus, skills-based scenarios allow students to practice acquired skills or demonstrate theoretical knowledge, especially underlying some fixed procedures or instructions. With problem-based scenarios, students identify their existing knowledge and the areas to be explored, construct and apply the knowledge while facing varied challenges, learn to react to arising problems, and reflect on solutions and possible outcomes. Issue-based scenarios are used to promote students' understanding of contextual issues common for the profession and provide the opportunity to compare and contrast different perspectives. Speculative scenarios are employed to encourage students to research facts, trends, and any sort of data within their professional sphere in order to speculate on future or analyze the past experiences [27]. Along with these types, researchers also distinguish between narrative scenarios—a story-based scenario which presents a person, willing or motivated to use a system of actions in a certain situation in order to achieve a goal, and gaming scenarios—the ones, based on a game, to add fun and emotional involvement to learning processes [26]. To create an engaging experience for learners, it is necessary to consider several characteristics of SBL: challenge, narrative, choice, roles, role-play, authenticity, setting of the scenario, characters in the scenario, and scenario learning objectives [29]. Once properly created, scenarios in learning process stimulate the acquisition of strategies required for professions and enable learners to build the skills needed for managing their learning difficulties [30].

In language training, scenario-based instruction is an interactive approach that challenges the learners to choose between the communication strategies that are similar to real world discourse. The interactive approach to learning and training appears to be effective, as it involves the learner in the learning process at cognitive, emotional, and behavioral levels [31]. Professional communication training implies strategic interaction as a matter of specific communication strategies used to ensure the achievement of desired outcomes [32]. These strategies are employed to convey the message, to build on mutual understanding and meaning, to perform a certain role while communicating. Strategic professional language training, with the use of scenarios, enables learners to immerse in "real world" situations where they are able to learn and improve required skills, construct their knowledge, perform professional roles, and reflect on positive and negative practices in safe learning environment.

1.4. Aim of the Study

Since it has been hypothesized that, in the context of Higher education, scenarios can be employed to improve FL communication skills, the present study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What communication strategies and skills are principal for novice FL teachers?
2. Can SB instruction enhance the development of professional communication skills and strategic competence?
3. How can scenario-based instruction be implemented in communication training What is the pedagogical implication of SB instruction in foreign language training at a university level?

2. Materials and Methods

2.1. Research Methodology

The present study draws on action research methodology, which is an inquiry-based research approach that embraces four main phases—planning, acting, observing, reflecting—

in its cycle. It is a participative and collaborative research method in that those involved contribute equally to the inquiry and collaborate together on the problem [33]. Action research methodology focuses on generating solutions to practical problems that empower researchers to advance common practices and implement new strategies and approaches that lead to transformation and changes. In education, it aims at improving teaching practices, organizational structure, learning outcomes, students' academic achievements [34]. Being a collaborative method often undertaken by colleagues-educators to search for practical solutions to varied problems, it primarily helps to improve instruction and academic performance of students. In this study, it was implemented to improve the instructional strategy that is thought to contribute to students' academic success. Action research can be effectively used with other research methods, such as observation and reflection, as well as other methods aiming at collecting the qualitative data. Thus, in this study, the critical incident technique was used to select and organize the data for scenarios and assessment tool design [35]. To describe the process of research, we will further refer to the planning stage and experimental study. The latter embodies acting, observing, and reflecting phases.

2.2. Context of the Study

The study was conducted at Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University in spring and fall semesters 2020. As a part of a Master degree program, students–future FL teachers have to serve a teaching internship at a public school or at a relevant department at university. Each group of students is assigned to one or two senior lecturers (depending on a group size) who provide administrative and educational support and observe the lessons conducted by the students. During the internship, students are supposed to plan and deliver the lessons as well as to organize several extra-curriculum events, stipulated by the school or university department educational program. After careful observation of pre-service teachers' activity doing their internship at public schools and university departments the need for professional communication training became evident. Therefore, it was decided to design respective training procedures and teaching materials that could be incorporated into the university curriculum. All in all, the study lasted for 6 months.

2.3. Participants

Since our research comprised several stages, the pool of participants varied accordingly. At the planning stage, the study involved male and female MA students (N = 126), who were observed and surveyed while delivering their lessons during the internship, and educators (N = 12), who observed these students and made reports accordingly. The experimental study was conducted among 1st year male and female MA students (N = 152) in their first semester of studies. The students had little experience in teaching, specifically several weeks of prior internship as a part of their BA degree. The main criteria for selecting the students were: little experience in teaching, major in linguistics or foreign language education, good academic record. The students were divided into 2 groups, namely control and experimental, each of which comprised 78 and 74 students respectively. The experimental group was further introduced to scenario-based instruction. The experiment involved several educators (N = 5), the authors, who were involved in the research, as well as in designing and delivering the sessions in both control and experimental groups.

2.4. Data Collection and Materials

At the planning stage, we focused on detecting the areas that seemed to be the most challenging for students. Thus, we analyzed 210 observation reports and surveyed 126 students. An observation report usually contains several categories, carefully described by the observer, such as teaching methods and techniques, materials design, the use of ICT, classroom interaction etc. We studied the comments referred to classroom interaction to identify the core communication strategies and skills that should be further trained. Having analyzed the reports, we came to the conclusion that there were three core areas that had to be addressed at the instructional level: planning communication, monitoring

communication and the use of linguistic resource. It called for the necessity to develop the instructional procedure that could help students to plan their communication, to use professional communication strategies that could support effective classroom interaction, to introduce them to authentic classroom language. In order to understand whether our assumptions were in line with the students' perception, we developed a 21-item questionnaire, answered on a five-item Likert scale from 1 (I cannot do that) to 5 (I can easily do that) the internal consistency of which was measured using Cronbach's alpha (0.82).

Having determined the most sensitive areas in classroom interaction, we designed the procedure to support scenario-based instruction in communication training and a set of relevant teaching materials (scenarios).

The set of scenarios was used to support the instruction at each stage. While working with the scenario students were supposed to anticipate possible pitfalls, to speculate on outcomes, to think of appropriate classroom language and communication strategies that could contribute to effective classroom interaction (see Box 1).

Box 1. Example of a skills-based scenario.

> ***Scenario 1.****You are teaching the topic of traveling to a group of 10-year-old students. Your students are usually quite active, however, this time they look rather exhausted. You need to present a set of vocabulary items and check if your students understand the meaning, form and the context of usage.*
> *What difficulties (pitfalls) might you face while teaching your students new words and organizing classroom interaction?*
> *How might the classroom interaction develop? What might it depend on?*
> *What teaching techniques would you use to present new words? Why?*
> *What communication strategies would you use in this situation? Why?*

In order to track the efficacy of scenario-based communication training towards improving communication skills and strategic competence of learners, we developed a codified observation tool. The observational tool was designed in line with the Behaviorally Anchored Rating Scale (BARS). Being commonly used as a management tool in the process of employees' appraisal, it is also recognized as an effective instrument of classroom observation [36]. In our study, it measured, on a five-point scale, the student-teachers' performance against examples (descriptions) of desirable or undesirable behavior that occur in classroom communication. These descriptions of behaviors encompassed a set of strategy-specific professional communication skills. Incidents, describing the use of linguistic resources, were also included (see Table 1). We applied this tool in both control and experimental groups to collect and compare the data and to trace the learning dynamics of students.

Table 1. An adapted (translated) extract from BARS observational tool.

The Use of Linguistic Resources				
1.	**2.**	**3.**	**4.**	**5.**
-Fails to use basic classroom language; -Fails to provide accurate examples of the language items being taught; -Makes language mistakes.	-Struggles to use basic classroom language; -Occasionally provides accurate examples of the language items being taught; -Makes occasional language mistakes.	-Uses classroom language which is mostly accurate; -Provides accurate examples of the language items being taught; -Makes occasional language mistakes.	-Uses classroom language which is consistently accurate; -Provides accurate examples of the language items being taught; -Demonstrates accurate language use.	-Uses classroom language which is consistently accurate; -Provides accurate and varied examples of the language items being taught; -Demonstrates accurate language use.

1. Unsatisfied performance-fails to perform, exhibits the behavior not appropriate to the learning/studying situation, demonstrates inaccurate language use; 2. Unsatisfied performance-struggles to demonstrate task-specific behavior, makes language mistakes, struggles to follow the logics of the lesson; 3. Satisfactory performance–demonstrates appropriate behavior, is able to use a communication strategy in a specific context, faces difficulties to plan and monitor the communication flow, makes occasional language mistakes, uses classroom language which is mostly accurate and appropriate; 4. Good performance–demonstrates appropriate behavior, uses several communication strategies and techniques, the communication is well-planned and well-monitored, uses classroom language which is mostly accurate and appropriate, carefully reacts to the learners' output and is able to respond in planned situations; 5. Excellent performance–demonstrates outstanding behavior, uses varied communication strategies, the communication is well-planned and well-monitored, accurately responds to the learners' output in both planned and spontaneous situations, uses classroom language which is consistently accurate and appropriate.

2.5. Analysis

The present study utilizes both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the efficacy of scenario-based instruction in communication training. At the planning stage qualitative and quantitative approaches were employed to analyze the observation reports, to deal with the data received from the questionnaire and to define the areas of further research focus.

During the experimental study (acting, observing, reflecting) the focus was directed at researching the efficacy of scenario-based instruction in FL communication training. The primary goal was to define whether the teaching procedure developed in the course of theoretical analysis could contribute to the improvement of student-teachers' communication skills, specifically to their abilities to plan and monitor the classroom interaction using appropriate communication strategies and language. The lessons were observed and videotaped, which allowed us to return to the lessons while discussing the results of the training within the research group. During the observation, we employed a codified observational tool that enabled to collect qualitative and quantitative data to track the learning dynamics.

3. Results

3.1. Planning Stage Results

The table below reports the results of the survey which was conducted among 126 students (see Table 2). It displays a distribution of responses ranked from 1 to 5 given in percentage as a mean value.

The preliminary data showed that the majority of the respondents reported difficulties regarding planning and monitoring classroom communication. As for the language use, the students reported to be more confident.

The analysis of the responses allowed us to conclude that communication strategies such as questioning, paraphrasing and maintaining the conversation flow caused the greatest difficulties among students. The identified strategies were further used to design the scenarios for pre-service FL teachers' professional communication training and to develop the BARS tool.

3.2. Results of Experimental Study

The experimental work aimed at checking the effectiveness of scenario-based communication training towards improving communicational skills and strategic competence of learners. We employed BARS tool to assess the learners' performance regarding their usage of professional communication strategies. All in all, the students of experimental and control groups had three assessments during the course. The table below (Table 3) describes the data received after the first assessment in both control and experimental groups. This assessment was organized to monitor the initial level of participants' performance in both groups. The incidents with a mean below 3 were considered indicative of the low range of effectiveness (fails to meet acceptable levels). The incidents with a mean of 3 and under 5 were considered indicative of the medium range of effectiveness, and incidents with a mean of 5 were thought indicative of the high range of effectiveness (meets acceptable levels and exceeds acceptable levels, respectively). The table below describes a mean value given as a percentage of students, in both control and experimental groups, demonstrating acceptable and unacceptable levels of performance under each category.

The results of the first assessment showed that half of the students in the control group failed to meet the acceptable level of performance in questioning (~64%) and paraphrasing (~54%), though the majority demonstrated a satisfactory result in terms of the language use (~ 81%). The results observed in the experimental group were quite similar, yet with a slight difference regarding the satisfactory use of linguistic resources (~84% against ~81%) and paraphrasing (~49% against ~46%). More than half of students from both control and experimental groups managed to perform well while maintaining the conversation flow (~ 65% and ~66% respectively).

Table 2. The distribution of students' responses within five-point scale.

Statement / Scale	1	2	3	4	5	N
I can analyze my audience communication needs	21.4	28.6	37.3	12.7	-	126
I can anticipate the difficulties that might occur in communication with learners	28.6	21.4	46	4	-	126
I can anticipate which linguistic items might cause difficulties for my learners	12.7	35	25.3	19	8	126
I can plan in advance how I will explain some difficult linguistic items to my learners	35.7	31	21.4	11.9	-	126
I can explain linguistic items in such a manner that my learners can easily understand them	32.5	25.4	35	7.1	-	126
I can define the learning objectives for each lesson	9.5	17.5	50.8	22.2	-	126
I can follow the learning objectives that I have prior defined	19.8	26.2	45.2	6.4	2.4	126
I can ask thought-provoking questions that are related to the topic of discussion.	13.4	17.5	42.9	15.9	10.3	126
I can ask concept checking questions to make sure my students understand the topic.	31	36.5	32.5	-	-	126
I can make a set of questions that correspond with the aim of the activity I use in my lesson.	19	27.8	31	19	3.2	126
I can ask instruction checking questions to make sure my students understand what to do next.	19	27.8	33.3	19.9	-	126
I can easily come up with some extra questions to support the conversation flow of the lesson.	26.2	20.6	32.5	14.3	6.4	126
I can verbally praise my students after they have contributed to the lesson	9.5	13.5	35.7	28.6	12.7	126
I can verbally encourage my students to do activities I planned	17.5	27	32.5	12.7	10.3	126
I can give immediate feedback to my students after their performance	13.5	19.8	27	31	8.7	126
I can adapt the language I use to the proficiency level of my students	23	24.6	34.1	18.3	-	126
I can use authentic classroom language to instruct my learners	19	16.7	29.4	27	7.9	126
I can provide accurate examples of language items I plan to teach	9.5	7.1	16.7	42.9	23.8	126
I can demonstrate accurate language use during the whole lesson	16.7	19.8	42.1	19	2.4	126
I can easily use synonyms and antonyms to explain the words and phrases my learners do not know	12.7	23	46	18.3	-	126
I can use more than 5 different authentic expressions and phrases to praise my students, to encourage them to work, to get their attention	15.1	24.6	37.3	23	-	126

It should be stated that we did not come across the situations when students demonstrated inappropriate behavior or refused to perform. However, most of the students struggled to deliver the lessons parts which could meet the criteria. It was difficult for students to maintain classroom interaction in a natural manner. They seemed to miss the opportunities to develop conversations or give an immediate response to the learners' output. Interestingly, although the majority of students managed to use linguistic resources appropriately, they did not focus on their classroom language use. The students were not aware of the authentic language that could be used for giving instructions or managing their learners, so they tended to give quite wordy and unclear instructions.

Overall, the results of the first assessment allowed us to conclude that the students in both groups demonstrated rather similar level of performance.

Table 3. Results of the first assessment.

Category	Fails to Meet Acceptable Levels (< 3)	Meets Acceptable Levels (= 3 < 5)	Exceeds Acceptable Levels (5)	N
Control				
questioning	64.1	35.9	-	78
paraphrasing	53.8	46.2	-	78
maintaining the conversation flow	34.6	65.4	-	78
the use of linguistic resource	19.2	80.8	-	78
Experimental				
questioning	64.9	35.1	-	74
paraphrasing	51.3	48.7	-	74
maintaining the conversation flow	33.8	66.2	-	74
the use of linguistic resource	16.2	83.8	-	74

After the first assessment, the experimental group was introduced to the scenario-based instruction whilst the control group was instructed as usual. To track the effectiveness of the SB instruction, we arranged midterm (2nd) and final term (3rd) assessments. The table below shows the results that were obtained within 2nd and 3rd assessments both in control and experimental groups (see Table 4). It describes a mean value given as a percentage of students, in both control and experimental groups, demonstrating varied levels of performance under each category. The assessment stipulated the delivery of a lesson part based on a certain scenario. The educator observed and scored the performance, and a full group discussion was held to speculate on positive practices as well as the ones that could be improved.

Table 4. Results of the 2nd and 3rd assessments.

Category	Fails to Meet Acceptable Levels (< 3) 2nd ass-t.	3rd ass-t.	Meets Acceptable Levels (= 3 < 5) 2nd ass-t.	3rd ass-t.	Exceeds Acceptable Levels (5) 2nd ass-t.	3rd ass-t.	N
Control							
questioning	47.4	32	52.6	68	-	-	78
paraphrasing	34.6	21.8	65.4	78.2	-	-	78
maintaining the conversation flow	25.7	15.4	74.3	84.6	-	-	78
the use of linguistic resource	12.8	3.8	87.2	96.2	-	-	78
Experimental							
questioning	27	6.8	73	79.7	-	13.5	74
paraphrasing	20.3	9.5	79.7	74.3	-	16.2	74
maintaining the conversation flow	21.6	10.8	78.4	75.7	-	13.5	74
the use of linguistic resource	9.5	2.7	90.5	77	-	20.3	74

Based on the results obtained, it is possible to depict several tendencies that occurred in experimental and control groups. Firstly, the students from both the control and experimental groups were observed to use the language in a more accurate manner. During the second assessment, ~90% of students in experimental and 87% of students in control groups met the requirements. However, during the third assessment, there was an increase at a higher level in experimental group, namely ~77% of students from experimental group

were able to demonstrate the performance that meets the acceptable level and ~20% of students demonstrated an outstanding level of performance.

Secondly, during the third assessment ~ 75% of students from experimental were observed to monitor the conversation at acceptable levels and ~20% of students demonstrated a high level of performance, whereas ~84% of students from the control group demonstrated acceptable performance and ~ 15% could not handle this strategy.

Thirdly, the students from experimental groups demonstrated better learning dynamics in acquiring questioning and paraphrasing strategies, namely, during the third assessment, ~79% of students from the experimental group demonstrated acceptable levels and ~13% of students performed at a high level in questioning, whereas only ~68% of students from the control group managed to meet the acceptable levels. Additionally, during the third assessment only ~9% of students from the experimental group were challenged to handle the paraphrasing strategy while almost ~22% of students from the control group did not meet the acceptable levels.

4. Discussion

The present research primarily focused on identifying the way to improve professional communication skills and strategic competence during FL training in the context of Higher education. Communication plays a pivotal socializing role, allowing students to learn the norms of speech, patterns, and rules of communicative behavior that are common for varied social contexts [37]. The study recognized the necessity to deliver strategic foreign language training in the context of professional communication. In this research, the attention was directed to the training of pre-service FL teachers. Thus, one of the focal points was to define the communication strategies that could enable novice FL teachers to organize productive communication in the classroom. It was further assumed that professional communication training would be effective if arranged in tight relation with "real world situations" (scenarios) that would occur in a professional setting. This assumption led to the necessity to develop the teaching procedure to enhance the effectiveness of scenario-based instruction in foreign language training.

In the field of linguistics and foreign language education, communication strategies are extensively researched from varied perspectives. A great number of recent studies focus on the classroom discourse as a matter of teacher-student interaction analysis, namely, the language used to convey the message, the discourse patterns, the ways of transmission and reception of information, the roles of the participants, communication style, etc. [38]. This line of research generally addresses the issues of "teacher talk" in the class-room, specifically the balance between the teacher-student talking time, the use of imperatives and questions, and the linguistic and sociolinguistic aspects of FL teachers' speech [23]. Another strand of research is mostly attributed to the analysis of communication strategies used in FL classroom by language learners [10,14,19,20]. In this regard, communication strategies are mostly considered as compensation strategies that help to avoid communication breakdowns. However, few studies have focused on communication strategies used by FL teachers in the classroom as well as the ways pre-service teachers can be trained to become effective communicators.

We believe that communication strategies used by (non-native) FL teachers in the classroom are complex in their nature. Firstly, these strategies are aimed at delivering and managing the pedagogical content of the lesson, so the strategic nature of communication (teacher talk) is contextually and professionally bound. Secondly, communication strategies in FL classroom are used by teachers to represent the foreign language models, to model communication patterns, and to support the classroom interaction. Thirdly, the effective use of communication strategies indeed helps to avoid any breakdowns in classroom communication.

In recent studies on classroom, discourse communication strategies, such as questioning or keeping the conversation flow, are recognized as a core for productive classroom communication [23,38].

It is also worth mentioning that, due to the lack of clarity concerning the distinction between such terms as strategy, technique, sub-strategy, tactic, and move. In this study, we referred to the word strategy, yet acknowledging the importance of differentiating one from another, especially in the context of linguistic studies [39].

Our study suggests that questioning and maintaining the conversation flow together with the paraphrasing strategy should be considered as the most critical strategies for pre-service FL teachers. Importantly, these strategies appeared to be quite difficult for students to master.

Questioning is one of the most important communication strategies for FL teachers [40]. In the context of classroom discourse, it is common to differentiate between display and referential questions. Referential questions provoke learners' thinking, and a teacher might only guess what sort of answers s/he could receive. Display questions are those that aim at eliciting specific knowledge from students and a teacher knows what kind of answer s/he expects from students. Thus, concerning the first group of questions the main difficulty for students was to arrange a sequence of questions that could logically lead to the next activity or be used as a matter of learners speaking practice. In this regard, it was assumed that planning, as a metacognitive strategy underlay, the ability of students to arrange meaningful communication and, therefore should be addressed at the instructional level. The second group of questions (display questions) refer to the communication strategy of asking for clarification or checking the understanding. In the practice of FL teaching, display questions are used to check the concept and instruction understating (CCQs and ICQs). Concept checking questions (CCQs) and instruction checking questions (ICQs) are targeted questions commonly used by a FL teacher in the classroom. CCQs help a teacher to gain an accurate evaluation of students' comprehension of the things being taught, and ICQs are used by teachers to check whether the students understand the instruction given before the task completion. It was observed that students were not able to use these questions, as they were challenged to understand what sort of concepts had to be checked during the lesson, and how to weave these questions into the communication flow.

In FL classrooms, teachers need to adapt to the level of students' language proficiency, so they need to vary their language in terms of grammar and vocabulary to make a clear and meaningful statement. In this regard, paraphrasing is another strategy that constitutes the core of FL classroom interaction. It was noticed that intern-teachers tended to use the grammar structures which were not entirely correct in order to make them comprehensible for learners. It was also hard for students to explain the meaning of some words, in particular, to adapt their language to the proficiency level of their potential students. Moreover, they could not see the opportunities for attracting non-verbal or visual resources, such as miming, gesturing or relevant realia. Instead, they would use complicated "dictionary-like" definitions of unclear words to build on linguistic comprehension of their learners. Meanwhile, non-verbal strategies can contribute to effective classroom interaction [41]. Non-verbal strategies, such as miming or gesturing, help a teacher to convey the necessary meaning, in particular, explain concepts, correct learners' mistakes or give instructions. They also help to create a more relaxed and dynamic atmosphere in the classroom. Novice teachers quite often fail to use non-verbal strategies as they cannot immediately assess the situation and instantly come up with the gestures that could be demonstrative and time-effective.

Another set of challenges was attributed to novice teachers' skills to maintain the conversation flow in the classroom. Firstly, it appeared that pre-service teachers could not provide the learners with an immediate response while interacting with them. Instead, they would nod or just turn to another student to proceed with the activity. Secondly, they also were challenged to use some encouraging (or praising) techniques that could stimulate the learner and help build on learners' confidence. In situations when students were distracted, or did not want to finish the activity, it was hard for teachers to attract the learners' attention.

It is also worth mentioning that, while assessing students' performance, we also noticed that teacher-students used the avoidance strategy in situations when: (a) they were confused to explain the meaning of the word to learners; (b) some grammar structure or lexical units, which were above the level of learners' proficiency, appeared in the flow of communication; (c) when the initial lesson plan did not stipulate the discussion of the topic raised by learners, therefore it was hard for novice teachers to deviate from their lesson plans and initiate the "natural" discussion.

The analysis of students' pitfalls allowed us to model the 4-step scenario-based instructional procedure that could enable the students to master the strategies in "close to real life" professional settings. It was hypothesized that successful scenario-based classroom instruction had to comprise several stages such as exposition, orientation, practice. Our assumption echoed the idea prior suggested by Sukirlan [42]. However, in the course of our research, we came to the conclusion that to make the communication training more effective, the assessment and reflection stage had to be emphasized. They had to include formative assessment, summative assessment, self-assessment, peer-assessment, and self-reflection, as these procedures promote the development of relevant professional skills as well as cognitive and metacognitive strategies [43] (see Figure 1).
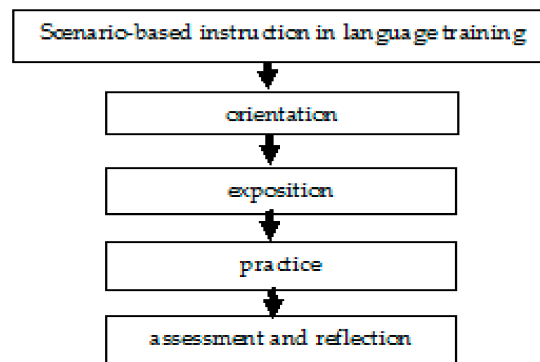

Figure 1. Scenario-based Instruction procedure in communication training.

At each instructional stage, varied scenarios were employed to support the learning process. Overall, a scenario contained the description of a typical classroom discourse situation.

At the orientation stage, we used scenarios that helped to build linguistic awareness of students. These scenarios contained an extract from classroom discourse that reflected the real situations of classroom interaction. The students were supposed to fill in the gaps, choosing between appropriate phrases, or suggest their own wording that would fit the context of the given situation. At this stage we also introduced the students to the specific strategy that would be further trained.

At the stage of exposition, the students observed the models of behavior demonstrated by other practitioners. To this end, we used different open resources to find short videos that depicted necessary strategies. It was important that these videos contained a challenge that would make it hard to predict the outcomes of communication and were authentic in terms of language. The students worked in small groups, to analyze the behavior of a teacher and students, to anticipate the problems that might occur in classroom communication.

At the practice stage, the students were introduced to scenarios that were further analyzed and acted out. At this stage we used role-plays and open class discussions to reflect on good practices and develop a step-by-step procedure of implementing strategies in real settings [44].

At the assessment and reflection stage, the students were supposed to demonstrate the skills acquired. The educator assessed the students' performance while they were delivering the lesson parts based on the scenario they had received. The results were discussed with the student and the group. The students were supposed to share observations and discuss the strong and weak points of the performance. Collaborative work at

every stage helps students to build confidence, acquire necessary team-working skills, and develop a professional identity [45]. Overall, the sequential implementation of each step of scenario-based instruction involves students into productive theory analysis, reflective analysis of behavioral models, theorizing, practice and reflective self and peer assessment. It helps students to build on personal knowledge and practices that could enhance the teaching repertoire [46].

The research has shown that scenario-based instruction can significantly enhance the communication skills of learners. Being an interactive method of teaching, it provides the learners with the opportunities to try out varied communicative situations where they need to discuss, assert their opinions, role play, and act out the scenarios. It also allows arranging strategic communication training which, if necessary, could be limited to the behavioral and communication patterns that need specific attention. Scenario-based instruction helps students to acquire and improve professional communication skills in a safe learning environment, where they learn to analyze their difficulties and develop the strategies for effective learning and communication.

The core pedagogical implication of SB instruction is that it significantly changes the roles of an educator and students. The students become the active participants in their learning. They observe, analyze, gather information, explore, and practice which might also foster their cognitive and metacognitive learning strategies. The role of an educator is to guide the students and render support at times when students need to detect the areas of their improvement. The core objectives of an educator while conducting training sessions could be formulated as follows:

- to create conditions for students that enable them to acquire and improve their skills and competencies;
- to provide the feedback and support, so the students could detect the area of their further improvement and envisage its path;
- to develop the learners' skills and competencies by enabling the learner to take an active role;
- to foster students' motivation through challenging activities and collaborative work;
- to attract varied resources in order to make the learning process more engaging.

Scenario-based instruction may also support students in adapting to their professional roles. It equips the educator with the opportunities to create the learning environment, which helps learners to manage anxiety and build confidence. Helping students to adapt to their social and professional roles is as important as providing them with diverse learning opportunities, since adaptation stipulates the development of skills needed for independent professional work and personal fulfillment [47].

As a matter of practical implications, the research contributes to the practical knowledge of developing the instructional strategy while delivering the scenario-based training to students. The developed 4-step instructional procedure might be used to teach other subjects at university. If so, the main focus should be directed to defining the core objectives of the course or a discipline, selecting relative scenarios (incidents of real life) and arranging collaborative work among students. At each step of SB instruction, the educator should provide the students with equal opportunities to collaborate, express their opinions, practice, and reflect on their own performance and the performance of their peers. The study also reveals communication strategies that are the principal for novice teachers' education. These strategies could underlie the basis of professional communication training, not only at university, but also at institutions delivering professional development training.

5. Conclusions

Overall, scenario-based instruction is the method that can contribute to active learning and considerably enhance the improvement of communication skills in FL training. The results obtained, within the experimental study, allow us to conclude that scenario-based instruction appeared to be rather effective in the context of Higher education. Thus, scenario-based instruction is likely to become one of the useful tools for building the skills

of 21st century. It encourages the learner to have initiative and be fully involved in the learning process, stimulates the development of analytical skills, and helps students to build on their abilities to anticipate the outcomes of their decisions and professional activities.

However, the implementation of scenario-based instruction might require specific amendments of curriculum in order to adjust this method to the FL programs taught at university. It also calls for a careful assessment of learners' needs and expectations, thorough selection and design of teaching materials, development of active learning environment. Scenario-based instruction requires thoughtful observations and sensitivity to learners' progress and imposes the necessity of giving a comprehensive and informative feedback to students. Generally, it stipulates the transfer to a constructivist approach, which emphasizes the importance of creating students' own knowledge, rather than the transmission or recording the information conveyed by educators, the value of social interactions, the authenticity of problems that are studied by students [48].

The present study is limited to the assessment of quasi-professional communication in the context of Higher education FL training. Thus, we suppose that, in real professional settings, pre-service teachers might perform differently due to varied contextual and psychological factors. In this case, it could possibly result in obtaining the data distinct from the present findings. However, the present limitation could underlie the further research. It may deal with the assessment and comparison of quasi-professional and real professional communication of pre-service FL teachers in FL classrooms. We also suppose that the scenario-based instruction in FL professional communication training might be successfully implemented in varied occupational areas. Thus, another research strand might deal with the study of SB instruction in language classrooms for diverse language purposes. Additionally, the current world situation and technological progress promote the necessity to incorporate advanced technologies into the university classroom [49]. Scenario-based instruction has been extensively used in educational digital environment [50]. Thus, the study of SB instruction in FL digital university classroom appears to be another prospective line of research.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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