



## **Integrating Business English Communication in the Contextualized Teaching of an ESL Graduate Course**

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### **Abstract**

This research aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL) by using Business English Communication as the context in improving the academic and classroom performance of graduate students. The intervention was employed in the course “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods,” along three areas, namely: “individual oral report,” “class participation,” and “periodic test.” Participants were 39 graduate students. They were pre-tested on a dependent variable and then post-tested using an intervention. The dependent

variable for this study is the students' performance, as they were subjected to the usual instructional design of the course, while the treatment refers to the use of CTL strategy wherein business English communication is employed as the context. The effectiveness of the intervention was based on the results of a specially prepared Performance Evaluation Rubric. This rubric was specially designed to evaluate separately the performance of students. To assess whether the intervention is effective, the performance ratings across the pre-test and the post-test were compared. Progress or regress in performance were indicated by the descriptive categories on level of performance, as well as the actual numerical ratings. The accounts of male and female students in terms of progress or regress in student performance were also compared. This was done to determine if there were discrepancies in responses to the intervention between the sexes. Findings of the study confirm that the performance of the students has improved as indicated by the progress in their ratings in the three areas. As such, it appears that the use of CTL works best to improve the students' performance in their periodic test on top of other learning activities. The use of CTL appears to have a relatively lower impact in as far as its application to the conduct of individual oral report.

**Keywords:** *Contextualized Teaching and Learning, ESL teaching, graduate education course, Business English Communication, action research*

## **Introduction**

In recent years, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has approved a "blueprint" that will guide its ten member-states on initiatives to achieve regional integration (8th ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting, 2014). This integration allows the member-states to participate in the flow of goods and services, capital, foreign investment, and labor. It also opens doors for regional job markets making the competition tougher and pushing the education sectors to produce competent graduates who possess skills needed to actively contribute to this knowledge-based society. The need to develop these skills gave rise to 21<sup>st</sup> century learning which refers to a pedagogical concept that emphasizes skills and knowledge needed by learners in order to succeed in work, life, and citizenship (8th ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting, 2014).

Accordingly, some recent research findings revealed that the current curriculum needs to improve its specificity, internal coherence, and integration of some essential principles of 21<sup>st</sup> Century learning and language teaching and learning (Barrot, 2018). Researchers and scholars have thus recommended to address the gaps and challenges in implementing the curriculum.

One way to solve these gaps is testing emerging teaching approaches in classrooms like Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL). It combines skill and knowledge so that learners obtain new information in an environment that they can relate to and that is of interest to them. They process this information in ways that makes sense to them based on their frame of reference, memory and experience (Andriotis, 2017). In a traditional classroom-learning environment, knowledge and skills are being taught separately. Learners are often not able to make the connection between what they have learned and how that knowledge will be used. With CTL, every part of the instruction and assessment is aimed directly at combining skills and knowledge. Learners not only understand the facts but they see the big picture. Real-world situations are being used and knowledge and skills are being learned in the context of their career setting or in which it will be used. By making this connection, learners are able to retain the new information better and they are also more motivated continue learning (Andriotis, 2017).

Contextualizing instruction refers to the utilization of particular situations or events that occur outside of an academic specialized class or are of particular interest to students to motivate and guide the presentation of ideas and concepts. Contextualizing often takes the form of real-world examples or problems that are meaningful to students personally, to the local area, their community or workplace. These are situations in which students may have some experience with (either directly or indirectly) prior to or in conjunction with the presentation of target ideas in class, and that students engage with over extended periods of time (Rivet & Krajcik, 2007). Contextualized instruction is getting a lot of attention lately, especially when the topic is basic skills instruction that helps adults along “career pathways” (Bransford et al, 1999). In adult education, the term “Contextualized Instruction” describes a set of teaching, learning and assessment practices that: are aimed directly at developing the skills and knowledge that adults need to deal with specific situations or perform specific tasks, and that they have identified as important and meaningful to themselves in their everyday lives or in their workplace (Bransford et al, 1999). Instead of focusing only on the possession of basic skills and knowledge, contextualized instruction focuses on the active application of those skills and that knowledge “in a context.” Such a context should be as “real-world” as is feasible.

In terms of pedagogical theory, contextual learning activities are aligned with the mainstream pedagogical body of knowledge, including Motivation Theories. CLT is likewise based on social learning theories, problem-centered learning and modern psychological and physiological research around how human brains learn. Rather than teach for the abstract or theoretical world, using contextual learning strategies helps teachers prepare their students to

take on real-world challenges that their staff faces in the workplace. Because the contextual learning approach relies on “context”, teachers can offer content built to deal with company-specific context in mind (Labiste, 2019).

In corollary, one of the skills required for success in today's business is strong command of the English language (Al-Khatib, 2005; Weedmark, 2019) and that contextualization is a key in developing students' language skills (Labiste, 2019). In improving one's communication skills, English will be at the foundation of that training. In closing sales discussion, persuading people or leading employees, proficiency in English will be one vital asset. Also, in expanding business to other regions of the world, English is going to be the most-used language (Weedmark, 2019). English is not the most spoken language in the world, but when it comes to business, it is by far the most important (Weedmark, 2019). In any study or survey of business leaders, when asked what are the most important skills that they are looking for today, English is invariably the underlying factor. In a 2018 survey of 2,000 business leaders by LinkedIn, English was the foundation of the top three skills companies were looking for: leadership, communication and collaboration (Weedmark, 2019).

In a study by the National Association of Colleges and Employers, 73.4 percent of employers said they wanted job candidates with strong written communication skills. While the educational system has focused on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, 75 percent of employers stated that there should be a greater emphasis on written communication skills in college (Weedmark, 2019). Thus, English is a requirement for more jobs in more countries than ever before in human history. Even 20 or 30 years ago, having a strong grasp of the English language was not as important as it is today (Patil, 2005).

On the above context, it is obvious that Business English is also one of the primary concerns of ESL teachers as much as all other teachers engaged in other academic disciplines. Teachers use English in their actual formal correspondence in their respective institutions. Some teachers are assigned administrative functions which even broadens their tasks to preparing documents and other types of communications using English. Therefore, business English communication takes center stage in the teaching career, not only as content knowledge that teachers impart to their students but the teachers' own communication functions and roles as well in their own organizations. For that, it is an established fact that business English is one of the most relevant contexts to which ESL courses taken up by teachers in their graduate studies should anchor on.

## **Context and Problem**

One course in “Master of Arts in Education (M.A.Ed.), major in English” at Pangasinan State University School of Advanced Studies (PSU-SAS) is “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods.” It aims to orient students on the different methods and approaches in second or foreign language teaching including the language learning strategies. A careful review of the component course topics shows the theoretical feasibility of contextualizing the teaching of the ESL course using business communication English. The researcher noted some observations regarding the students in terms of class participation and their individual performance in oral report delivery. While the course contents are interesting in themselves, the tendency of the students to signify their understanding of some course contents to actual circumstances occurring in their institutions, as well as certain tasks that they actually perform in relation to their workplace is noticeable. This is particularly observed during individual oral reports when student-reporters would anchor their explanations of certain concepts to real engagements they encounter in the workplace. It is likewise observed in the participation of all other students when they initiate their questions or clarifications of certain concepts with a fellow student currently delivering an oral report or in the event that the teacher (i.e. this researcher) is conducting his own class lectures. As such, there seems to be an apparent trend to such student practice to anchor the course to some “contexts” that they believe are relevant. This phenomenon has been observed similarly with another ESL course taught by the researcher in the previous semester. On this point, students’ zeal to conduct their oral reports and their participation in class seem to heighten at times when they realize the relevance of certain contexts to the ESL theories and concepts being tackled. Hence, it led to this researcher’s curiosity to formalize such student practice which, at any rate, is only held as a clandestine practice without any framework of whatsoever that legitimizes such practice. It is risky as well as highly informal to simply allow students to explore on just any context to signify the ESL topics, which might just be done at times when students simply want to divert the focus of the lesson to just any topic in their workplace that they can talk about or personally wish to talk about. As such, there is also the risk that the course turns into a venue of sharing personal experiences and pouring out sentiments in the workplace at the compromise of using the limited class period to discuss the formal course contents. Hence, if such practices are held constant by graduate students and that these practices somehow give rise to their interest to participate and communicate ideas inside the classroom, then it is worth considering how to establish formally a mechanism to accommodate such practice but as regulated by underlying pedagogical theory. The student practice appears to stem from some desire to contextualize the course lessons and this process

is highly analogous to the principles of CTL. After all, what every graduate course imparts are not simply the ESL lessons, per se, but how they are situated in actual contexts in the actual professional engagements of the students.

On the above basis, this action research was designed to formalize as well as regulate the practice of contextualizing ESL course contents which the students take up mostly in their own personal choice and whims, whether their intentions for doing so is really for the noble exploration of the subject matter being discussed or simply want to divert course content discussions to their personal desire for self-expression of sentiments related to their workplace problems or issues. This action research establishes a focal context, that is, “business English communication,” which might later be integrated to the teaching of the graduate course “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods.” This study aimed to determine the students’ response to this intervention in terms of the favorability of this context, as well as its effects in improving students’ performance in individual oral report delivery and class participation. It sought answer to this central question: Is there an improvement of the pre and post-test rating descriptions of students in their (a) individual oral reports, (b) class participation, and (c) periodic test when Business English is used as a context in an ESL class?

## **Method**

### **Intervention**

One noticeable observation of the researcher, who serves as the instructor of the undergraduate class, is the trend among his graduate students. When conducting individual oral reports, responding to queries, and raising their questions and clarifications during buzz sessions, students practice contextualization of certain course lessons. They, then, tend to personally assign their own contexts when exploring ideas and theories related to ESL or the course contents. This practice of random contextualization is relatively problematic, as it sometimes leads class discussions towards irrelevant topics. Moreover, some students carry out contextualization to extremes such that the length of discussions on external topics result to waste of much time in which the reporter ends up wrapping up his / her oral report and will have failed to deliver an intensive presentation on a given course topic because the class period has already been exhausted. Some students also seemingly use contextualization simply to divert the course discussions into their personally preferred topics, which is detrimental to the interests of formal classroom discourse with less learning that results at the end of the class session. Meanwhile, other students were also observed to use contextualization to explore

topics that enable them to voice out sentiments related to problems and issues in their workplace.

Faced to solve this classroom-specific problem, the researcher incorporated the CTL pedagogical approach in the teaching of the graduate course titled “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods.” Such intervention involved the integration of “Business English Communication (BEC)” in the course’s instructional design. However, BEC was not directly instructed as an added course content but was used as a “context” upon which certain selected course contents were anchored. Moreover, selected learning activities and assessment tools were modified, too, using BEC as a context. Several reading resources were likewise recommended as references in dealing with such learning activities.

The intervention strategy advanced by this study is presented in the form of certain modifications introduced in some selected course contents in the syllabus. However, modifications under “learning activities” and “assessment tools” were presented in the form of sample prototypes of learning activities, assessment tools, and their corresponding rubrics. The general statement of learning activities and assessment tools that appear in the course syllabus remained, but a teacher’s guide in implementing these activities and tools was formulated.

## **Design**

This study used action research as an approach to solve the problem. Specifically, it employed descriptive-developmental design. Norton (2009) opined that action research follows a process similar to other research methods, yet action research emphasizes cyclical and iterative improvements. This cyclical process creates emergent knowledge and solutions. The cycle bears some similarities to the Deming cycle of plan, do, check, and act. Plan, do, check, and act is a total quality management process for continuous improvement. It was also used in education where “plan” defined the learning process, “do” executed the process, “check” analyzed the information, and “act” was the corrective action (Dahlgaard, Kristensen, & Kanji, 1995). To create change, action research requires the execution of a solution, production of the invention in the everyday life in which the problem is discovered, and evaluating the effectiveness of the production (Melendy, 2008).

Since this study aimed to see a teaching-learning improvement in a graduate course through the use of an intervention, action research, as an approach, was appropriate. According to Coghlan and Brannick (2001), one goal of action research is to solve a professional learning situation problem that used scientific study. It is based on problem solving and generating new

knowledge The methodology required diagnosing a change situation, gathering data, taking action, and then fact finding (Coghlan & Brannick, 2001).

Descriptive research, on the other hand, is common to social researches (Bhat, 2018), since many of these studies aim to present the results of surveys or describe the profile of a target population in terms of some selected categories (socio-demographic or otherwise). Signified to the concerns of this study, several items to be described include (a) students' performance in individual oral report; (b) students' performance in a learning activity; (c) students' test performance; and (d) students' performance in class participation.

In addition, the research design presupposes participants of the same grade level to be pre-tested on a dependent variable and then post-tested using an intervention. The dependent variable for this study is the students' performance as they are subjected to the usual instructional design of the course, while the treatment refers to the use of CTL strategy wherein business English communication is employed as the context for a selected course content, learning activity, and assessment tool. Pretesting permits the gathering of baseline data which later can be used to check whether the intervention is effective or not.

### **Subjects**

This study involved the total population of graduate students pursuing the program, M.A.Ed., Communication-Arts English at Pangasinan State University School of Advanced Studies located in Urdaneta City, Pangasinan. The students comprise a single class section enrolled in the course titled "Survey of ESL Areas and Methods" during the First Semester of AY 2020-2021. This researcher is the faculty-in-charge of said course. Table 1 shows the complete registry of the students who became the research subjects. Moreover, the table shows the students' sex distribution.

**Table 1.** Subjects' sex distribution.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	8	21%
Female	31	79%
Grand Total	39	100%

## **Data Collection**

The research investigation was conducted just when the lessons tackled with the students were about the course topic: “Methods and Approaches in Second or Foreign Language Teaching.” Based on the current course syllabus, it refers to the seventh course topic, tackled within 16 hours on the fifth week of the semester. Learning activities set for the duration of this course topic included “individual oral report, discussion (i.e., buzz sessions), and lecture.” The course-topic was divided into three parts namely, (a) Teacher-Oriented, (b) Learning-Oriented, and (c) Learner-Oriented. Under each part was an inventory of teaching methods classified accordingly. At the start of the semester, the students had already been assigned their individual reports in the different course topics.

Initially, permission to conduct this study was formally sought from the Dean of the PSU School of Advanced Studies. For the pre-test, the students were assigned to present an oral report on “Teacher-Oriented Method.” The rest of the students were also encouraged to conduct their buzz sessions and group discussions just as the regular class participation was usually conducted. The learning assessment or periodic test given by the teacher was also conducted in its regular and usual fashion. On these representations of the students’ performance, this researcher did some reflection on his assessment using a specialized rubric.

For the post-test, the students were assigned to present an oral report on “Learning-Oriented Method” presupposing a special directive from the researcher that the discussions of concepts were signified to the concerns and issues of Business English Communication. The rest of the students were also encouraged to conduct their buzz sessions and group discussions using Business English Communication as a context to understand and elucidate the concepts related to “Learning-Oriented Method.” The learning assessment or periodic test given by the teacher was also conducted using BEC as a context to evaluate the students’ comprehension of the lesson.

## **Data Analysis**

The effectiveness of the intervention was based on the results of an especially prepared Performance Evaluation Rubric designed to evaluate separately the performance of students in terms of (a) Oral Report, (b) Class Participation, and (c) Periodic Test. The distinctions made among these aspects of student performance further enable accuracy in reporting the effectiveness of the intervention. The results were able to indicate whether the intervention was effective as with the overall student performance in all three aspects or partially on certain aspects only. The scale below was used to interpret the performance ratings.

Table 2. Interpretation scale used in the analysis of data.

Scale	Interpretation (Level of Performance)
4.50 - 50.00	Very High
3.50 – 4.00	High
2.50 – 3.00	Moderate
1.50 – 2.00	Low
1.00 – 1.49	Very Low

To assess whether the intervention is effective, the performance ratings across the pre-test and the post-test were compared. Progress or regress in performance were indicated by the descriptive categories on level of performance, as well as the actual numerical ratings. However, since this study did not employ inferential statistics, there was no further attempt to verify whether the difference in the pre-test and post-test results was statistically significant. This can be further explored in more intensive research applications that use statistical analysis of data.

Moreover, the accounts of male and female students in terms of progress or regress in student performance were compared. This was done to determine if there were discrepancies in responses to the intervention between the sexes. However, since this study did not employ inferential statistics, there was no further attempt to verify whether the difference in the performance between the male and the female students was statistically significant.

### **Results and Discussion**

This section presents the results of the pre-tests and post-tests to enable their comparison. As previously established, three (3) indicators were used to assess the effectiveness of applying CTL in the teaching of the course “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods”, particularly with the use of Business English Communication as “context” in the delivery of selected course topics, learning activities, and evaluation. As such, pre-tests and post-tests were conducted to measure the students’ performance along: (a) individual oral report; (b) class participation; and (c) periodic test. To facilitate a clearer presentation and discussion of the results, each set is allocated its respective tabulated data.

### Individual Oral Report

Table 3 shows the pre-test and post-test results in terms of the students' performance on "individual oral report." Students were evaluated of their performance prior and after the implementation of the CTL approach that uses business English communication as context for conducting the individual oral reports. In the pre-test, the students conducted their reports in their familiar traditional way in which they freely selected their own "contexts" as signified to their assigned report topics. In the post-test, the students were instructed to use business English communication as context that they have to signify to their report topics.

**Table 3.** Synopsis of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Results on Individual Oral Report

Students	Pre-Test Rating Description		Post-Test Rating Description	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Male	2.8	Moderate	3.7	High
Female	3.5	High	4.5	Very High
<b>AWM</b>	<b>3.15</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>4.1</b>	<b>High</b>

Findings indicate that there is an apparent increase in the rate of student performance. This was accounted for by both male and female students. In the pre-test, the performance rating of the male student is 2.8, described as a "Moderate" level of performance, while the female student obtained a rating of 3.5 (High). Thus, on the average, the students' oral report performance is 3.15 (Moderate). On the other hand, in the post-test, the respective performance ratings of the male student (3.7 or High) and the female student (4.5 or Very High) show a dramatic increase from their pre-test performance ratings. Overall, the post-test performance rating of the students on oral report is 4.1 (High).

On the above results, there is a glaring evidence of progress in performance regardless of sex differences among the students. This progress is hereby directly attributed to the variation of conditions between the pre-test and the post-test in which the students were exposed to the use of CTL approach. Such approach employed business English communication as a context to conduct their individual oral report during the post-test stage. As such, the use of this intervention is deemed effective in improving the students' individual oral reporting. Referring back to the details of the students' performance ratings, it appears that students relatively increased in their oral report performance when business English communication was used as a context. Their increased performance is characterized as follows:

- *Ability to effectively relate the concepts in his or her report to certain contexts.*
- *Ability to provide lucid explanations of the concepts in his or her report when he or she relates them to certain contexts.*
- *Confident to explain the concepts in his or her report in relation to certain contexts.*
- *Ability to provide concrete examples and situations to explain the concepts in his or her report as he or she tries to relate them to certain contexts*
- *Ability to illustrate how the principles of some second or foreign language teaching approaches can also be integrated to certain contexts*
- *Passion and interest to discuss the concepts in his or her report as they are related to certain contexts*
- *Ability to relate a lot to the concerns of certain contexts outside the report topic as he or she provides concrete examples from his own experiences.*
- *Ability to make his or her report more interesting with his or her creative way of relating ESL concepts to certain contexts*
- *Fluency in conducting report using certain contexts*
- *Expressive and communicative of ideas when conducting report using certain contexts.*

As to discrepancies in the accounts of the sexes, the male students tend to have relatively lower performance ratings compared to female students when it comes to individual oral report. These figures are consistent in both the pre-test and post-test ratings, even if the ratings of male and female students increased across the test stages. The framework of this study does not enable a further investigation to explain such discrepancy which may be due to extraneous factors not identified by this study. Nevertheless, the male students responded positively as much as the female students when it comes to the effect of the intervention.

The above findings concur with scholarly opinions on the beneficial effects of CTL. According to Hudson & Whistler (2007), CTL is a conception of teaching and learning that helps teachers relate subject matter content to real world situation and its application to their lives as family, citizen, and workers and engage in the hard work that learning requires. In the case of this research, the context that was signified to the contents of an ESL graduate course is business English communication which pertains to a real-world situation in as far as the students' experiences are concerned because they are engaged in formulating business communications in their respective work places. CTL emphasizes students' interest and experience (Satriani, Emilia, & Gunawan, 2012). The purpose of the CTL approach is to motivate the learners to

take charge of their own learning and to relate between knowledge and its application to the various contexts of their lives (Satriani, Emilia, & Gunawan, 2012).

Anent the above, scholars also provide some approaches for implementing contextual teaching and learning. Berns & Erickson (2001) proposed one CTL approach known as “problem-based learning.” In this approach, the students can solve the problem when they are learning that integrate skills and concepts from a selected content area. It can begin a real or stimulated problem (Putnam & Leach, 2004). This CTL approach was employed in this research since the individual student reporters were asked to invoke problems related to their experience of business writing in their own work place, and then use these as launching points to clarify the concepts in their assigned oral reports.

### **Class Participation**

The pre-test and post-test results on the category of “class participation” is shown in Table 4. In this case, the participation among the male members of the class was assessed separately from those among the female members. As previously indicated, the class has a total population of 39, comprised of 8 male students and 31 female students.

**Table 4.** Synopsis of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Results on Class Participation

Students	Pre-Test Rating Description		Post-Test Rating Description	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Male	1.6	Low	2.6	Moderate
Female	2.2	Moderate	4.2	High
<b>AWM</b>	<b>1.9</b>	<b>Low</b>	<b>3.4</b>	<b>Moderate</b>

Findings indicate an apparent increase in the rate of student performance across the pre-test and the post-test. This case was accounted for by both male and female members of the class. In the pre-test, where no intervention was applied, the class participation of the male class members is rated 1.6 (Low), while the female class members rated 2.2. (Moderate). Overall, the class participation is rated 1.9 (Low). But this has taken a dramatic increase in the post-test when the CTL approach was used, employing business English communication as a context in understanding the ESL course lessons. The class participation among the male class members increased to the rate of 2.6 (Moderate), while that among the female class members increased

to the rate of 4.2 (High). Consequently, the overall class participation also increased to the rate of 3.4 (Moderate).

Along this vein, there is an obvious evidence of progress in the performance regardless of sex differences among the students. This progress is directly attributed to the variation of conditions between the pre-test and the post-test, where the students were exposed to the use of CTL approach employing business English communication as a context to facilitate class participation. As such, the use of this intervention is effective in improving the students' class participation. Referring back to the details of the students' performance ratings, their increased performance is characterized as follows:

- *Many of the class members seem interested to raise more questions because of the context used by the reporter in explaining the concepts in his or her report.*
- *Many of the class members seem interested to raise more clarifications because of the context used by the reporter in explaining the concepts in his or her report.*
- *Many of the class members seem interested to share their own experiences or opinions because of the context used by the reporter in explaining the concepts in his or her report.*
- *Many of the class members seem to be enjoying listening to the reporter because of the context used by the reporter in explaining the concepts in his or her report.*
- *Many of the class members take turns in giving their own opinions as they are motivated by the context used by the reporter in explaining the concepts in his or her report.*

As to discrepancies in the accounts of the sexes, the male students still tend to have relatively lower performance ratings compared to female students when it comes to class participation. Results are again consistent in both the pre-test and post-test ratings, even if the ratings of male and female students increased across the test stages. Satriani et al. (2012) provided some benefits of using the CTL approach that signify to enhancing the classroom learning atmosphere and participation, CTL improves students' writing skill and motivation to learn.

### **Periodic Test**

Table 5 shows the pre-test and post-test results on the category of "periodic test." In this case, the periodic test performance among the male members of the class was assessed separately from those among the female members.

**Table 5.** Synopsis of the Pre-Test and Post-Test Results on Periodic Test.

Students	Pre-Test Rating Description		Post-Test Rating Description	
	Mean	Interpretation	Mean	Interpretation
Male	2.2	Moderate	4.4	Very High
Female	3.2	High	4.4	Very High
<b>AWM</b>	<b>2.7</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>Very High</b>

It can be noted that an apparent increase in the rate of student performance across the pre-test and the post-test existed. This was accounted for by both male and female members of the class. It should be noted that the pre-test did not have any intervention was applied. The periodic test performance of the male class members is rated 2.2 (Moderate), while the female class members rated 3.2. (High). Overall, the class participation is rated 2.7 (Moderate). But this has taken a dramatic increase in the post-test when the CTL approach was used, employing business English communication as a context in understanding the ESL course lessons. The class participation among the male and female class members uniformly increased to the rate of 4.4 (Very High).

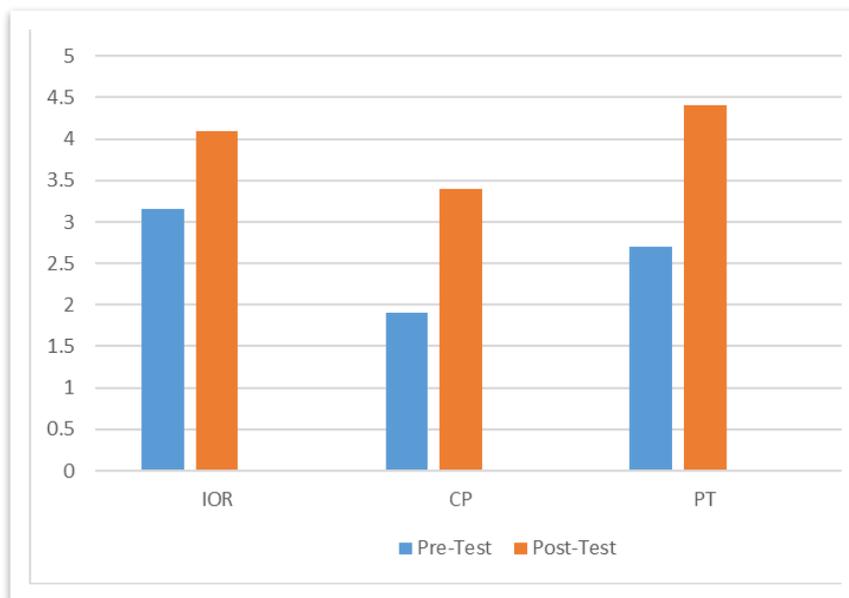
The above results prove a dramatic progress in performance regardless of sex differences among the students. This progress could be directly attributed to the variation of conditions between the pre-test and the post-test in which the students were exposed to the use of CTL approach, employing Business English Communication as a context in the structure of their periodic test. As such, the use of this intervention is considered effective in improving the students' periodic test performance. Referring back to the details of the students' performance ratings, their increased performance is characterized as follows:

- *Ability to explain clearly the ESL concept or theory by relating it to a certain context.*
- *Ability to explain ESL concept or theory is substantial as he or she tried to use a context in his or her discussion.*
- *Ability to write more sentences in his response to the test question because he or she used a context to peddle his or her explanations of an ESL concept or theory.*
- *Competent in student's knowledge about the context that he or she used to explain an ESL concept or theory.*
- *Ability to explore further practical applications of an ESL concept or theory as he or she tried to relate them to a certain context.*

As to discrepancies in the accounts of the sexes, the male students tend to have relatively lower performance ratings compared to female students when it comes to periodic test performance. However, this pattern seems to apply only in the pre-test stage because in the post-test stage, the performance of male and female students appears to be at a similar rate. The male students responded positively as much as the female students when it comes to the effect of the intervention.

### Overall performance

The consolidated results confirm that the overall performance of the students has improved as indicated by the progress in their ratings in “individual oral report,” “class participation,” and “periodic test performance” (Fig. 1).



**Fig. 1.** Chart indicating the increase of student performance using CTL approach as an intervention in teaching a graduate ESL course

Table 6 further shows the margin of difference between the rating obtained by the students in the pre-test and the post-test across the three indicators of student performance. As illustrated, the differences in the ratings commonly indicate an increase in performance level, although at different rates. The increase in students’ performance rating for “periodic test” (1.7) appears to have the highest rate of increase as compared to the rates of increase in their performance for “class participation” (1.5) and “individual oral report” (0.95). This implies that even through the use of CTL as an approach to teach the course “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods” has

generally caused a progress in the students' performance in the course activities, such impact may vary across different types of learning activities. As such, it appears that the use of CTL is effective to improve the students' performance in their periodic test on top of other learning activities. The use of CTL appears to have a relatively lower impact in as far as its application to the conduct of individual oral report.

**Table 6.** Difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test Ratings of Student Performance

<b>Indicator of Student Performance</b>	<b>Margin of Difference between Pre-Test and Post-Test Performance</b>
Individual Oral Report	0.95 (increase)
Class Participation	1.5 (increase)
Periodic Test	1.7 (increase)

### **Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

This research aimed to identify the effectiveness of CTL approach in teaching a graduate course. It further identified the progress of the graduate students their performance along individual oral report, class participation, and periodic test. The context used was Business English Communication. It found out that the students' classroom performance generally increased with the use of Contextualized Teaching and Learning (CTL) approach. Moreover, the female students have relatively higher performance rating than the male students when signified to the use of CTL in a graduate ESL course. The use of CTL in a graduate ESL course has its highest impact in improving students' performance in periodic tests.

Using an action research as a research approach, this study has several limitations. First, the CTL approach was used only in one class. Succeeding researchers may want to apply CTL in various ESL graduate courses to strengthen the generalizability of the claim. This recommendation is aimed to improve the graduate students' academic and classroom performance in the ESL courses of their graduate program curriculum. Moreover, it is also aimed to expose the students to the CTL approach and its principles which they can adopt in their own instructional design respective of the subjects that they teach in the schools where they are affiliated.

Second, because this study is just a small-scale action research, the statistical treatment used is limited. Future researches might want to adopt the objective of this study but with the use of

higher statistical treatment and qualitative approaches. In this manner, results could be more substantiated.

This study also recommends the use of “Business English Communication” as a context to teach the course “Survey of ESL Areas and Methods.” The appreciation for and mechanics of using CTL approach should be reinforced, especially among the male graduate students, in order to further optimize its beneficial impact in improving the students’ overall academic performance in their ESL course, most especially in their conduct of individual oral report.

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