The Factors Contributing to the Palestinian Undergraduates' Speaking Skills in Palestinian Universities

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ABSTRACT

It is compulsory for Palestinians to master English speaking skills in order to improve in their academic, working and social life. The Palestinian government deems English as an essential and a universally oriented language for travel, health services, academic and businesses. Based on a number of studies carried out on Palestinians level of competency in their speaking skills, issues on speaking skills have remained critical among the Palestinian EFL learners. It was found that there is a lack of proper teaching strategies, lack of inspirational motivation from the part of their instructors, they lack proper writing materials, and they lack proper instructional strategies. The present paper reports on the quantitative findings of a study conducted to examine a number of factors contributing to the mastery of the speaking skills among Palestinian undergraduates in Palestinian universities, especially regarding the English language teaching strategies. Among others; motivation, teaching strategies supporting motivation, and communicative competence were identified as the main factors contributing to their acquisition of speaking skills.

Keywords: *Communicative competence, speaking skills, socio-educational theory, motivation, teaching strategies*

INTRODUCTION

It is compulsory for Palestinians to master English speaking skills in order to improve in their academic, working and social life. The Palestinian government deems English as an essential and a universally oriented language for travel, health services, and business (Qabaja, Nafi, & Abu-Nimah, 2016). Moreover, in the Palestinian context, the current expansion of international trade and electronic communication has led to the focus on the second language (L2) education. In order to achieve this, the Palestinian government has encouraged Palestinian EFL learners to improve their speaking skills to enable them to communicate effectively with other nations (Al-Twairish, 2009).

Based on a number of studies carried out on Palestinians level of competency in their speaking skills, issues on speaking skills have remained critical among the Palestinian EFL learners. Some of the studies carried out were Albalawi (2016), in his study on the Saudi Arabian EFL learners; Ancheta and Perez (2016) researchers on the Philippines ESL

learners; Batiha, Noor, and Mustaffa (2016) conducted a study on the Jordanian EFL learners; while Abdullah (2015) explored the Malaysian ESL learner's communicative skills. Mainly, these studies revealed that there is a problem with communicative Competence especially in the speaking skills, and that the teaching strategies employed in the classroom-based teaching activities for ESL/EFL learners are insufficiently geared towards promoting communicative competence among the learners. Gardner's socio-educational theory (2001, 2004, 2006) strategic framework was adapted to connect with the 'motivation' factor in this study. As a result of the hypothesized effect of language class activities and teachers' communicative style on students' communicative competence, in order to support the motivation, theories of teaching strategies are assessed.

There is a lack of use of proper teaching strategies, lack of inspirational motivation, lack of proper writing materials, and lack of proper instructional strategies (Abdullah, 2015; Ancheta and Perez, 2016; Albalawi, 2016). This

rest on the basis of the findings, which shows defective knowledge in the use of the grammatical accurateness, the lack of appropriate skills for communicative purposes, and the students' incompetence to strategically repair or reconnect their communicative breakdowns. Thus, it is important to carry out a study to identify and highlight the problems faced by the Palestine's students, relating to their communicative skills. This study will answer the following objective and research question;

OBJECTIVES

- To determine the relationship between motivational factors and communicative competencies of Palestinian university students.
- To determine the relationship between teaching strategies and communicative competencies of Palestinian university students.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- What is the relationship between motivational factors and communicative competencies of Palestinian university students?
- What is the relationship between teaching strategies and communicative competencies of Palestinian university students?

The Concept of Speaking Skills and Communicative Competence

Mastering speaking skills is an important aspect for ESL/EFL learners. In most cases, acquisition of speaking skills increases student's proficiency level to become communicatively competent, especially for those that are studying within the EFL contexts (Abdullah, 2016; Saeed, Khaksari, Eng, & Ghani, 2016).Canale (1980) and Alptekin (2002) defined communicative Competence as a fundamental system of skills needed and underlying knowledge for communication. Virtually, communicative Competence is considered as a measure for learning assessment, as a major goal of learning, an educational approach, and a theoretical construct (Byrnes, 2006; Gumperz, 1982). The definition of communicative Competence was developed by Hymes in 1972. He was against the pedagogic grammatical rules tradition and he was also against the audio-lingual method. Depending on the sole frame of Hymes' (1972) theory is another study by Canale and Swain (1980), which illustrates both the linguistic use and the effective use of communicative events. Canale and Swain (1980) established that communicative Competence can be categorized into four parts, which are the grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence and along with their features are vividly presented in Figure 1:
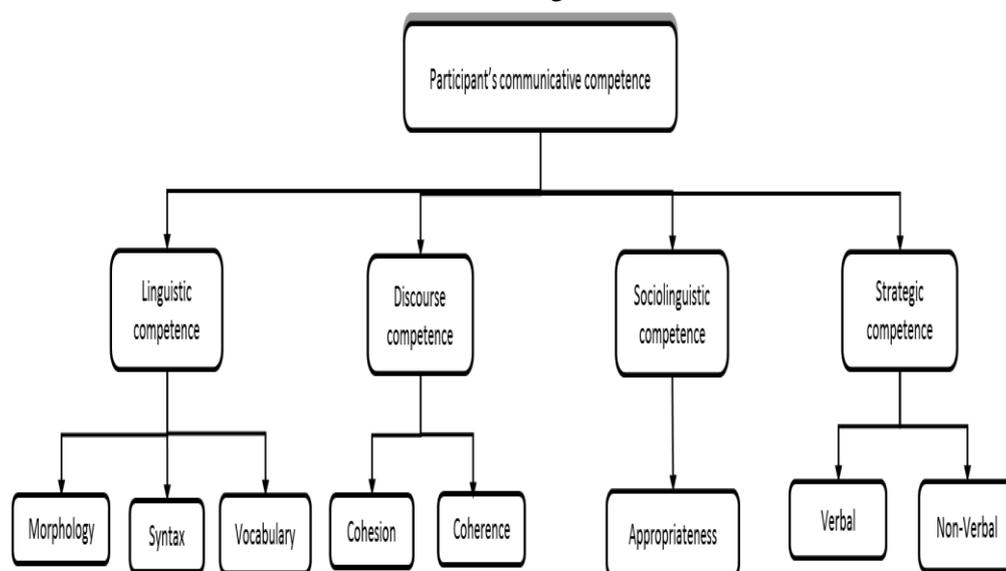

Figure1. *Adapted Communicative Competence elements (Canale& Swain, 1980)*

In essence, Figure 2.1 shows the elements of the communicative competence as explain by Canale and Swain (1980). In this case, Figure 2.1 further explain the notion of linguistic competence, as it stands to be the first aspect of communicative competence, which involves increasing the grammar proficiency. It includes many characteristics including the requirement

for morphological knowledge on lexical items and how they are shaped in terms of their word of the formation. It also comprises the syntactic knowledge, which enables establishment on the way in which items are formed together in sentences. It, however, requires semantics knowledge that guides in formations of appropriate structures in order to impart correct meanings of words and phrases in sentences. It then demands on phonological knowledge on the speech sounds of a language, intonation and stress, and syllable structure (Alptekin, 2002).

On the other hand, the sociolinguistic competenceincludes comprehending the social and cultural perspectives by the target language practitioners (Canale, 1983). Just by being familiar with the languagedoes not necessarily means learners are prepared to use the target language appropriately and effectively. Learners need to also know the norms and rules which the structural of the speech acts and appropriate timing. Knowing the sociolinguistic area of language helps students understand how to respond nonverbally and also what comments are appropriate according to the aim of the conversation (Ma, 2009).

Furthermore, discourse competence is connected with the relationships of inter-sentential knowledge on the rules of cohesion and coherence that support the communication in a dynamic method. Both, the comprehension and production of the language needs the competence to process and perceive stretches of communication, and to build meaningful representations from referents all through previous and subsequent sentences. Consequently, active speakers acquire a wide range of discourse marks and structures to produce ideas, indicate cause, reveal time relationships, and emphasis. Ma (2009) illustrated that with all these marks, learners possibly will achieve turn-taking during conversations. On the end range, strategic Competence' guides learners control the language to come across communicative objectives. In other words, with regard to oral communication, strategic Competence indicates the competence to be familiar with the ongoing conversations, the way to end the conversations, and comprehension problems (Ma, 2009).

Methodology

The present study used a set of questionnaires to identify the differences between grammatical competence, pragmatic competence and sociolinguistic competence under the communicative competencies among Palestine undergraduate students in Palestine.

Since the study was interested to investigate the communicative competence of Palestinian undergraduates, the questionnaire was distributed to a total of 150 undergraduates in three universities in Palestine. The questionnaire was revised according to the feedback received during the interviews, which were conducted to pilot and validate the items in the questionnaire. Some of the items were removed as the interviewees claimed that the items did not contribute to the assessment of their communicative competence. The final revised of the questionnaire has62 items, divided according to the following;

Questionnaire: Measures Students' Self-Reported Communicative Competencies

A five-point Likert scale; where numbers 1 to 5 were assigned to each category of concepts in the questionnaire, namely; strongly disagree = 1, disagree = 2, undecided = 3, agree = 4 and strongly agree = 5), were used in the questionnaire, to measure the constructs within the proposed theoretical framework.

DATA ANALYSIS

A total of 150 Palestinian undergraduates from three universities in Palestine were given the questionnaire. The respondents were aged between 17 to 20 years old with 85 males and 65 females. Since it was difficult to distribute the questionnaire equally among males and females, examining the communicative competence between genders was avoided.

Outlier screening was carried out to determine if there is any occurrences of scores that are substantially different from the rest of the responses (Hair et al., 2006). However, it was found that there were no outliers in the acquired data, thus suggesting no major problems. The zero occurrences of the outliers may be contributed by the significance piloting of the instrument before the actual data collection.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

This section describes the mean scores of all the 62 items tested in the questionnaire of the

dependent variable communicative competencies. The mean values are presented according to the measurement construct of the items. The interpretation of the mean scores was based on the five-point Likert scales, whereby five (5) represented the highest score while one (1) represented the lowest score. The tables below indicate the findings from the **Pearson**

Correlation of the result of the data analysis on the self-reported communicative competencies section of the questionnaire. Pearson Correlation was used to find out the relationship between the variables in this study. The factors investigated consists of three (3) variables, namely; teaching strategies, motivational factors and communicative competence.

Table 5.1. *Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between instrumental motivation and communicative competence*

Variables		GC	SC	DC	SOC	INSM
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.683(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.539(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.481(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.619(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Instrumental motivation	Pearson Correlation	.683(**)	.539(**)	.481(**)	.619(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (Motivational factors) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that instrumental motivation and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.683 sig=.00), instrumental motivation and strategic competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.539 sig=.00), instrumental motivation and discourse

competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.481 sig=.00), whereas instrumental motivation and sociolinguistic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.619 sig=.00). It was concluded that instrumental motivation and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table 5.2. *Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between integrative motivation and communicative competence*

Variables		GC	SC	DC	SOC	INTM
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.882(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.732(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.759(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.659(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Integrative motivation	Pearson Correlation	.882(**)	.732(**)	.759(**)	.659(**)	1

Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000	
N		150	150	150	150	150

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (motivational factors) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that integrative motivation and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.882 sig=.00), integrative motivation and strategic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.732 sig=.00), integrative motivation and discourse competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.759 sig=.00) , whereas integrative motivation and sociolinguistic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.659 sig=.00). It was concluded that integrative motivation and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table5.3.*Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between attitudinal motivation and communicative competence*

Variables		GC	SC	DC	SOC	AM
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.835(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.696(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.697(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.754(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Attitudinal motivation	Pearson Correlation	.835(**)	.696(**)	.697(**)	.754(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (motivational factors) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that attitudinal motivation and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.835 sig=.00), attitudinal motivation and strategic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.696 sig=.00), attitudinal motivation and discourse competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.697 sig=.00), whereas attitudinal motivation and sociolinguistic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.754 sig=.00). It was concluded that attitudinal motivation and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table: 5.4.*Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between communicative style and communicative competence*

Variables		GC	SC	DC	SOC	CS
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.615(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.529(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.599(**)

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.861(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Communicative style	Pearson Correlation	.615(**)	.529(**)	.599(**)	.861(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

***Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (teaching strategies) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that communicative style and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.615 sig=.00), communicative style and strategic competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.529 sig=.00), communicative style and discourse competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.599 sig=.00) whereas, communicative style and sociolinguistic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.861 sig=.00). It was concluded that communicative style and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table5.5. *Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between class activities and communicative competence*

Variables		*GC*	*SC*	*DC*	*SOC*	*CA*
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.479(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.528(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.424(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.505(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Class activities	Pearson Correlation	.479(**)	.528(**)	.424(**)	.505(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

*** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (teaching strategies) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that class activities and grammatical competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.479 sig=.00), class activities and strategic competence have moderate positive relations relationship with (r=.528 sig=.00), class activities and discourse competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.424 sig=.00) whereas, class activities and sociolinguistic competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.505 sig=.00). It was concluded that class activities and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table5.6. Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between feedback and communicative competence

Variables		*GC*	*SC*	*DC*	*SOC*	*FB*
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.683(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.539(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.481(**)

	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.619(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Feedback	Pearson Correlation	.683(**)	.539(**)	.481(**)	.619(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (teaching strategies) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that feedback and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.683 sig=.00), feedback and strategic competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.539 sig=.00), feedback and discourse competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.481 sig=.00) whereas, feedback and sociolinguistic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.619 sig=.00). It was concluded that feedback and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table5.7.*Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between group work and communicative competence*

Variables		GC	SC	DC	SOC	GW
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.557(**)	.535(**)	.564(**)	.615(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Strategic competence	Pearson Correlation	.557(**)	1	.450(**)	.712(**)	.529(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Discourse competence	Pearson Correlation	.535(**)	.450(**)	1	.383(**)	.599(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.712(**)	.383(**)	1	.861(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Group work	Pearson Correlation	.615(**)	.529(**)	.599(**)	.861(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (teaching strategies) and dependent variable (communicative competencies). The statistical result found that group work and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.615 sig=.00), group work and strategic competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.529 sig=.00), group work and discourse competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.599 sig=.00) whereas, group work and sociolinguistic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.861 sig=.00). It was concluded that group work and all the factors of communicative competence have positively associated with each other its means they have significance relationship.

Table5.8.*Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between motivation and communicative competence*

Variables		GC	PC	SC	CC	MF
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.639(**)	.564(**)	.863(**)	.848(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Pragmatic competence	Pearson Correlation	.639(**)	1	.627(**)	.891(**)	.814(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.627(**)	1	.825(**)	.733(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150

Communicative competence	Pearson Correlation	.863(**)	.891(**)	.825(**)	1	.931(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Motivational factors	Pearson Correlation	.848(**)	.814(**)	.733(**)	.931(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

*Level of significance *<.05, **<.02*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (motivational factors) and dependent variable (communicative competence). The statistical result found that motivational factors and grammatical competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.848, sig=.00), motivational factors and pragmatic competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.814, sig=.00), motivational factors and sociological competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.733, sig=.00). It was concluded that motivational factors and communicative competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.931, sig=.00). It was concluded that the group work, the factor of teaching strategies and communicative competence were positively associated between each other and had a significance relationship.

Table5.9. Pearson correlation to find out the relationship between teaching strategies and communicative competence

Variables		*GC*	*PC*	*SC*	*CC*	*TS*
Grammatical competence	Pearson Correlation	1	.639(**)	.564(**)	.863(**)	.577(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Pragmatic competence	Pearson Correlation	.639(**)	1	.627(**)	.891(**)	.595(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Sociolinguistic competence	Pearson Correlation	.564(**)	.627(**)	1	.825(**)	.667(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000	.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Teaching strategies	Pearson Correlation	.863(**)	.891(**)	.825(**)	1	.706(**)
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	150	150	150	150	150
Teaching strategies	Pearson Correlation	.577(**)	.595(**)	.667(**)	.706(**)	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	150	150	150	150	150

*Level of significance *<.05, **<.02*

Pearson correlation was conducted between independent variable (teaching strategies) and dependent variable (communicative competence). The statistical result found that teaching strategies and grammatical competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.577, sig=.00), teaching strategies and pragmatic competence have moderate positive relationship with (r=.595, sig=.00), teaching strategies and sociological competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.667, sig=.00). It was concluded that teaching strategies and communicative competence have strong positive relationship with (r=.706, sig=.00). It was concluded that teaching strategies and communicative competence were positively associated between each other and had a significance relationship.

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