

Examining the Implementation of Situational Language Teaching (SLT) in the EFL classroom: A semi-systematic literature review

Examinar la implementación de la enseñanza de lenguas situacionales (SLT) en el aula de inglés como lengua extranjera: una revisión bibliográfica semisistemática

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ABSTRACT

Situational Language Teaching (SLT) is well-known for its practical applications in second language teaching and learning, as it emphasizes the use of real-life situations and contexts. SLT has significantly influenced learners' language skills since its inception. The need to analyze the implementation of SLT in the EFL classroom, arises with the need to examine the pedagogical methods and techniques used by teachers in SLT to foster English language skills, as well as students' motivation to learn. This semi-systematic review examined four databases to provide an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of SLT and current studies with different methodologies, participants, and the efficacy of SLT in the development of EFL learners' language skills, motivation and learning styles. The review provides an updated overview on SLT and its influence on the development of language skills of EFL learners.

Keywords: Situational language teaching approach; EFL learners; motivation.

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RESUMEN

La Enseñanza Situacional de Lenguas (SIT) es bien conocida por sus aplicaciones prácticas en la enseñanza y el aprendizaje de segundas lenguas, ya que hace hincapié en el uso de situaciones y contextos de la vida real. La SLT ha influido significativamente en las destrezas lingüísticas de los estudiantes desde sus inicios. La necesidad de analizar la implementación de SLT en el aula de EFL, surge con la necesidad de examinar los métodos y técnicas pedagógicas utilizadas por los profesores en SLT para fomentar las habilidades lingüísticas en inglés, así como la motivación de los estudiantes para aprender. Esta revisión semisistemática examinó cuatro bases de datos para proporcionar una visión general de los fundamentos teóricos del SLT y de los estudios actuales con diferentes metodologías, participantes y la eficacia del SLT en el desarrollo de las destrezas lingüísticas, la motivación y los estilos de aprendizaje de los estudiantes de EFL. La revisión ofrece una visión general actualizada sobre el SLT y su influencia en el desarrollo de las destrezas lingüísticas de los estudiantes de EFL.

Palabras clave: Enfoque situacional de la enseñanza de idiomas; estudiantes de EFL; motivación.

Introduction

SLT originally emerged as a response to the limitations that grammar-translation and audio-lingual methods presented language acquisition. While considered outdated by some authors, the core features of SLT related to the communicative language teaching are what maintain its relevance in contemporary language teaching practices (Smith & Loewen, 2018).

The task of creating real-life situations offers benefits not only for learners but also for teachers and course facilitators, as it is their responsibility to devise circumstances that closely resemble authentic language interactions. The features of SLT include verbal and cognitive exercises, problem-solving, message content, and utterances in the form of monologues or dialogues (Akhmetgareyeva & Diliara Gainanova, 2020). SLT can also easily be merged with technological practices such as augmented reality or game-based learning. There is a considerable advantage to game learning which lies in the genuineness of learning tools and the situational quality of an education setting (Xiao & He, 2023). Within game-based learning, game technology proves to be useful in supplying students with authentic communication situations that mimic authentic social activities complete with actual scene-oriented language, discourse, and exchange (Kong et al., 2022).

Motivation bases and predictors may vary according to the age and type of learner, but it is worth noting that enjoyment, relevance, and relatedness are common among learners when they experience SLT in the classroom. Inostroza et al. (2024), mention that learners find enjoyment when faced with real-life situations, and the incorporation of multimedia materials enhances participants' engagement, leading to high achievement in the established activities.

To mitigate negative learning factors such as boredom or language anxiety, it has been recommended that learners be presented with methods and activities that encourage their inclination to participate actively or persevere in such actions (Kruk, 2019). Regarding teaching methods there has been considerable debate as to which is the most effective. The straightforward answer to this debate is none, or perhaps all, each within its original conception time frame. As suggested

by some authors, there must be a contextual evaluation or needs analysis to determine whether a method deemed favorable in a context may not be as effective in another. Moreover, being new or avant-garde does not guarantee immediate success. Therefore, the stance of EFL and ESL teacher's stance should not be biased; instead, they should focus on identifying the advantages that different methods and techniques offer (Armut, 2020; Hao, 2017; Tunaz, 2023).

The present study aims to explore the implementation of SLT in the EFL classroom by analyzing the pedagogical approaches and practices aligned with SLT used by teachers and instructors to foster English language skills, and how SLT influences students' motivation.

To this purpose, the following research questions were posed:

1. What are the pedagogical approaches and practices used by teachers in SLT to foster English language skills?
2. How situational language teaching methods, influence students' motivation?

Historical background of SLT

The origins of SLT can be traced to the first half of the twentieth century, when Palmer (1921), Hornby (1950), and other British applied linguists created a methodology that included methodical selection, grading, and presenting principles, thus shedding light on the Oral Approach, Structural-Situational Approach and Situational Language Teaching (SLT).

Palmer (1921), promoted teaching language in a manner that fulfilled students' immediate communication needs and practical purposes. His approach allowed students to gain language abilities they could promptly apply to their everyday lives by presenting language in contexts where it was likely to be used. Palmer emphasized how crucial it is to keep students interested in language acquisition and to engage them. He believed that by making language training engaging and relevant for students, motivation would increase, and language acquisition would be facilitated. It also underscores the significance of engaging learners and maintaining their interest in language learning, in other words, enhancing motivation and facilitating language acquisition.

SLT emphasizes the interplay of language structure, context, and usage scenarios within oral practice activities (Richards & Rodgers, 2001), Hornby (1950), stressed the "necessity of enabling the learner of a foreign language to form links between new words and constructions and real situations" (p. 98). Though it is not always feasible within the "artificial conditions" offered in classrooms, Hornby stated that teachers could conceive and successfully implement real situations. As a result, SLT was first applied in the 1960s in a series of experimental language courses known as the "English by Radio and Television" project. This project, initiated by the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC), aimed to teach English to adult learners in various countries. The courses

were designed to be interactive and contextually based, with a focus on developing oral proficiency. Learners were exposed to authentic language situations through radio and television broadcasts, and they were encouraged to actively participate by responding to prompts and engaging in conversations (The British Council, 1979).

In addition to the effect that SLT had in UK-based ELT, it also influenced the development of subsequent methodologies such as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), which further emphasized the importance of meaningful communication and authentic language use in language learning (Smith & Bowers, 2012).

Theoretical framework

To understand the growing interest showed to SLT in its beginnings, it is crucial to reexamine the theories that lead to it in the 1950s. Structuralist theory established by Swiss linguist Saussure (1959), contained the seminal conception that “language is a system of signs that express ideas” (p. 16). Based on this idea, British linguists devised instructional representations of the fundamental English grammatical structures, which in turn were to be connected to situations. These specialists created influential notions of language that highlighted meaning, context and situation, an example of structural situations is presented by Halliday et al. (1964), “The emphasis now is on the description of language activity as part of the whole complex of events which, together with the participants and relevant objects, make up actual situations” (p. 39).

Analyzing SLT’s theory of learning leads to Behaviorism. According to Widiarini (2022), it is “the method of psychological investigation based on the objective study of behavior,” and it is believed that through the use of behaviors learners can acquire a target language that is nearly identical to their original tongue. Some of the features of Behaviorism applied in SLT are learning a language through memory and repetition, and the utilization of correct speech habits, these could be witnessed in the use of techniques such as: guided, chorus and individual repetition, substitution and question-answer drills. These practices focused more on the procedures than the environments for language learning (Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

Conceptual framework

Examining the implementation of SLT is crucial in the context of reviewing second language acquisition methods. It must be understood that the objective of acquiring a second language cannot be compared to learning any other subject like mathematics or history. As expressed by Gardner (1985), “students are not asked simply to learn about the language; they are required to learn the language, to take it in, as it were, and make it part of their behavioral repertoire” (p. 6). This perspective can be seen as a culturally bound or, as Gardner (2001), referred to it, an integrative

situation which “reflects a genuine interest in learning the second language in order to come closer psychologically to the other language community” (p. 7). It is then that SLT can be impartially employed to develop students’ communicative ability and fluency. The main intention of SLT is to allow learners to communicate in the target language. From its origins, the core distinctive feature has been the emphasis on real-life situations.

SLT instruction

Li (2024), examines the advantages, limitations and applications of SLT in the context of English classrooms. Among the advantages, the research mentions that this method aids in improving learners’ intercultural communicative abilities and enables them to adopt correct values and viewpoints on life by fabricating real-life situations. SLT employs a lifelike methodology that allows learners to develop their visual, auditory and sensory senses, as well as refine their aesthetic skills, SLT also aligns with the New Curriculum Standards in the People’s Republic of China by incorporating knowledge into situations and fostering students’ English pivotal skills. While the article highlights some limitations to the use of SLT, it also suggests strategies to counteract these limitations. These strategies involve individualizing abstract concepts into vivid images using multimedia to provide real-life scenes, which in turn connect with learners’ daily lives and experiences to strengthen engagement and understanding.

According to Red’ko et al. (2023), SLT provides opportunities to use communication activities necessary in relevant social environments by carefully crafting the scenario and choosing the right language tools. The authors argue that situational foreign language training can be used to didactically meet the learning objectives of the competency-based framework. They used SLT as a crucial component of the learning process, and the data from their quasi-experimental design showed that after applying situational language instruction’s content over the course of three lessons using pre-situational and situational exercises and tasks. Throughout the study, the teachers’ lesson plans on communication topics were used by the students to complete educational activities. To enable the teachers to carry out the experiment on their own, they were given didactic materials that included language-skills exercises and complexes of pre-planned communicative scenarios. The participants, 137 high school students and 91 teachers, found the suggested situational education to be effective and positive. Through the use of competency-based learning frameworks, students’ learning was approximated to real-world situations.

Some authors have noted that SLT is no longer a widely used approach to language teaching, and factors such as the use of repetition-drills or the low tolerance of mistakes, have negative results in the learning process, as well as the need for fulfilling the emerging communicative goals of language instruction not being achieved (Smith & Loewen, 2018) (Smith & Bowers, 2012) (Alkhirbash, 2023). However, the real-life key features of SLT, and its inductive approach to teaching grammar and vocabulary by emphasizing the use of the target language are worth combining with contemporary approaches and technological tools.

Methodology

Data sources

For the present literature review, multidisciplinary and open access platforms were selected. Google Scholar mainly for its public accessibility and reputation. Because of the researcher's membership, Research Gate, and ProQuest databases were also used. Finally, Research4life database for education resources was chosen because it is discipline-specific, in this particular case education.

Keywords used for the search

The initial objective was to use the following keywords: "Situational Language Teaching" or "Situational" as the basic terminology, followed by "EFL" "motivation" or "students' motivation". After considerable research and analysis, it was decided that the terms EFL and motivation should be left out due to the broad list of results, many of which were unrelated to the main topic (See Table 1 and 2).

In total, 28 articles were selected for the review.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Criteria	Inclusion	Exclusion
Focus of the article	Situational English Language Teaching/Learning	Articles that do not cover Situational Language Teaching/Learning Articles that address only situational teaching/instruction Articles that address motivation
Publication date	2019–2024	Articles published before 2019
Publication type	Scholarly, peer-reviewed journal articles	Conference papers, theses, book chapters, technical reports or discussion papers that do not include a discussion of the procedures of the study
Language	English	Other languages will not be included

Source: Own.

Table 2. Selection of articles/journals.

Platform	Results after filters	Selected articles
Research4life		
Keywords: “situational language teaching”		
Filters: Full text online, scholarly & peer reviewed, journal article, 5 years, English, education, languages & literatures, computer science, medicine, engineering, psychology, social sciences.	142	8
Research Gate		
Keyword: “situational”	1099	13
Filters: articles, 5 years, only full-texts		
Google scholar		
Keywords: “situational language teaching” and “EFL”	150	5
Filters: 5 years		
ProQuest		
Keywords: “situational language teaching”	26	2
Filters: 5 years, scholarly journals		
Total	1417	28

Source: Own.

Research themes

Situational Language Approach in teaching a second language

Description: The situational language teaching approach is a type of instruction wherein the teacher intentionally constructs images in the students’ minds, conveys specific emotional attitudes, provides them with vivid real-life experiences, and helps them enrich their backgrounds while acquiring knowledge, thereby ensuring cognitive growth (Li, 2024).

Motivation in EFL teaching

Description: Motivation in EFL teaching involves the intrinsic component by following a significant job related to the discipline of teaching a language; autonomously doing so, while belonging to a lively educational association where self-efficacy, educational goals and performance feedback all play a role in determining effort and determination (Dörnyei, 2011).

Review protocol and data analysis

The results of the review were presented through a narrative and descriptive analysis, which are appropriate for a semi-systematic literature review. Unlike employing effect size measurements to synthesize research traditions, this review identifies and comprehends all potentially relevant research traditions that have implications for the topic under study (Snyder, 2019).

Development

Geographical location of publications

Related to geographic location, the present article found that the majority of research in SLT practices is being developed in Asian countries, more specifically the People's Republic of China which is ruled under a socialist government. According to Pei (2017), China's "higher education system, the government is located in center position and plays a leading role," which results in restrictive and authoritarian educational administrative systems where teachers are rewarded only when they display excellent performance in teaching. This is evaluated by students' performance in standardized tests and examinations; lower level student results lead to teachers' external accountability which tends to disqualify and exclude them (Li & Tsang, 2023).

Table 3. Articles by geographic location.

Country	Number of articles
Azerbaijan	1
China	17
India	1
Indonesia	7
Russia	1
Ukraine	1
Total	28

Source: Own.

The articles covered during this review focused on the use of SLT as a method to enhance the four skills of English as a foreign language. It is worth mentioning that several articles included the use technology in the form of multimedia material including videos, pictures, virtual and augmented reality, 3D animations, etc., which have proven to be effective in earning learners' motivation in the form of engagement, providing visual and auditory support that cater to different learning styles. Due to its functional and interactional perspective, Competency-based language teaching was also considered as a complement to SLT, due to its orientation toward goals and learners' immediate needs through teaching in particular situations. It was found that many authors integrate SLT with the Task-based language teaching approach, which presents tasks that require real communication so learners can achieve real life performance during communicative interactions (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). A list of these practices can be seen in Table 3.

Table 4. Pedagogical methods and practices.

Method and practice	Author/Year
Real-life scenarios	28
Use of visual / audiovisual multimedia	20
Role-play / dialogues	9
Cooperative learning	7
Culture / intercultural integration	2

Source: Own.

Certain articles discussed pedagogical methods and practices in studies that did not involve the use of technology or multimedia tools or did not mention the use of it. The basis of these studies are also real-life situations contexts, and communication and to balance the lack of multimedia, other practices to meet students' needs and the projects' aims and objectives.

In the articles reviewed, it was possible to observe the influence of behaviorist approaches in many studies, particularly in Indonesia and China. One study at the Universitas Muslim focused on the development of basic English grammar teaching materials through two different language teaching approaches: the oral approach and the teacher center learning. The study employed materials that presented language in real-life contexts or situations in the form of dialogues, scenarios and activities that contextualized grammar learning, as well as refresher questions, completion of sentences, spoken language exercises and vocabulary drills (Yunus & Abdollah, 2020). Another study conducted with the goal of fostering speaking skills among eight grade students through SLT used various techniques ranging from repetition drills, memorization of words, dialogue practice, storytelling to role-playing to enhance participants' communicative abilities (Hafiz, 2023).

Nurbaiti et al. (2023), aimed to identify the most efficient method for teaching English at senior high schools in Indonesia. The participants reported using SLT using textbooks, worksheets, and authentic materials to encourage students' motivation and facilitate learning objectives.

Ulung (2021), explored the effectiveness of SLT in helping first year junior high students of SMP Negeri 33 Makassar to learn and master prepositions, the procedures used during the study were: visual aids consisting of wall charts, flashcards, pictures, stick figures, etc., a graded grammatically syllabus, the use of a guide textbook, controlled and freer oral practice.

Applications within a competency-based learning framework

Red'ko et al. (2023), studied the Ukrainian experience using SLT in competency-based learning framework. Participants used dialogue communication, monologue statement with demonstrations, group discussions as a part of collective tasks, project activity and verbal presentation of the outcomes, didactic games which stimulate real communication and written correspondence.

In a study conducted by Sun (2020), about the employment-oriented college English teaching reform in medical colleges, English language is seen as an instrumental discipline that judges its practitioners as medical talent qualified or not. It proposed to use an employment-oriented teaching practicum using SLT, designing authentic and concrete situations and problems. Learners were encouraged to participate in vocational training, lectures and meetings.

Akhmetgareyeva & Gainanova (2020), conducted a study in which participants were monitored in the interactions with language skills through the use of significant language skills in SLT, verbal and cognitive assignments, problems and message content, the authors developed different language interaction close to as real as in various professional situations through the use of dialogues and monologues.

To investigate how situational language teaching method, influence learners' motivation, research articles that addressed directly towards this topic, as well as articles whose objectives or results directed to motivation features were also selected (See table 5).

Table 5. Strategies for fostering motivation.

Strategies	Authors	Findings
Positive reinforcement and encouragement	Masna, Y., Dahliana, S., & Martaputri, N. A. 2020.	Encourage confidence in learning English
AR / VR assisted English teaching programs	Chang, Y., Chen, C., & Liao, C. 2020.	Increase in willingness to learn independently
Use of metaverse	Zhang, Dejia. 2022	Satisfaction and engagement
Use of multimedia and network resources	Guo, H., & Gao, W. 2022	Stimulate learners' interest, curiosity and cognitive involvement
	Wang, Y. 2022	Boost learners' enthusiasm and creativity
	Nurbaiti, N., Yunita, W., Syahril, S., & Gusman, E. 2023	
Creation of real-life situations and contexts	Mamedova, Rena. 2023	
	Gao, Lijuan. 2019	Learners are interested, engaged and motivated in different language skills
Provide practical, relevant and authentic learning experiences	Huang, Jingwen. 2023	Bring language closer to real-life
	Jing, Cui. 2023	
	Ulung, B. P. 2021	

Alignment of instructional activities with learners' educational experience	Red'ko, V., Sorokina, N., Smovzhenko, L., Onats, O., & Chyzhevski, B. 2023	Learners' engagement
Usefulness of English as a tool for job-hunting	Sun, Y. 2020	Motivation for learning English
Integrating language learning with content	Akhmetgareyeva, R., & Gainanova, D. 2020	Real communication enables learners to demonstrate intrinsic and extrinsic motivation
Incorporation of games	Tari, Nirmala & Safitri, Ni. 2023	Provide elements of enjoyment, competition and challenge
		Increase learners' self-assurance and lower their anxiety
Autonomous learning	Mei, Qiong. 2021	Stimulate students' enthusiasm and creativity in language learning
Emotional contexts and scenes	Huang, X., & Liu, Y. 2024	Stimulate learners' interest, enthusiasm and curiosity
Incorporation of interactive and technology-enhanced approaches	Tan, Z., & Zeng, L. 2020	Help to cultivate students' interest

Source: Own.

Conclusion

The review exhibited SLT in the light of the advantages of its usage and implementation in English as a foreign language classroom. SLT is part of the major trends in twentieth-century language teaching, which means there is an assorted variety of new and finer approaches. It is of great relevance to acknowledge the importance of the origins of current methods; since teaching contexts are never the same, it is not plausible to claim “old approaches” are worthless.

Even though the geographical location of SLT application was not one of the main features to consider within the study, it is worth mentioning that after analyzing all the articles, there was a high range of occurrence in Asian countries the majority of them being located in China.

In answer to the first research question which focused on identifying the pedagogical approaches and practices used by teachers in SLT to foster English language skills, the review found that all the authors considered in this article, turn to the utilization or creation of real-life scenarios, sometimes merged with visual and audiovisual multimedia, or applied to role-play, dialogues, cooperative learning and culture integration within the classrooms.

As found in several of the research studies, educational institutions, and their protagonists, depend on unique circumstances, and it is their duty to seek, assess and put into action the methods that best suit their conditions and needs. Factors like its low error tolerance, the deductive manner to present vocabulary and grammar and the time that consumes teachers to come up with the necessary teaching situations that resemble real-life, are indeed shortcomings derived from this method, but teachers and researchers have made the necessary modifications to improve the use of SLT during English lessons (Smith & Loewen, 2018).

Among the more prevalent methods and approaches used in SLT according to the review are the creation of real-life scenarios to create authentic situations which could be controlled by the teacher according to the course requirements; and the use of audio visual or multimedia in classrooms which could bridge the gap to a real-world experience that learners within the EFL classroom cannot go through.

In answer to the second research question on how SLT influences students' motivation, the review found studies that counterbalanced the drawbacks of SLT by examining the use of available technological tools as a path to increase learner motivation. From the perspective of the value of a pedagogic task to anticipate active choice, effort and persistence, it is important to highlight that students reap the benefit of instruction when the assignment is beneficial to their intrinsic goals, identities or interests (Miller, 2021). It would be recommended to carry out action research with the aid of artificial intelligence and propose this to learners who want to acquire English language as a career-focused field of study, which could provide them with authentic situations that make learning a more interactive process.

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