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Linguistic Competence Analysis and the Development of Speaking Instructional Material

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***Abstract*—**Linguistic oral competence plays a vital role in attaining effective communication. Since the English language is considered as universally used language and has a high demand skill needed in the work-place, mastery is the expected output from learners. To achieve this, learners should be given integrated differentiated tasks which help them develop and strengthen the expected skills. This study aimed to develop speaking instructional supplementary material to enhance the English linguistic competence of Grade 9 students in areas of pronunciation, intonation and stress, voice projection, diction and fluency. A descriptive analysis was utilized to analyze the speaking level of performance of the students in order to employ appropriate strategies. There were two sets of respondents: 178 Grade 9 students selected through a stratified sampling and chosen at random. The other set comprised English teachers who evaluated the usefulness of the devised teaching materials. A teacher conducted a speaking test and activities were employed to analyze the speaking needs of students. Observation and recordings were also used to evaluate the students' performance. The findings revealed that the English pronunciation of the students was slightly unclear at times, but generally fair. There were lapses but generally they rated moderate in intonation and stress, because of other language interference. In terms of voice projection, students have erratic high volume pitch. For diction, the students' ability to produce comprehensible language is limited, and as to fluency, the choice of vocabulary and use of structure were severely limited. Based on the students' speaking needs analyses, the supplementary material devised was based on Nunan's IM model, incorporating context of daily life and global work settings, considering the principle that language is best learned in the actual meaningful situation. To widen the mastery of skill, a rich learning environment, filled with a variety instructional material tends to foster faster acquisition of the requisite skills for sustained learning and development. The role of IM is to encourage information to stick in the learners' mind, as what is seen is understood more than what is heard. Teachers say they found the IM "very useful." This implied that English teachers could adopt the materials to improve the speaking skills of students. Further, teachers should provide varied opportunities for students to get involved in real life situations where they could take turns in asking and answering questions and share information related to the activities. This would minimize anxiety among students in the use of the English language.

***Keywords*—**Fluency, intonation, instructional materials, linguistic competence, pronunciation

I. Introduction

THE Philippine Educational System has implemented the K-12 curriculum in order to be at par if not to surpass our neighboring countries in the area of education. The English language plays a vital role in various spheres of life including academia, the business world, social media and the like, K-12 aims to develop the communication skills of students in order to be locally and globally competitive after senior high school.

Developing the oral communication skills of the student plays a crucial role in helping them to succeed in their personal and academic life. Most classroom instructions and activities are delivered orally, thus, if a student has an inability to listen well and communicate their thoughts effectively, most likely their progress would be very slow. On the other hand, if a student has listening and speaking skills, most likely they could absorb and take advantage of all learning opportunities inside and outside the classroom. With these skills he could easily share his ideas or thoughts, make clarification and take active part in a group discussion. These are the demands of 21st century learners.

As stated in the K-12 curriculum guide, Language Arts and Multiliteracies Curriculum (LAMC) is composed of five (5) intricately intertwined and integrated sub-strands (listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing) that serve as building blocks for understanding and creation of meaning and for effective communication across curricula. Each skill is equally important, as each is highly interconnected. It is therefore logical that the teaching strategies of the macro skills will be designed to boost both teaching and learning of the English language [9].

This study is focused on the development of speaking skills. This is one of the most important macro skills that involves multi-sensory activity because it requires paralinguistic features such as eye-contact, facial expressions, body language, tempo, pauses, voice quality changes, and pitch variation, which affect conversational flow in most of its enabling activities [1]. This skill is necessary for effective communication in any language according to most research, particularly when speakers in a language that is not their mother tongue. As English is universally used as a means of communication, especially on the Internet, English speaking skills should be developed along with other skills so that these integrated skills will enhance communication competence.

II. Methodology

The descriptive survey was used in determining the speaking skills level of performance of the learners in order to employ appropriate objectives and strategies to enhance their speaking or oral skills.

Two sets of respondents were involved in the study. The first set consisted of Grade 9 students enrolled at Ramon Magsaysay Technological University during the school year 2015-2016. The second set consisted of 10 English teachers

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who evaluated the usefulness of the devised instructional materials. Stratified random sampling was used to determine the number of respondents.

A constructed speaking test was used to determine the speaking skills of the students. The test is composed of two tasks and takes approximately five minutes to complete. The task difficulty increases as the test taker progresses through the test.

A checklist adopted from Nunan [2] and Kinsella [3], with some modifications, was used to evaluate the usefulness of the devised instructional materials.

III. Results and Discussion

A. Level of Speaking Proficiency as to Pronunciation Intonation and Stress, Voice Projection, Diction and Fluency

It can be gleaned from Table I, the speaking proficiency of respondents.

TABLE I
SPEAKING PROFICIENCY OF THE RESPONDENTS

Speaking Proficiency	5	4	3	2	1	AWM
Pronunciation	2 (10)	78 (312)	80 (240)	15 (30)	3 (3)	3.34
Intonation & Stress	3 (15)	36 (144)	90 (270)	48 (96)	1 (1)	2.96
Voice Projection	3 (15)	70 (280)	74 (222)	27 (54)	4 (4)	3.23
Diction	0 (0)	12 (48)	37 (111)	86 (172)	43 (43)	2.10
Fluency	1 (5)	10 (40)	42 (126)	87 (174)	38 (38)	2.15
Overall Weighted Mean						2.76

Diction obtained the lowest computed overall weighted mean of 2.10 interpreted as the response may be connected to the picture, but the speaker's ability to produce comprehensible language is limited. Respondents were asked to describe a scene in a market where customers are talking to sellers, answer questions using adverbs of frequency like "how often", describe their favorite TV program and give information related to the data given. However, most of the responses were sentence fragments and they took a long time to think of the words needed to describe the pictures and respond to the questions. They also made errors in using prepositions like in, at and on. Besides, the students' limited responses show that they are groping for words to express their thoughts and ideas.

The findings of the study as to fluency revealed that the computed overall weighted mean was 2.15, interpreted as the choice of vocabulary and use of structures is severely limited. Again, many respondents gave choppy or sentence fragments and it was noticed that they had difficulty in constructing full and correct sentences. It was also noted that many of them do not know the functions of verb "to be", like is and are. This linguistic incompetence makes it difficult for the students to construct correct and coherent sentences. This indicates that they lack skills in fluency, wherein they are expected to express coherent sentences spontaneously. This limited competence also implies that students need to be given adequate exposure and opportunities to develop their fluency.

As to intonation and stress, this study revealed that the computed overall weighted mean was 2.96 interpreted as the use of emphases, pauses, and rising and falling pitch is generally appropriate to the text, though the responses include some lapses and/or moderate other language influence. Some respondents failed to use rising intonation, especially in asking question. They also lack stress in reading important words within a sentence.

The findings of the study as to voice projection shows that the computed overall weighted mean was 3.34 and interpreted as erratic volume of voice. Some respondents had a soft voice in reading which made them difficult to understand. The researchers pointed out that erratic volume of voice could sometimes signify a respondents' lack of confidence in speaking and reading the language. However, this could still be improved by frequent exposure to using the language.

Table I also shows that as to pronunciation, the computed overall weighted mean was 3.34 interpreted as the students were slightly unclear with pronunciation at times, but generally are fair. Respondents were asked to read a passage observing the correct production of vowel and consonant sounds. Though the result was fair, some mispronounced words are those with /a/, /e/ and /I/ sounds, like in the word 'instance'. As to the consonant sounds some respondents pronounced the sound f as p, such as in the words 'forget' and 'first'.

B. Level of Academic Performance of the Respondents in English Subject

Table II shows the 1st Grading and 2nd Grading academic performance in the English subject of the respondents for school year 2015-2016.

The computed weighted mean average of academic performance of the respondents in English subject is 80.52 (First Grading) and 81.10 (Second Grading) interpreted as Approaching Proficiency (AP), respectively.

TABLE II
ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE OF THE RESPONDENTS IN ENGLISH SUBJECT

Description	Numerical Value	First Grading %	Second Grading %
Advanced (A)	90 & above	10.11	9.55
Proficient (P)	85 – 89	16.85	24.16
Approaching Proficiency (AP)	80 – 84	25.28	23.03
Developing (D)	75 – 79	26.97	28.65
Beginning (B)	74 & below	20.79	14.61
Total		100.00	100.00
Mean Grade		80.52- AP	81.10-AP

* Based on DepEd Grading System

As an essential tool for language teaching and learning, speaking can "facilitate language acquisition and development" [4] and it can be beneficial to learners' academic achievement, as well as professional success [5]. As an important aspect of language skills, English speaking should not be devalued but be "developed in its own right"

[6]. Therefore, good speaking competence is essential to English learners.

C. Significant Relationship on the Level of Speaking Proficiency and Academic Performance

Table III shows the summary of significant relationship between the respondents' level of speaking proficiency as to pronunciation, intonation and stress, voice projection, diction and fluency and the academic performance of Grade 9 students enrolled in the school year 2015-2016.

TABLE III
SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RESPONDENTS' LEVEL OF SPEAKING PROFICIENCY AND ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Source of Correlation		Academic Performance	Decision
Pronunciation	Pearson Correlation	0.462**	Reject Ho Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	178	
Intonation and Stress	Pearson Correlation	0.513**	Reject Ho Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	178	
Voice Projection	Pearson Correlation	0.424**	Reject Ho Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	178	
Diction	Pearson Correlation	0.530**	Reject Ho Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	178	
Fluency	Pearson Correlation	0.525**	Reject Ho Significant
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	178	

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

The data provide sufficient evidence to conclude that respondents' level of speaking proficiency as to pronunciation and academic performance are highly correlated. This finding shows that when respondents have a high speaking proficiency, particularly with pronunciation, academic performance is high as well.

D. Instructional Materials Devised to Enhance the Students' Speaking Proficiency Level

The materials were developed based on Nunan [7] and Willis' [8] task-based models with some modifications to suit local situation.

The instructional materials are composed of the learning task, expected outcome, language focus and activities. This was devised based on the speaking needs of respondents: 1. How to reply and ask questions using the correct verb 'to be', possessive pronouns and appropriate intonation; 2. Use correct subject-verb agreement, use appropriate words, construct 'wh' questions, use the correct article 'a' and 'an', use correct prepositions of time, and adverbs of times; 3. Use the expressions how much is/are, use commonly used expression in buying items and express preferences; 4. Reply on the questions introduced by how often, construct questions answerable by yes or no; 5. Describe their family, ask and answer questions; 6. Correct use of adverbs of frequency 7. Describe their neighborhood, construct questions introduced by 'Is there a…?', 'Are there any…?' and 'There are…', some and any; 8. Describe physical appearance 9. Give advice using the expressions, 'It's important…', 'It's helpful…', 'It's a good idea…', and 10. Agreeing and disagreeing using 'so', 'too', 'neither' and 'either'.

E. Evaluation of English Teachers on the Usefulness of the Instructional Materials

The second set of respondents comprising 10 English teachers evaluated the usefulness of instructional materials with 10 indicators, as shown in Table IV.

Table IV shows the perception of the English teachers on the usefulness of the instructional materials. It has an overall weighted mean of 4.75, interpreted as very useful.

TABLE IV
USEFULNESS OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS

	Indicators	AWM	DR
1	The speaking task provides opportunities for the students to get acquainted with others. It also contained activities that will enhance mastery on the correct use of the verbs to be: am, is, are, and possessive pronouns.	4.70	VU
2	The speaking tasks contained activities that are useful to improve diction and master student's skill in subject – verb agreement, correct use of articles a and an, and correct use of prepositions.	4.70	VU
3	The speaking tasks are useful for the students to develop their skill in answering and asking questions when choosing items. The activities also allowed them to express their preference correctly.	4.80	VU
4	The speaking tasks provide opportunities to enhance student's skills in asking and answering questions. It is also useful in developing correct intonation in asking and answering questions.	4.90	VU
5	The speaking tasks provided opportunities for the students to develop their diction and fluency in discussing about families.	4.70	VU
6	The speaking tasks are useful for the students to improve their diction and fluency in discussing about their daily activities.	4.80	VU
7	The speaking tasks are useful to improve their fluency by engaging in a role play that emphasizes the use of the expression there is and there are.	4.80	VU
8	The speaking tasks are useful to enhance the diction of the students in describing peoples' appearance.	4.60	VU
9	The speaking tasks are useful for the students to develop their fluency in talking about health. It also contained activities that will improve their skills in asking and giving advice or suggestions.	4.90	VU
10	The speaking tasks are useful for the students to develop their diction and fluency in talking about food. The activities are also useful in improving their correct usage of so, too, neither and either.	4.60	VU
	Overall Weighted Mean	4.75	VU

This implies that English teachers could adopt the materials to improve the speaking proficiency of the students. This further indicates that students with the same speaking needs should be given more meaningful activities in order to enhance their speaking skills.

IV. Conclusions

Based on the summary of investigations conducted, the researcher has concluded that the speaking competence level of Grade 9 as to pronunciation is fair, intonation and stress is appropriate to the text, but with some lapses, erratic voice and volume, diction and fluency are severely limited.

The level of academic performance of the respondents in the English subject in the two grading periods are 80.52 (First Grading) and 81.10 (Second Grading), and was described as Approaching Proficiency (AP).

The students' level of speaking proficiency as to pronunciation, intonation and stress, voice, diction and fluency and the academic performance highly related. If the level of speaking proficiency is high; therefore, academic performance is high as well.

Task-based speaking materials are efficient tools in improving the students' speaking skills. The evaluation of the instructional materials on usefulness is a significant tool to match the knowledge of the lesson content of the K-12 module with the real world target task using the English language.

V. Recommendations

At the onset of the school year, students' speaking competence shall have been identified in order to align the instructional materials based on the students' need.

It is good to encourage students to speak the language during their English classes by giving various learning opportunities; likewise, teachers shall strictly observe behaviorism and CALP language practices in the classroom, in order to enhance students' language proficiency.

Linguistics and pragmatics need to develop and acquire competence, which they can do through exposure and use in authentic experiences. Without sufficient exposure of learners to notice and monitor the language input, as well as opportunities to use the language, communicative competence is not likely to be promoted.

In the preparation of instructional materials, the teacher shall include authentic experiences of students and materials found in their environment in relation to their K-12 module and performance standard.

A remediation class is encouraged to enhance the speaking proficiency of the students. School-based activities shall include competitions like speech choir, jazz chants, declamation, and readers' theater and oration, as avenues to enhance the speaking proficiency among students.

Further research could be conducted in other areas of English language proficiency which are not included in this study, such as effectiveness of the instructional materials.

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