



Assessment of the oral English proficiency level of the grade 9 students of San Francisco national high school, anao-aon, surigao del norte

Jay Mark Vasquez Fulgarinas

San Francisco (Anao-Aon), Surigao Del Norte, Punta Bilang-Bilang, Surigao City, Philippines

Abstract

The study attempts to establish a baseline quantitative data on the Grade 9 students' level of oral English. To achieve the purpose, 91 Grade 9 students were selected from a whole population pool of 118 based on the result of the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) and the researcher-made questionnaire in terms of Philippine curriculum competencies, namely: linguistic and discourse. It was found out that the students are less proficient and less competent in oral communication. Pearson-Product Moment Correlation was used to determine the relationship between the TOEIC level of proficiency and level of competence based on the Philippine curriculum. The result indicated that there was a significant relationship between the oral proficiency of the students in terms of the TOEIC evaluation criteria and the level of competence based on the competencies of the Philippine curriculum.

Keywords: oral proficiency, english language, linguistic competence, discourse competence, communication, oral competency, language

Introduction

English as the vehicle of communication helps people of a community to communicate and interact with one another. This language becomes a global language used or required as a medium of communication in so many contexts of the world. English proficiency is one of the key dimensions for successful language learning process (Imran & Ghani, 2014) [12].

As cited by Ahmed (2013) [1], English is an important language in the academia. Students' mastery of the English language may not only help them excel in their studies but also enable them to progress through their education. Therefore, students must be able to read, write, listen and speak effectively. Moreover, English prepares students for meaningful instruction and academic performance in academic subjects taught using the English language (Kong *et al.*, 2012) [15].

Language proficiency refers to a person's ability to use a language for a variety of purposes, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing. Proficiency in the English language includes the passive or receptive skills such as listening and reading and the productive skills, speaking and writing.

Speaking is significant in the learning process. Through mastering this skill, students develop a good command of the English language. Oral proficiency, the ability how well a person speaks a language, is considered as a critical skill in learning a second or foreign language, yet there is a large number of learners in secondary education need attention on the deteriorating and declining state of English proficiency and speaking ability (Beniss & Bazzaz, 2014; Palmer, 2010; Pramana, 2015) [5].

It is within this context that the researcher is prompted to study and assess the English oral proficiency of the of Grade 9 students of San Francisco National High School, San Francisco, Surigao del Norte and determine the level of

English proficiency to formulate recommendations based on the study.

Methodology

This chapter presents the research design, participants, instrument, data gathering procedure, and data analysis of the study at hand. It discusses the underlying principle on the use of research design, the conditions for the sample selection, reliability and validity of the instrument, data gathering procedure, basis for employing the different statistical techniques in the treatment of data and the ethics in research.

Research Design

The study made use of descriptive research design to help the researcher plan and carry out the study. A questionnaire was based on an international test was used and a researcher-made questionnaire patterned from the Grade 9 Philippine Curriculum Guide was employed to collect data regarding the level of oral English proficiency.

Participants

The participants of the study were the 91 out of the 118 Grade 9 students of San Francisco National High School-San Francisco, Surigao del Norte who were enrolled during the school year 2018-2019. Random sampling was used for the sample selection.

Instrument

In gathering the data, a questionnaire consisted of two parts was used. Part I is the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC), a program which offers English language proficiency tests for people whose native language is not English. The instrument was adopted and it assessed on the oral proficiency of the participants in terms of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, intonation and stress.

Part II is a researcher-made questionnaire on the level of competence specifically linguistic and discourse competence based on the standard set by the Philippine curriculum which was validated by experts. The researcher conducted pilot testing prior to its full deployment to assure the reliability of the instrument.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher asked permission through a letter sent to the principal of the secondary school. In the letter, the researcher asked consent to administer the questionnaire to the students. Upon approval, the researcher personally distributed the questionnaires to the student-participants. The researcher himself administered the questionnaires by conducting home visitation to each of the participants to explain the rationale of the study. The data were gathered, tabulated, analyzed, and interpreted.

Data Analysis

The following statistical tools were utilized in analyzing the data

Frequency Count and Percentage Distribution. These tools were used to describe the distribution of the participants in terms of level of proficiency and competence.

Weighted Mean and Standard Deviation. These tools were utilized to determine participants’ levels of speaking and writing proficiency.

Pearson Correlation Coefficient. This tool was used to determine and measure the linear correlation of the oral English proficiency of the students and level of competence in terms of linguistic and discourse competence.

Ethics in Research

To ensure the protection of the participants in the study, the researcher took some important considerations at the time of data collection. The researcher guaranteed all participants that all data maintained secured and pseudonyms are used to protect their identity. All data collected are used for this research purpose only.

Results, findings and analysis

This section presents the result of the study. The presentation and discussion of the data follow the sequence of the research problems.

Table 1 shows the level of proficiency of the participants based on the evaluation criteria set by Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) Speaking Proficiency Test.

Table 1: Level of Proficiency in Terms of TOEIC Evaluation Criteria of the Participants

Evaluation Criterion	Mean	SD	VI	QD
Vocabulary	1.98	0.76	Less Accurate	Less Proficient
Grammar	2.09	0.88	Less Accurate	Less Proficient
Cohesion/organization	1.78	0.66	Less Accurate	Less Proficient
Pronunciation	1.87	0.76	Less Fluent	Less Proficient
Intonation	1.74	0.64	Less Fluent	Less Proficient
Stress	1.77	0.65	Less Fluent	Less Proficient
Average	1.87	0.62		Less Proficient

Legend : VI QD
 3.25-4.00 Very Accurate/ Very Fluent Very Proficient
 2.50-3.24 Accurate/Fluent Proficient
 1.75-2.49 Less Accurate/Less Fluent Less Proficient
 1.00-1.74 Not Accurate/ Not Fluent Not Proficient

The results show that using the TOEIC Evaluation Criteria, the participants are *Less Accurate* in terms of *Vocabulary*($M= 1.98, SD=0.76$) qualitatively described as *Less Proficient*, this implies that L2 speakers experience much greater difficulty in vocabulary. The problem of the student in this aspect is lexical in nature or limited words. Vocabulary has long been recognized as a vital and a good indicator of second language proficiency (Koizumi & In’ami, 2013). Moreover, Kormos (2017) ^[16] mentioned an L2 speaking model, in this model, vocabulary holds a central position in speech production. Limited vocabulary and using faulty grammar definitely result to learners’ low level of proficiency.

The participants are qualitatively described as *Less Proficient in Grammar* ($M= 2.09, SD= 0.88$) which corroborates with the idea of Amogne (2014) ^[2] & Tabert (2012) who found out that grammar in general as part of the language lesson plays a pivotal role in enabling students to communicate effectively. Also, in the study of Sering (2013), grammar plays a key role in learning the structure of English. However, learning the accurate use of grammar is one thing, correctly using grammar in one’s speech is another. Some students are good at grammar in reading and writing, but they may often make inaccuracies in their spoken English.

In terms of *Cohesion/organization*, the participants are qualitatively described as *Less Proficient* ($M=1.78, SD=0.66$). Based on the idea emphasized by Malah (2015), he asserted that cohesion is an important component in the linguistic, however, second language learners experience difficulties in speaking systematically using transitional devices. This is also confirmed by Ruegg & Sugiyama (2013) who stated that teaching organization or cohesion is sometimes not focused in the language curriculum.

On the other hand, the participants are also *Less Fluent* in terms of Pronunciation ($M=1.87, SD= 0.76$), *Intonation* ($M= 1.74, SD= 0.64$), and *Stress* ($M=1.77, SD=0.65$) which are all qualitatively described as *less proficient*. In connection with the results, Stella & Muchemwa (2015) ^[19] stated that learning communication skills is a challenge for all students who learn English as a second language. Students display poor performance in oral communication based on some aspects like pronunciation, intonation and stress.

Similarly, Onyekachi (2012) pointed out that poor knowledge in communication skills including accuracy in grammar, vocabulary and cohesion and fluency in terms of pronunciation stress and intonation negatively affect the learning of English language. It is evident based on the result that most students have trouble in pronunciation of words in oral English and makes speech incomprehensible. This is due to the fact Derwing (2012) ^[6] & Ketabi (2015) stated that pronunciation is an element of language which is granted little weight, if not completely discounted.

In average, the participants are *Less Proficient* in Oral English communication ($M=1.87, SD=0.62$) According to Iwashita & Brown, *et al.* (2012), difficulties in oral communication continue to pose a major challenge to language teacher on how to make oral language teaching relevant and effective. Thus, attention is given to language use and mastering its components to become orally proficient in the English language.

Table 2 shows the level of competence of the participants in terms of Philippine curriculum competencies namely:

Linguistic and Discourse Competence.

Table 2: Level of Competence in Terms of Linguistic and Discourse

Competence	Mean	SD	VI	QD
Linguistic				
Grammar	2.01	0.72	Less Accurate	Less Competent
Vocabulary	1.80	0.79	Less Accurate	Less Competent
Pronunciation	1.77	0.83	Less Fluent	Less Competent
Linguistic Average	1.86	0.63		Less Competent
Discourse Competence	2.24	0.66	Less Accurate	Less Competent
General Average	2.05	0.59		Less Competent
Legend :			VI	QD
3.25-4.00	Very Accurate/Very fluent		Very Competent	
2.50-3.24	Accurate/Fluent		Competent	
1.75-2.49	Less Accurate/Less Fluent		Less Competent	
1.00-1.74	Not Accurate/ Not Fluent		Not Competent	

Table 2 indicates that the participants are *Less Accurate* as to level of competence in terms of linguistic competence. In terms of *Grammar* ($\bar{M}=2.01, SD=0.72$), the participants are described as *less competent*. This implies that implicit knowledge of grammar contributes to the linguistic competence of L2 students. Obeso-Salazar & Bachman (2015) cited that linguistic competence relates to language and knowledge of its aspects to communicate effectively. As to *Vocabulary* ($\bar{M}=1.80, SD=0.79$), the participants are qualitatively described as *Less Competent* which means that development of ESL learners' vocabulary knowledge is the key to the growth of their overall linguistic competence. According to Wang (2014), expanding vocabulary knowledge is the solid foundation for other language skills like learning grammar and pronunciation. In terms of *Pronunciation (Intonation and Stress)* ($\bar{M}=1.77, SD=0.83$) the participants are qualitatively described as *Less Competent*. The results blend with the findings of Gilakjani (2012) which show English Foreign Language learners have serious problems with pronunciation. For this reason, Roccamo (2015) suggested that pronunciation is a vital component of linguistic competence, thus it is critical in oral English communication. The linguistic competence of the participants is generally described as *Less Accurate* or *Less competent* ($\bar{M}=1.86, SD=0.63$). These results are consistent with the study of Andreyeva, *et al.* (2013) [3] who opined that the aim of foreign language learning is to acquire a high level of language competence, thus perfect knowledge of grammatical and syntactical language structures, of thoughts presentation logic, and fluent pronunciation is the ability to communicate proficiently. According to Batang (2014) [4] &

Gandhi (2014) [9], learning a second language is similarly viewed by language proponents as acquiring the linguistic means to perform different kinds of functions such as knowing and applying linguistic competence such as grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and providing a smooth flow of ideas in speech.

Meanwhile, the participants are also *Less Accurate* or *Less Competent* in terms of *Discourse Competence* ($\bar{M}=2.24, SD=0.66$). In comparison to the study of Salazar-Obeso (2015), the result emphasized on the idea that discourse competence is also a vital component of competence in language. Discourse competence accounts for the ability to connect sentences into a meaningful whole, thus important to understand the whole communication process.

Table 3: Significant Relationship between the TOEIC oral proficiency and the Philippine Curriculum: Linguistic and Discourse Competence

Variables	Pearson r	P-value	Decision
Linguistic Competence	0.5265	0.0000	Reject H ₀
Discourse Competence	0.6681	0.0000	Reject H ₀

Table 3 shows the significant relationship between the oral proficiency of the students in based on the TOEIC criteria and the Philippine Curriculum competencies, namely: linguistic and discourse competence. As the results showed, there is a significant relationship that existed. The Pearson Product Method Correlation Coefficient was employed to measure the relationship between variables, and found out that the null hypothesis is rejected.

The present results are relevant with the study conducted by Fahrudinova & Vasileva, (2016) [8] who stated that competence is defined as a certain level of language proficiency and speech skills and abilities. According to Evans and Jones (2012) [7], they equated oral language proficiency with spoken language, and oral competencies.

In the context of foreign language learning, Remache, (2016) agreed that language competence is a combination of language aptitudes and knowledge of an individual which contributes to his/her achievement of higher language proficiency. This means that high level of linguistic competence is necessary for the learners to become orally proficient in a language.

These results indicate that language competence and oral proficiency are considered as potentials of linguistic knowledge, as set of rules for language unit analysis and synthesis, which allow to build and to analyze sentences, to use the language system for communication (Remache, 2016).

Table 4: Distribution of the Participants in terms of the TOEIC Evaluation Criteria Proficiency

Evaluation Criterion	Level of Proficiency			
	Very Proficient	Proficient	Less Proficient	Not Proficient
Vocabulary	2	19	45	25
Grammar	5	25	36	25
Cohesion/organization	4	8	29	50
Pronunciation	4	24	18	45
Intonation	2	10	38	41
Stress	1	8	51	31

Table 4 shows the distribution of the participants in terms of the TOEIC Evaluation Criteria Proficiency level. The result indicates that in terms of Vocabulary, out of 91 participants

in the study 2 or (2%) are Very Proficient, 19 or (21%) are Proficient, 45 or (50%) are Less Proficient and 25 or (27%) of participants are Not Proficient in oral communication. In

terms of *Grammar*, 5 (5%) of the participants are *Very Proficient*, 25 or (27%) are *Proficient*, 36 or (40%) are *Less Proficient* and 25 or (27%) of the participants are described as *Not Proficient* in English language. On the other hand, based on Organization or cohesion, the 4 or (4%) of the participants are *Very Proficient*, 8 or (9%) are considered *Proficient*, 29 or (32%) are *Less Proficient* and 50 or (55%) of them are described *Not Proficient*.

In terms of *Pronunciation*, 4 or (4%) of the participants are qualitatively described as *Very Proficient*, 24 or (26%) are *Proficient*, 18 or (20%) are *Less Proficient* and 45 or (50) out of the 91 participants are labeled as *Not Proficient*. Based on the table, in terms of *Intonation and Stress*, the result respectively shows that only 2 or (2%) and 1 or (1%) of the participants are *Very Proficient*, 10 or (11%) and 8 (9%) are described *Proficient*, 38 or (42%) and 51 or (56%) are *Less Proficient* and 41 (45%) and 31 (34%) are identified as *Not Proficient*.

Overall, the results blend with the findings of Pramana (2015) which found out that a large number of learners in the secondary education need attention on the declining state of English Proficiency. He attributed this phenomenon to the deteriorating state of speaking ability. Moreover, the results corroborated with the idea of Beniss & Bazzaz (2014) ^[5] who believed oral language proficiency encompasses knowledge of specific aspects of oral communication which include pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar and morphology.

Table 5: Distribution of the Participants in terms of the Level of Competence Based on the Philippine Curriculum

Competence	Level of Competence			
	Very Competent	Competent	Less Competent	Not Competent
Linguistic				
Grammar	2	18	50	21
Vocabulary	4	17	19	51
Pronunciation	4	11	36	40
Discourse	6	37	24	24

Table 5 shows the distribution of the respondents in terms of the level of competence based on the Philippine curriculum. The table indicates that in terms of linguistic competence, specifically *Grammar*, only 2 or (2%) of the total 91 participants are *Very Competent*, 18 or (20%) are labeled *Competent*, 50 or (55%) are *Less Competent* and 21 or (23%) are considered *Not Competent*. In terms of *Vocabulary* and *Pronunciation*, 4 or (4%) are *Very Competent*, 17 or (19%) and 11 or (12%) are *Competent*, 19 or (21%) and 36 or (40%) are *Less Competent* and 51 or (56%) and 40 or (44%) of the participants are described as *Not Competent*.

The results show that most of the Grade 9 participants are *Less Competent* in the oral language in terms of linguistic and discourse competence set by the Philippine Curriculum. As emphasized by Kittelman & Calvo-Amodio (2015) ^[14], linguistic competence and discourse refer to the knowledge of possessing the language that is governed by (1) rules of sounds, words, and (2) the construction of words into sentences, respectively. Thus, it can be seen that students encounter difficulties in the spoken English due to the lack of competence in the language.

On the other hand, based on the discourse competence of the participants which refers to organization and cohesion, out

of the 91 participants, 6 or (7%) are described as *Very Competent*, 37 or (41%) are considered *Competent* and the number of *Less Competent and Not Competent* is 24 or (26%) of the entire sample size. These findings are also in agreement with Latham (2013) which showed the fact that spoken communication requires not only linguistic competence but also knowledge in organizational skills which is equated to discourse competence on the English language.

Discussion

The study determined the level of oral English proficiency based on the Test of English for International Communication criteria and the level of competence in terms of Philippine curriculum competencies, namely: linguistic and discourse competence off the Grade 9 students of San Francisco National High School, San Francisco Surigao del Norte for the school year 2018-2019. There were 91 participants involved in the study.

Overall, a number of measures provided evidences that were analyzed according to the level of proficiency and competence in the English language. Pronunciation (Intonation and Stress), grammar, vocabulary, and organization of thought were the evaluation features of the TOEIC criteria. On the other hand, the Philippine curriculum provided two competencies: linguistic and discourse competence.

It was concluded in the study that the participants are less fluent in terms of Pronunciation, Intonation and Stress, qualitatively described as less proficient. Moreover, they are less accurate in terms of Grammar, Vocabulary, and Organization of Thought or Cohesion, qualitatively described as less proficient. And also, the participants are less accurate in terms of linguistic competence which includes Grammar and Vocabulary, and less fluent in terms of Pronunciation (Intonation and Stress), qualitatively described as less competent.

Linguistic and discourse competence of the Philippine curriculum significantly relate to the criteria set by the Test of English for International Communication, thus, both proficiency and competence are essential in the oral English skills of the students. Both the TOEIC criteria and the competencies of the Philippine curriculum, namely: Linguistic and Discourse competence are components of the oral English language for the students to be proficient.

Summary

The study determined the level of oral English proficiency based on the Test of English for International Communication criteria and the level of competence in terms of Philippine curriculum competencies, namely: linguistic and discourse competence off the Grade 9 students of San Francisco National High School, San Francisco Surigao del Norte for the school year 2015-2016. The descriptive research design was used in ascertaining data from the participants. There were 91 participants involved in the study.

Overall, a number of measures provided evidences that were analyzed according to the level of proficiency and competence in the English language. Pronunciation (Intonation and Stress), grammar, vocabulary, and organization of thought were the evaluation features of the TOEIC criteria. On the other hand, the Philippine

curriculum provided two competencies: linguistic and discourse competence.

In the gathering of data, the researcher made use of the Test of English for International Communication, a test for non-native speakers of the English language and a researcher-made questionnaire based on the Philippine curriculum. The statistical tools employed in the study were the mean and standard deviation and Pearson Correlation Coefficient. In administering the questionnaire, the researcher asked permission to the principal of San Francisco National High School. The researcher himself administered and retrieved. The data gathered were statistically tabulated, analyzed and interpreted.

Findings

The following are the findings of the study:

1. Based on the TOEIC Evaluation Criteria, the participants are *less accurate* in terms of *Vocabulary* ($\underline{M}=1.98$, $SD=0.76$), *Grammar* ($\underline{M}=2.09$, $SD=0.88$), and *Cohesion/organization* ($\underline{M}=1.78$, $SD=0.66$), qualitatively described as *less proficient*. The participants are also *less fluent* in terms of *Pronunciation* ($\underline{M}=1.87$, $SD=0.76$), *Intonation* ($\underline{M}=1.74$, $SD=0.64$), and *Stress* ($\underline{M}=1.77$, $SD=0.65$) which are all qualitatively described as *less proficient*. In average, the participants are *less proficient* in Oral English communication ($\underline{M}=1.87$, $SD=0.62$).
2. In terms of the standard set by the Philippine Curriculum, the participants are *less accurate* as to level of competence in terms of linguistic competence which is comprised of *Grammar* ($\underline{M}=2.01$, $SD=0.72$), *Vocabulary* ($\underline{M}=1.80$, $SD=0.79$) and *less fluent* in *Pronunciation (intonation and stress)* ($\underline{M}=1.77$, $SD=0.83$) qualitatively described as *less competent*. The linguistic competence of the participants is generally described as *less accurate* or *less competent* ($\underline{M}=1.86$, $SD=0.63$). Meanwhile, the participants are also *less accurate* or *less competent* in terms of *Discourse Competence* ($\underline{M}=2.24$, $SD=0.66$).
3. There is a significant relationship between the oral proficiency of the students in based on the TOEIC criteria and the Philippine Curriculum competencies, namely: linguistic and discourse competence.
4. Overall, the participants in the study are less proficient and less competent in oral English communication.

Conclusions

The following are the conclusions drawn from the results of the study:

1. The participants are *less fluent* in terms of *Pronunciation, Intonation and Stress*, qualitatively described as *less proficient*.
2. The participants are *less accurate* in terms of *Grammar, Vocabulary, and Organization of Thought or Cohesion*, qualitatively described as *less proficient*.
3. The participants are *less accurate* in terms of linguistic competence which includes *Grammar and Vocabulary*, and less fluent in terms of *Pronunciation (Intonation and Stress)*, qualitatively described as *less competent*.
4. Linguistic and discourse competence of the Philippine curriculum significantly relate to the criteria set by the Test of English for International Communication, thus, both proficiency and competence are essential in the oral English skills of the students.

5. Both the TOEIC criteria and the competencies of the Philippine curriculum, namely: Linguistic and Discourse competence are components of the oral English language for the students to be proficient.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions of the study, the following are recommended:

1. In teaching oral English, teachers should develop and provide interactive and innovative activities to enhance the *Pronunciation (Intonation and Stress)* skills of the students.
2. Teachers should also focus on teaching *Grammar, Vocabulary and Organization of Thought or Cohesion* to develop the level of proficiency and competence of the students in Oral English language.
3. Teachers should design varied learning and speaking tasks for the students to be equipped with a high level of proficiency and competence in the Oral English language.
4. Students should be exposed to different speaking activities inside and outside the classroom environment.
5. Students should be closely monitored in terms of oral English proficiency by employing performance –based assessment.

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