

**ORAL ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS OF GRADE 6 PUPILS
OF ST. THERESA'S COLLEGE QUEZON CITY**

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ABSTRACT

The study investigated on the oral English language proficiency of the Grade 6 pupils of St. Theresa's College, Quezon City for the A.Y 2011-2012. It applied both the quantitative and qualitative approaches. Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Oral test, interview questions, rubric for the Oral Proficiency Test and checklists were employed as research instruments. There are two groups of participants in the study, namely: the eighty-three (83) pupils who were taken from each of the seven sections through random sampling and the three (3) teachers at the Grade 6 level, including the researcher herself, who served as raters or evaluators. Frequency and percentages as well as the thematic analysis were used for data analysis. Results unveiled that the pupils' assessment of their oral English language proficiency level is within the "established" level while on teachers' assessment of their pupils' oral English language proficiency level is within the "proficiency level 3" notably that pupils "commit few errors in the pronunciation of the critical sounds," "speak with few errors in syllable stress and does not clearly emphasize content words in a sentence," "does not blend some English sounds," makes few errors in phrasing" and "slightly confused with the use of the intonation patterns." This implies a call for reinforcement and enhancement in the higher level. This, therefore, poses a challenge to the high school teachers as they teach speech to these students. The study further assessed that the pupils' difficulty in expressing themselves in English is an indication of their non-mastery of the skills in English regarding accent, fluency, confidence, phonological and grammar structures. All these bring about ineffective communication since listeners do not master the oral English language skills. Therefore, enhancement of these skills is deemed necessary to make themselves competent and confident speakers of the English language.

Keywords: *Oral english language skills, accent, fluency, phonological structures, grammar structures*

INTRODUCTION

Language is a man's essential tool. Using language, man develops himself and helps others develop themselves, too. Through language, he receives and transmits the great ideals of his civilization and those of other people. Therefore, the fulfillment of man's aims and aspirations as an individual and of his role in his direct and broader community depends on his great ability to communicate. With language, man can conquer and stand the tumult of events directly. As he struggles and explores the various facets of life, he has to deal with others. In other words, man communicates as a gesture of existence. His ability to communicate is vital for the success of his endeavour. Hence, communication skills are essential in any sphere of human interaction. Today, the English language is only one official language that links people with one another in any part of the world. The use of the English language cannot be overemphasized in an increasingly interconnected and globalized world. English provides access to people and things across the nations and gives people the chance to have a wider vision of the world. In this era of globalization, people across the globe share a single commonality - to speak English in dealing with one another.

At St. Theresa's College, Quezon City, it has been a major problem for the teachers to let the students speak English naturally and engage in a substantial conversation using the target language. To support this argument, the majority of the Grade 6 students, who were asked about the reasons why they hesitate to speak in English, responded that they are not sure of their grammar and pronunciation. They do not also know the appropriate words to use in expressing themselves, and this, consequently, prompts them to switch to the Filipino language. They that confess their lack of confidence in using the English might bring them embarrassment in class. It is in this light that as language teachers, the need to assess the level of the oral English language proficiency of students is vital to find out their verbal communication abilities, their oral communication skills as well as their oral language difficulties. Assessing their oral language proficiency level would certainly give the language teachers a clear picture of their strengths and weaknesses in the target language. This would help them use proper approaches and employ appropriate strategies to make them speakers of the English language.

Conceptual Framework

Based on the theories and from other readings of the researcher on the assessment of the oral proficiency of the language learners, the conceptual framework below has been formed and designed to carry out the objectives of the study.

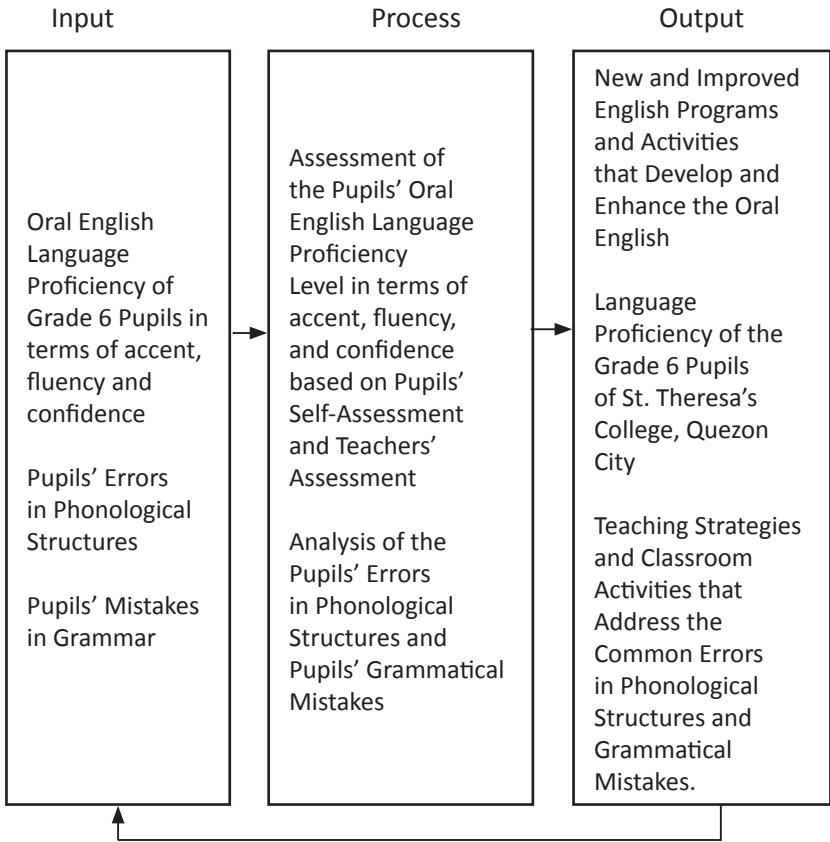


Figure 1. The Paradigm of the Study

The pupils' assessment of their oral English language proficiency level and the teachers' assessment of the pupils' oral English language proficiency were the indicators of the pupils' oral English proficiency level.

As such to ascertain the oral English language proficiency level of the pupils, self-assessment and oral proficiency tests on oral English language proficiency were used in this study.

Likewise, checklist on the errors in phonological structures and grammatical mistakes were also utilized to determine the pupils' errors in phonological structures and mistakes in grammar. Results of these oral English language proficiency tests were analyzed and assessed in the light of this study.

With the ascertained oral English language proficiency level of the pupils, innovations, improved programs, and meaningful activities in teaching English were designed. These innovations, programs and activities envision improving the oral English language proficiency level of the Grade 6 pupils of St. Theresa's College, Quezon City to address their weaknesses in phonological structures and in grammar.

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to ascertain the oral English language proficiency level of the Grade 6 pupils of St. Theresa's College, Quezon City for the school year 2011-2012.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the oral English language proficiency of the Grade 6 pupils as assessed by themselves regarding:
 - 1.1 accent;
 - 1.2 fluency; and
 - 1.3 confidence?

2. What is the oral English language proficiency of the Grade 6 pupils as assessed by their teachers in terms of:
 - 2.1 accent;
 - 2.2 fluency; and
 - 2.3 confidence?

3. What are the phonological errors of the Grade 6 pupils on:
 - 3.1. segmental phonemes
 - 3.1.1 critical vowel sounds;
 - 3.1.2 critical consonant sounds; and
 - 3.1.3 final sounds?
4. What are the grammatical mistakes of the Grade 6 pupils in oral English communications?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study applied both the quantitative and qualitative methods of research. The qualitative approach was used in the study since the teacher underwent an analysis on the oral skills of pupils based on their oral responses.

The data were collected from the results of the pupils' assessment of their oral English language proficiency level, the teachers' assessment of their pupils' oral English language proficiency level, and from the checklists on phonological structures and grammatical mistakes.

Participants of the Study

There are two groups of participants in the study; the pupil-participants and teacher participants. There were eighty-three (83) pupils that were randomly selected from the 314 pupils in the Grade 6 level of St. Theresa's College, Quezon City enrolled for the school year 2011-2012. Since this is an all-girls school, all the participants were female. These pupils were taken from each of the seven sections through random sampling. The three teacher-participants who are English teachers served as raters or evaluators of the pupils' oral English language proficiency. Each teacher-participant rated all the 83 pupils in terms of their oral English proficiency.

Research Instruments

Self-Assessment Questionnaire, Sentences for the Oral Test, Interview Questions, Rubric for the Oral Proficiency Test, checklist on Errors in Phonological Structures, and Checklist on Grammatical Mistakes were utilized as tools for data gathering.

In the Self-Assessment Questionnaire answered by the pupils, there were 3 categories included to describe the pupils' oral English language proficiency such as Accent, Fluency and Confidence.

The following scale and its descriptive interpretation, based on the 1999 ACFTL Oral Proficiency Interview Tester Training Manual (Swender 1999) and W-APT k-Model and ACCESS for ELLs, were used to indicate the participants' own assessment of their oral English language proficiency level in terms of Accent, Fluency and Confidence:

Scale	Descriptive Interpretation
5	Proficient
4	Mastered
3	Established
2	Developing
1	Beginning

A checklist was utilized to identify the mistakes that the pupils incurred while answering the interview questions. The checklist on errors in phonological structures included the segmental phonemes and supra-segmental phonemes. The checklist on grammatical mistakes included subject-verb disagreement, misuse of pronouns in relation to their antecedents, redundancy, wrong tense of verbs, adjectives used as adverbs, misuse of prepositions, wrong choice of words, starting a sentence with a conjunction/incomplete and run-on sentence.

Data Collection Procedure

To facilitate the collection of the data needed, the researcher undertook the following procedures:

1. A letter of request addressed to the School Directress was written to seek permission to conduct the study to the Grade 6 pupils of St. Theresa's College, Quezon City.
2. A letter of permission was also sent to the parents of the participants to allow their daughters to participate in the study.
3. With the approval of the School Directress, through the Grade School Principal, and with the permission of the parents of the participants, the researcher administered the Self-Assessment of the Pupils' Oral English Language Proficiency and conducted the Oral English Proficiency Test with the pupils, together with the teacher-raters.
4. In answering the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, the pupils rated themselves according to their assessment of their oral English language proficiency level.
5. After the Self-Assessment, the researcher, together with the two other English language teachers in the level, administered the oral English Language Proficiency Test to the participants. The Rating of the teachers was done at the same time.
6. All the results of the Self-Assessment and Oral Proficiency Test were collated, and appropriate statistical tools were employed for further analysis and interpretation.

Data Analysis

The researcher analyzed the data by summarizing the answers of the pupils in the Self-Assessment Questionnaire, by collating the ratings of the three teachers in the Oral English Language Proficiency Test, and by determining the frequency of the errors in phonological structures and mistakes in grammar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

On pupils' assessment of their oral english language proficiency level

On Accent, most or 45.8% of the pupils assessed their oral English language proficiency is at the “established” level. This implies that pupils have not mastered the skills related to accent. Thus, it calls for reinforcement and enhancement in the higher level.

On Fluency, the highest percentage of the pupils claimed that their oral English language proficiency is at “established” level with an overall frequency of 33 or 39.8%. This implies that the Grade 6 pupils have acquired the basic and necessary skills regarding fluency during their elementary years.

On Confidence, results revealed that the highest percentage or 39.8% of the pupil-participants believed that their oral English language proficiency is at the “established” level. This means that as Grade 6 pupils, they have already established themselves confidence in speaking, yet they need more of this to communicate with others more easily and more efficiently.

On teachers' assessment of their pupil' oral english language proficiency level

Along Accent, more than half or 55.5% of their pupils are under “Proficiency Level 3” which denotes that pupils “commit few errors in the pronunciation of the critical sounds,” “speak with few errors in syllable stress and does not clearly emphasize content words in a sentence,” “does not blend some English sounds,” “makes few errors in phrasing” and “slightly confused with the use of the intonation patterns” with an overall mean of 50.6%. This means the majority of the grade 6 pupils are not yet proficient regarding skills related to accent. This, therefore, poses a challenge to the high school teachers as they teach speech to these students.

In terms of Fluency, majority or 50.6% of their pupils are under “Proficiency Level 3” notably, pupils “commit few errors in the

pronunciation of the critical sounds,” “speak with few errors in syllable stress and does not clearly emphasize content words in a sentence,” “does not blend some English sounds,” “makes few errors in phrasing” and “slightly confused with the use of the intonation patterns.” Belonging to this level, pupils make conscious attempt to speak with relative ease. Students have a limited vocabulary, and make few errors in the choice of words; use idiomatic expressions and figures of speech to a certain extent; have some grammatical lapses but don’t interfere with meaning, and organize ideas with some effort when speaking.

On Confidence, more than half or 55.4 of their pupils are under “Proficiency Level 3” notably, pupils “commit few errors in the pronunciation of the critical sounds,” “speak with few errors in syllable stress and does not clearly emphasize content words in a sentence,” “does not blend some English sounds,” “makes few errors in phrasing” and “slightly confused with the use of the intonation patterns”. Since the majority of the pupils belong to “Proficiency Level 3”, it is inferred that they display some nervousness and manifest fluctuating energy level when speaking. Therefore, enhancement of these skills is deemed necessary to make themselves competent and confident speakers of the English language.

On errors in phonological structures committed by students

Among all errors in phonological structures perpetrated by the pupils along segmental phonemes, the common errors frequently committed by pupils in their speech are the errors on the contrastive sounds of /l/-/i:/ and /θ/-/ð/ and the sound of /t/ and /z/. This shows that pupils do not clearly emphasize the distinct sounds of /l/-/i:/ and /θ/-/ð/ in their speech, and they find difficulty in applying the rules governing the sounds of /t/ and /z/.

Among all errors in phonological structures committed by the pupils along suprasegmental phonemes, the common errors frequently committed by pupils in their speech are the errors on sentence stress, pausing within the sentence, and difficulty on using rising-falling intonation. This implies that they have trouble highlighting or emphasizing

important words in a sentence, saying words or ideas together for a clearer message, and saying a sentence following the rising-falling intonation.

On grammatical mistakes committed by students

Among all grammatical mistakes in the English grammar, the errors on starting a sentence with a conjunction/incomplete sentence, redundancy/repetition of words/use of fillers (like um and ah), and subject-verb disagreement are the most frequent errors committed by the pupils in their speech. This clearly communicates that pupils have the difficulty composing their ideas when speaking and that they need to develop and enhance their knowledge and skills in English grammar to achieve grammatical competence in speaking.

CONCLUSION

From the findings, the researcher concludes that pupils' difficulty in expressing themselves in English is an indication of their non-mastery of the skills in English regarding accent, fluency, and confidence. Pupils' errors on phonological structures indicate that they have not mastered the skills along segmental and supra-segmental phonemes. Likewise, the pupils' mistakes in grammar are indicators of their non-mastery of these grammar structures. All these bring about ineffective communication since listeners do not clearly get their message due to the mispronunciation of the critical vowels, consonants, and final sounds, the non-observance of proper stress, phrasing/pausing, and intonation in speaking, and the occurrence of grammatical mistakes in their speech.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, the following recommendations are drawn:

On School Curriculum

That English language teachers may realign content and skills in English, focusing on the communicative competence of the pupils. The

activities, lessons, and expertise they give to the pupils should be geared towards development and enhancement of the oral language proficiency of the pupils.

That English language teachers may do streamlining of lessons and spiraling of content and skills in Reading and Language at all levels to ensure that the pupils are well-prepared for the next level. That English language teacher should provide varied and engaging classroom activities to develop the pupils' oral English language proficiency.

On Classroom Instruction

The English teachers may provide the pupils with different activities that would allow them to express themselves in English. The Speak-up-and-be-Hheard activity, the opportunity to ask a question (OTAQ), oral performances, oral tests, oral evaluations, and other oral activities that enable them to speak freely and confidently using the target language.

That other subject teachers may provide their pupils opportunities for speaking, discussion, and expression of ideas, experiences, and opinions across the whole curriculum. This would involve a range of experiences in which the size and type of audience, the situation, and purpose will all vary. Teachers should establish good strategies to manage all forms of communication to ensure that all students have their interpersonal speaking and listening skills (e.g. large and small group discussions).

On School Facilities

That administration may consider putting up a speech laboratory that could help the pupils acquire and master oral language skills through the process and method of learning this laboratory gives. This provides an avenue for the students to improve the way they pronounce words and be corrected by the teacher whenever necessary. It helps students to pronounce certain words correctly. Small details like accent, stress, and blending of words can also be corrected as young as they are. Teachers and education specialists could also make use of the laboratory in creating unique materials and other relevant materials. Language learning in

laboratories can be done privately and at their pace, students who are slow in learning the language, become more confident as they try to develop their proficiency in the language. Though it is expensive to put up a language laboratory, the school should still invest on it. In fact, the advantages it can get it outweigh the overall cost.

On Instructional Materials

That English language teachers may help the head of the Instructional Media Center in acquiring materials that develop the oral communication skills of the pupils and use these materials to a great extent to improve the oral English language proficiency of the pupils.

On School Activities

That the school may intensify its “Speak English Campaign” to encourage the pupils to speak in English, thus helping them to develop and enhance their oral English language proficiency.

That English language teachers and the SINAG (Socialized Instructional Activities for the Advanced Group) and SIG (Samahan Interest Groups) facilitators may intensify the oral proficiency of the pupils by exposing them to different speech acts like Speech Choir, Readers’ Theater, Chamber Theater, Oration, Extemporaneous Speech, and Declamation. These various speech forms could help them develop their accent, fluency, and confidence in speaking.

On Future Researchers

Those future researchers make this study as a basis for their research as they assess the oral English language proficiency of the pupils as well as identify their common errors in phonological structures and grammar. This study may be replicated to seek more relevant information about oral proficiency not only of the pupils but also of the teachers and commit them to finding more ways to develop and enhance the oral English language proficiency of pupils and educators.

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