

ATTITUDES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS TOWARD ORAL COMMUNICATION: STORIES OF ENGLISH TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

This study ascertained the experiences of senior high school English teachers in Surallah II District, South Cotabato Division. There were ten (10) senior high school English teachers who dealt with the attitudes of learners toward oral communication, participated in the study. This study made use of a phenomenological approach to extract the ideas of the participants. The virtual in-depth interview was employed to gather some information as regards their respective narratives as they dealt with the attitudes of senior high learners toward oral communication. The thematic analysis of the responses from the participants of the study revealed the experiences of senior high school teachers to be: difficulty in oral discussions using the English language, learners' lack of confidence and fear of making mistakes, challenges on the negative attitude on oral communication. The coping mechanism employed by the senior high school English teachers were: designing contextualized activities and assessments, using rewards and penalty systems, and effective monitoring and assessment processes. The insights drawn from the findings of the study were: capacity building and effective monitoring and assessment processes. Teachers have designed appropriate plans and implemented strategies to meet the demands of the teaching and learning process to develop graduates who are globally competitive. in the school. There were lessons that would make teachers realize as they develop the communication skills of learners. This study provided a clear view of how senior high school teachers have prepared our graduates for employment and prepare them for real-life endeavors.

Keywords: attitudes toward oral communication, English teachers, oral communication.

1. INTRODUCTION

Chapter 1 of this study provides a detailed look into the factors influencing English language proficiency among Senior High School students in the Surallah II District, Philippines, focusing on attitudes toward language learning and the strategies used by teachers to manage these attitudes. The researcher investigates the influence of student attitudes on language performance, recognizing that positive attitudes can significantly boost learning motivation and language engagement, while negative attitudes may hinder effective communication and language acquisition.

The Importance of Attitudes in Language Acquisition

Student attitudes have long been identified as critical determinants of language learning success. Gardner (1985) and Kara (2009, as cited by Abidin, 2012) highlight that attitudes and beliefs about language learning directly impact student behaviors, influencing both participation and performance in the classroom. Students who view English positively are more likely to engage in speaking activities, develop coping strategies, and tackle challenges in oral communication. In contrast, students with negative attitudes may experience heightened anxiety, reduced engagement, and limited improvement in language skills. This underscores the need to foster positive attitudes, as it can lead to enhanced student confidence and willingness to use English in various contexts.

English Language Challenges in the Philippines

Despite the Philippines' strong reputation as an English-speaking nation—recognized globally for its proficiency and having surpassed India in voice outsourcing in 2012 (Mitra, 2013)—the study identifies enduring challenges. Filipino students, particularly in rural areas, face difficulties in attaining spoken fluency due to socio-economic and technological limitations. Disparities in internet access, resource availability, and educational infrastructure affect students' ability to practice and develop language skills. Additionally, recent studies reveal that Filipino graduates often fall below expected English proficiency levels, signaling an urgent need to address these gaps (Hopkins International Partners, 2019). Dr. Prospero De Vera's observations during the 2017 English Roadmap Seminar-Workshop also emphasize the need for improvement, as a substantial number of Filipino nursing candidates for the UK program failed their English tests, highlighting proficiency as a critical issue in the Filipino education system.

Gender Differences in Language Learning

Gender differences in language learning reveal another layer of complexity, with studies indicating that female students generally exhibit more positive behaviors, higher motivation, and better performance in language tasks compared to male students (Keller, 1983; Dornyei & Shoaib, 2005). This gender gap suggests that girls are often more receptive to language learning activities, participate more actively, and may develop language skills more quickly than their male

counterparts. These findings indicate the importance of a gender-sensitive approach to teaching English, ensuring both male and female students receive tailored encouragement and support to cultivate proficiency.

The K to 12 Curriculum and Theoretical Underpinnings

The Philippine K to 12 curriculum aims to produce graduates equipped with language competencies suited for real-world application. The Language Arts and Multi-Literacies Curriculum (LAMC), an essential component of K to 12, is designed to prepare students for effective communication by emphasizing critical language skills and adaptive learning strategies (K to 12 English Curriculum Guide, 2016). The curriculum also incorporates Canale and Swain's (1987, as cited in Ohno, 2011) framework of communicative competence, focusing on knowledge of grammar, social usage, and discourse principles. Grounded in constructivist learning theory, the curriculum aligns with principles that promote active, student-centered learning, wherein students gain proficiency through meaningful interaction and contextual application. This approach is essential for preparing students to either enter the workforce or pursue further education.

Teacher Coping Mechanisms and Strategies

English teachers play a vital role in shaping student attitudes and adapting instructional methods to foster engagement. The study highlights various strategies employed by teachers to improve student participation and language use, especially in oral communication.

Contextualized activities and a reward system, as noted in Ceo-DiFrancesco's (2013) study, can motivate students to actively use English in class. Tran's (2009) interaction hypothesis further suggests that student-teacher interactions, such as dialogue-based activities, allow students to practice English in meaningful ways, fostering both proficiency and confidence. Teachers also employ contextualized materials, real-life examples, and culturally relevant discussions to make learning more relatable, reducing students' fear of making mistakes and enhancing their comfort in speaking English (Moeller & Roberts, 2013).

Implications for Language Education

The findings from this study hold practical implications for educators and policymakers in the Philippines. By focusing on student attitudes and supporting English teachers through professional development, training, and resources, educational institutions can improve language learning outcomes. Encouraging positive attitudes towards English can help alleviate language anxiety and inspire greater engagement in language tasks, thereby preparing students more effectively for real-world communication. Insights from this research advocate for a curriculum that incorporates meaningful language tasks, aligns with local contexts, and supports differentiated learning strategies based on student needs and abilities.

Role of Positive Reinforcement and Language Policies

In addition to teaching strategies, policies such as a "Speak in English" classroom environment help reinforce language use. By creating a structured yet flexible language policy, students are encouraged to use English consistently, building both fluency and confidence.

Studies show that controlled use of a target language in the classroom enables students to develop their language abilities over time, fostering a habit of regular practice (Snorraddóttir, 2014). Furthermore, integrating language rewards and a positive classroom culture enhances students' willingness to participate and engage in language exercises.

Addressing Future Challenges: Strengthening Oral and Communication Skills

The results of this study also suggest that oral communication skills should be strengthened across the curriculum. As the global landscape increasingly demands proficiency in English, particularly in Southeast Asia, Filipino students need to attain competencies that meet both academic and professional expectations.

By implementing initiatives such as targeted vocabulary building, grammar instruction, and interactive language activities, educators can address the specific gaps in student proficiency. The K to 12 curriculum provides an ideal foundation, but it requires continued adaptation to evolving language standards and industry expectations.

2. CONCLUSION AND SIGNIFICANCE

Chapter 1 establishes a comprehensive foundation for understanding the role of attitudes in language learning, particularly for Filipino Senior High School students.

The study identifies key challenges, such as limited resources, gender differences, and student anxiety, which collectively impact language acquisition and usage in classrooms. The chapter also emphasizes the role of educators in shaping positive attitudes and developing coping strategies to overcome these challenges. With insights from this study, educational stakeholders can take steps to enhance the effectiveness of English language education in the Philippines, ultimately supporting students in their pursuit of higher education or career opportunities where English proficiency is indispensable.

3. METHODS

This chapter details the research methodology, addressing the research design, participant selection, data collection methods, data analysis, trustworthiness measures, and ethical considerations.

Research Design

This qualitative study employs a phenomenological approach to explore the challenges faced by English teachers concerning SHS students' attitudes toward oral communication. Phenomenology, as outlined by Patton (2002), seeks to understand the essence of experiences. This study aligns with Giorgi's (2007) suggestion that phenomenological research delves into underlying complexities, aiming to reveal insights beyond initial descriptions.

Philosophical Assumptions

This study is framed by the following philosophical assumptions:

1. **Ontology:** The ontological perspective accepts that multiple subjective realities exist, shaped by the participants' experiences and views (Creswell, 2012). For this study, the subjective realities of English teachers regarding SHS students' attitudes toward oral communication were explored. Participant responses were coded to ensure accurate reflection of these diverse perspectives.
2. **Epistemology:** Following Guba and Lincoln (1985), the epistemological approach aimed to establish close researcher-participant relationships. Data was gathered firsthand through interviews, fostering an insider perspective. This approach provided an in-depth understanding of English teachers' experiences in Surallah 2 District, South Cotabato.
3. **Axiology:** This axiology assumes that research is value-laden, and thus, values were openly acknowledged. By preserving the integrity of participants' responses, the study remained respectful of their contributions (Creswell, 2013).
4. **Rhetorics:** In line with qualitative conventions, the study employed a narrative style, using first-person language where appropriate. Canale and Swain's (1987) theory on communicative competence further supported the study's emphasis on communication knowledge and skill application.

Qualitative Assumptions

According to Gerodias (2013), methodology reflects a creative approach to inquiry, distinct from specific methods. Phenomenology allowed the researcher to focus on English teachers' personal experiences and the influence of cultural symbols and phenomena. Kalof and Dietz (2008) note that phenomenology helps researchers uncover underlying motivations and meanings, making it well-suited to this study's focus on teachers' challenges and coping strategies.

Participants

Eight English teachers from senior high schools within the Surallah 2 District in South Cotabato participated. Participants were selected based on their experience in teaching oral communication, with a minimum of two years in the field. Qualitative research often relies on smaller sample sizes to reach saturation, wherein additional participants do not yield new insights (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Creswell (1998) and Morse (1994) suggest a sample size of five to 25 participants, which is well-aligned with this study's participant count.

Data Collection

The following steps were taken in data collection:

1. **Site Access:** Approval was obtained from relevant school officials, including a formal letter from the Graduate School Dean.
2. **Sampling Strategy:** Purposeful sampling ensured that all participants had experience with the phenomenon under study.
3. **Data Collection:** The primary method was in-depth interviews (IDIs), conducted virtually due to COVID-19 protocols.
4. **Recording and Storage:** Interview responses were recorded, coded, and securely stored. Davidson (1996) suggests databases for data preservation, which was utilized to protect participant information.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Following Creswell (2013), the analysis involved examining, coding, and grouping responses into thematic clusters to reflect common experiences.

1. **Thematic Content Analysis:** Braun and Clarke (2006) define thematic analysis as a flexible tool for qualitative research. Six phases were followed: familiarization with data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and reporting.
2. **Document Analysis:** Documentary evidence was reviewed to triangulate findings. Frey (2018) supports document analysis as a means to validate and expand qualitative insights.

3. Triangulation: Triangulation was employed to ensure the validity of findings by using multiple data sources, as outlined by Kulkarni (2013). Environmental triangulation considered factors such as timing, location, and setting to confirm consistency.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to ethical guidelines to maintain participant privacy, informed consent, and respectful interaction. Sanjari (2014) emphasizes that participants must be fully informed about the study's nature, scope, and data usage. Approval from the Rizal Memorial College ethics committee was obtained before data collection.

Trustworthiness of the Stud

Trustworthiness, crucial in qualitative research, was addressed through four key measures (Lincoln & Guba, 2000):

Credibility: Researcher integrity and honesty were maintained, ensuring rigorous data collection and analysis.

Transferability: Gasson (2004) describes transferability as the applicability of findings to similar contexts. Detailed descriptions were provided to allow future researchers to assess relevance.

Confirmability: An audit trail was created, documenting each research step, as recommended by Gasson (2004), to confirm that findings represent participant perspectives accurately.

Dependability: Consistency in research methods and procedures was maintained to enable study replication. Data was stored in secure databases for future reference, supporting research reliability.

5. RESULTS

In Chapter 3, the study explores the lived experiences of senior high school English teachers, highlighting the difficulties they encounter with student attitudes toward oral communication and their strategies for addressing these challenges. Teachers across the Surallah II District in South Cotabato shared insights into how varying student backgrounds and educational tracks impact English proficiency, with many students struggling particularly in oral communication. This chapter includes a thematic analysis of teachers' observations, revealing students' reluctance toward oral English activities like impromptu speaking, extemporaneous speeches, and class discussions. The teachers noted a general passivity in students, rooted in factors like a lack of confidence, fear of making mistakes, and limited communication skills, as echoed in previous studies by Abidin (2012) and Tsui (2016). Teachers observed that students' language anxieties often hinder class participation, with students preferring performance-based activities like skits and games to spontaneous speech tasks.

Challenges such as passivity and reluctance are compounded by gender differences, with female students generally more participative and motivated than their male counterparts, aligning with Dornyei and Shoaib's (2005) findings. Additionally, socio-economic factors and educational backgrounds play a role, particularly among students from remote areas with limited exposure to English, reinforcing the importance of context in language learning (Ellis, 1985; Raja & Selvi, 2011). The study found that teachers resort to individualized strategies to mitigate these issues, often using rewards systems, simplified exercises, and contextualized tasks to build students' confidence and skills progressively.

Several teachers noted that creating a positive, motivating classroom environment led to improved student engagement. The study highlights that while students may initially display positive attitudes, they often lose interest as the curriculum shifts toward more complex speaking exercises. Teachers in the study emphasized the importance of practice, positive reinforcement, and aligning class activities with students' interests to foster a more supportive environment. Studies by Rastegar and Gohari (2016) support these approaches, suggesting that students' positive attitudes directly influence their engagement and success in language learning.

In terms of coping mechanisms, teachers in the study employed various strategies to encourage participation. Contextualizing learning materials to students' real-life experiences and introducing reward-based systems were identified as effective approaches to sustaining students' interest and overcoming passivity. Additionally, teachers advocate for continuous oral practice and emphasize the use of simple, relatable activities that students can connect with, which has been shown to improve both language retention and student confidence in speaking (Newberg, 2011; Ceo-DiFrancesco, 2013).

Further, teachers stressed the importance of an effective monitoring and assessment process to track progress in oral communication skills, highlighting a need for supportive learning materials and technology integration to engage students actively.

These coping mechanisms are critical, as teachers attempt to shift students' perceptions of English from a difficult requirement to a valuable skill. The chapter underscores the role of education as a transformative process, echoing Moore (2009), where effective instructional strategies and adaptive teaching methods can build both language proficiency and self-assurance in students, fostering a supportive environment for learning English as a second language.

6. DISCUSSIONS

Implications and Future Directions

This study highlighted the experiences of senior high school English teachers in the Philippines, focusing on how student attitudes toward oral communication present unique challenges in developing effective English-speaking skills. Oral communication is essential for students' global competence, yet Filipino students frequently encounter barriers in mastering this skill, often due to factors like low self-confidence, fear of making mistakes, and difficulty with English as a second language. Teachers observed that while students actively engage in informal, game-based activities, they often struggle with structured speaking tasks such as extemporaneous speeches or formal reporting due to anxiety and limited proficiency. These challenges, along with students' initial enthusiasm turning into reluctance as lessons advance, place a significant responsibility on teachers to create a conducive learning environment. In response, teachers emphasized contextualized activities and targeted assessments to encourage student participation and confidence in using English. Such strategies align with the Philippines' educational goals to prepare students as globally competitive graduates (Abidin, 2012; Gardner, 1985; Newberg, 2011).

Implications:

The findings suggest that educational authorities and policymakers should consider enhancing support for English teachers by providing access to practical resources, ongoing professional development, and a consistent framework for integrating English speaking activities across multiple subjects.

By incorporating contextualized and culturally relevant activities, educators can help bridge the gap between students' natural communicative skills and the structured language proficiency required for academic and professional success. This could involve developing teaching strategies that reduce anxiety, boost self-confidence, and offer varied assessment methods to meet the diverse linguistic needs of students across academic tracks. Furthermore, as education systems globally recognize the value of English proficiency, prioritizing oral communication in school curricula will empower Filipino students to excel in international contexts (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009).

The themes identified in this study suggest the importance of training teachers to navigate these complexities, where targeted and practical training on classroom management, assessment development, and culturally responsive teaching techniques are essential. Teachers' efforts to apply reward and penalty systems, motivation-based teaching, and learning through relatable contexts reflect a crucial adaptive approach to student engagement. The insights drawn further reveal the need for an educational system that values students' diverse language competencies while fostering an environment that actively builds their confidence to speak English. For instance, strengthening teachers' roles in assessing communication skills can not only measure linguistic growth but also encourage active student participation through positive reinforcement (Rastegar & Gohari, 2016).

Future Directions:

Future research could benefit from examining these issues in a broader, quantitative context across various regions to determine effective teaching practices at scale. Larger studies on similar themes may reveal further nuances in language attitudes and offer insights into how educational support systems can be optimized. Actionable strategies, such as teacher collaboration with school authorities and policymakers, can address systemic challenges and enhance teachers' ability to adapt classroom dynamics for language acquisition.

National surveys could measure the impact of curriculum changes on students' language confidence and offer recommendations for sustained improvements in oral communication. Additionally, innovative training programs and resources should be developed for teachers, focusing on creating culturally responsive and interactive teaching models. Quantitative research across multiple schools and student groups would also provide a broader understanding of how learners respond to different teaching methodologies and could inform policy recommendations.

By addressing these areas, educational authorities can ensure that future cohorts of senior high school graduates emerge as confident English speakers capable of thriving in diverse professional environments.

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