ENGLISH SPEAKING PROBLEMS OF FRESHMEN STUDENTS IN A TEACHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is the use of language to express meaning, and for students, the spoken or verbal language is the medium through which a new language is encountered, understood, practiced and learned rather than oral skills being simply one aspect of learning the language. Thus, this research determined the problems encountered by students in expressing themselves using English. It also determined the coping mechanisms by the freshman students of College of Teacher Education, Cagayan State University in addressing their problems. This descriptive research used the questionnaire checklist to gather the needed data which were statistically treated using frequency counts and ranking. The findings show that the main identified problem of the respondents is that their class lacks in providing activities that require them to use the language and the main coping mechanism that they have identified is that they would download applications that are related to English and use them when necessary. It is then recommended that English teachers in CSU and even in other colleges and universities where English is not a native tongue should engage students to various speaking activities that could help the latter develop further or enhance their skills.

KEYWORDS: Teacher Education, English, speaking problem, coping mechanisms

INTRODUCTION

Language according to Rabiah (2012) is a method used by people to relay and express their feelings and ideas to others. Hence, language is human's primary source of communication. It is a tool in which we share ideas and thoughts with others. We use language to inform others what we feel, desire and to question and understand the world

around us. It is a common knowledge that English is one of the most prominent languages to be discussed. Moreover, many people chose to learn it simply to place themselves in better positions, to secure their work and to communicate more effectively with more people. English might be a popular language to study but it doesn't necessarily mean that it is a simple language to master. There are countless challenges people surely face when learning English and if someone is aware of these beforehand, he/she can stand a greater chance of mastering the language that is essential for communication in our current time.

Rather than oral skills being simply one aspect of learning language, the spoken form acts as the prime source of language learning. However, speaking problem can be a major challenge to effective foreign language learning and communication. And no matter how much learners know about the English language, still face many speaking difficulties (Villegas, 2014). Many studies have indicated that oral language in the classroom is used more by teachers than by the students.

As mentioned earlier, English as a subject is an extensive term. It is not easy for it to cover a lot of English-related activities. It is not enough that one can comprehend to literature alone; it is not enough that one is very sensitive with his/her grammar and tends to correct someone if ever he/she has an erroneous sentence or statement; it is not enough that one has a wide range of vocabulary; it is not enough that one can appreciate the excitement this subject has to offer; it is not enough that one has to use it anytime and anywhere he/she should want to use it; it is not enough that one can memorize all the related terms of English and it is not enough that one can fluently and accurately speak using English a medium.

Nevertheless, above all these, speaking English as a medium is the most significant thing to be considered. It might be a time-consuming activity but one can see that it is also very fulfilling to mug up because of the assurance that it can create many opportunities.In the Common European Framework (n.d.), communicative competence has three components and these include linguistic competence, socio linguistic competence, pragmatic competence and strategic competence. As to factors affecting speaking performance in order to help students overcome problems in speaking, it is necessary for the language teachers to figure out factors that affect their speaking performance. Students

speaking performance can be affected by the factors that come from performance conditions such as time pressure, planning standard of performance and amount, and affective factors like motivation, confidence and anxiety, listening ability and feedback during speaking activities.

Through observation, the researches tried to dig into possible reasons why students fail to express themselves through the use of English considering that they have been exposed to the language at an early age. Some students fear to commit mistakes because their classmates might laugh at them or experience bullying. They thought that their teacher will also scold them if ever they use erroneous statements that would cause their confidence to deteriorate. Yi Htwe (2007) shares the strategy to build students confidence. He says that maximizing students exposure to English is a positive way to build the students confidence. Zua (2008) further adds that motivation is an inner energy. She says that no matter what kinds of motivation the learners possess it will enhance their study interest. It has been proven in many studies that students with strong motivation to succeed can persist in learning and gain better scores than those who have weaker motivation.

Many educators are truly challenged to address the pressing problems and mishaps faced by students whose primary language is not English. In the Philippines for example, a lot of its citizens are fond of speaking English, however, they do not generally utilize it as the natives do (Tagumasi and Villanueva, 2019). While mastering other skills and content in other subject areas, there is the necessity for these learners to gain proficiency in English and it had been a challenge for the teachers to face these difficulties. Therefore, the researchers conducted this academic study for them to be able to fully identify the problems encountered by students in speaking, using English as a medium.

Statement of the problem

Generally, the study determined the problems encountered by students in speaking using English as medium. Specifically, this study answered the following:

1. What is the profile of the students in terms of the following?

    1.1 sex;

    1.2 language spoken at home;

    1.3 reading materials available at home; and

1.4 favourite subject?

2. What are the problems encountered by students in speaking using English as medium?

3. What are the coping mechanisms employed by the students to address their problems?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive method of research was utilized in this study with the questionnaire checklist as the primary tool used in gathering the data from the 30 freshmen students of the College of Teacher Education, Cagayan State University, Sanchez Mira. This method according to McComber (2022) is a means of describing a certain population, situation or phenomenon. Statistical tools such as frequency counts and percentages were used to treat the profile of the respondents as to sex, language spoken at home, reading materials available at home and favourite subject. Meanwhile, ranking was used to determine the most pressing problems and the coping mechanisms of the respondents.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The following are the results and findings of the study such as the profile of the respondents, problems encountered and their coping mechanisms.

Students' Profile

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents as to sex, language spoken at home, reading materials available at home and their favourite subject. Of the 30 respondents, 15 or 50 % are males and 15 or 50 % are females. As to language spoken at home, 15 or 50 % speak Iloko, 9 or 30 % speak Ybanag and 3 or 10 % speak Isnag. Despite this place being Ibanag dominated, more students are Ilocanos. This is maybe attributed to their being exposed to the Ilokano speaking communities in Northwestern part of Cagayan province.

As regards reading materials at home, 24 or 80 % have books at home, 22 or 73.33% have magazines and 5 or 16.66 % have atlases. This result means that not all of the respondents have available and sufficient reading materials at home.

As to the respondents favourite subject, 7 or 23.33 % chose Filipino, followed by Math with a percentage of 16.66, Science and T.L.E with a percentage of 13.33, English, E.S.P. and A.P with a percentage of 10 while MAPEH has the least percentage which is 3.33%. Based from this finding, it is very evident that only 3 of the 30 respondents favoured

English; hence, there really is a need to assess the problems encountered by them especially when trying to use English to communicate.

Table 1- Profile of the Respondents

Profile	Weighted Mean	Percentage (%)
1. Sex		
Male	15	50
Female	15	50
2. Language Spoken at Home	15	50
Iloko	9	30
Ybanag	3	10
Taglish		
3.Reading Materials		
Books	24	80
Magazines	22	73.33
Atlases	5	16.66
4.Favourite Subject		
Math	5	16.66
English	3	10
Science	4	13.33
Filipino	7	23.33
T.L.E	4	13.33
ESP	3	10
MAPEH	1	3.33
A.P	3	10

Table 2presents the problems encountered by the students in speaking using English as medium. The most pressing problem as reflected in the table is "*I am shy in speaking the language because my classmates might interrupt me whenever I commit mistakes*". This

shows that, even though they want to talk or recite, they could or will not volunteer because of the fear that they will commit mistakes hence will make them a laughing stock inside the classroom.

The problem that was ranked 2nd is "*I lack confidence in speaking because my English teacher might interrupt me if I have erroneous statements*". This shows that the respondents do not trust themselves especially when they are asked to speak using the English language.

The problem that was ranked 3rd is "*I am not exposed to speaking using English language*" have a weighted mean of 1.93 which means that the students lack background of the language. They have not been using this whenever they communicate. The law of use and disuse is applied here.

The problem that was ranked 4th is "*Our English teacher failed to execute the lesson excitingly*". This has a weighted mean of 1.57. This finding shows that the students did not see or feel any motivation coming from the teacher. The teacher did not introduce activities that could possibly make the teaching and learning process more interesting.

Finally, the problem that was ranked 5th is "*Our English class lacks in providing activities that require us to speak the language*", which has a weighted mean of 1.1. The students have not mastered this skill because their teacher did not encourage or require them to use the language unlike the other schools in which they have their English Only Policy or EOP wherein every student should be speaking using English as medium.

Table 2. Problems encountered by students in speaking using English as medium

Problems	Mean	Rank
1. I am shy in speaking the language because my classmates might interrupt me whenever I commit mistakes.	2.23	1
2. I lack confidence in speaking because my English teacher might interrupt me if I have erroneous statements.	2.22	2
3. Our English teacher failed to execute the lesson very interestingly.	1.57	4

4. Our English teacher seldom provides activities that require us to use the language.	1.1	5
5. I am not exposed to speak using the English language.	1.93	3

Table 3 shows the possible solutions of the problems encountered by the students in speaking using English as a medium. The major solution used by the students is "*I read my books to expand my vocabulary*". Perhaps, this could be helpful because majority of the respondents have books at home. And of course, this also proved that "reading" does not only train one to speak using the English language but also gives him/her the assurance that is the best way to learn and to know more things around the world.

Ranked 2nd is "*I find time to bond with my peers in order to conquer my fear to speak in front of them*". If there is closeness among peers then they will feel more comfortable in reciting and participating during their class discussion. This also confirms the adage which says "Tell me your companions are and I will tell you who you are".

Third in the list is "*I would watch educational English movies*" which has a weighted mean of 2.77. This means that there is a better retention when watching rather that listening alone. This will help the students to improve their speaking skill especially on their accent and intonation while conversing with others.

The next remedy some of the respondents have used is "*I would expose myself in oral activities*" which has a weighted mean 2.37. The respondents joined speaking activities in order for them to overcome their speaking problems. With these, they were able to expose themselves in the English language. They have gained more confidence and have conquered their stage fight.

Finally, the last that the respondents have considered is "*I would download applications that are related to English and use them when necessary*". Instead of playing games using their cell phones, they downloaded applications such as educational games wherein they did not only enjoy but they also learned something which is helpful in the development of their speaking skills as well as in the widening of their vocabularies.

Table 3. Coping mechanisms of students

Coping Mechanisms	Weighted mean	Rank
1. I would read more books to expand my vocabulary.	3.33	1
2. I would find time to bond with my peers in order to conquer my fear to speak in front of them.	3.17	2
3. I would watch educational English movies.	2.77	3
4. I would expose myself in oral activities such as debate and delivering speeches.	2.37	4
5. I would download applications that are related to English and use them when necessary.	2.9	5

CONCLUSIONS

Based from the findings of the study, it could be concluded that the freshmen students of the College of Teacher Education, Cagayan State University are basically shy to participate in speaking activities during discussions because they are afraid that they may be humiliated. However, they have tried their best to look for possible remedies to whatever problems they have encountered.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based from the conclusions made, it is recommended that teachers should always provide interesting activities inside the classroom so that students would be encouraged to participate and help them increase their level of confidence and help them enhance their English speaking skill.

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