

# Speaking Performance of Maritime Students: A Pre-Experimental Study

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## Abstract

The Philippines provides several workers all over the world, particularly in the Maritime industry. The need to train graduates who are proficient in the English language is a must. However, academic institutions need to identify ways that can facilitate enhancing the students' speaking skills. This pre-experimental study determined the speaking skills of 38 Maritime students enrolled in an English Proficiency class in one of the Higher Education Institutions in Ozamiz City. The Speaking Test performance of the participants and the intervention materials were taken from the DynEd courseware. The data were analyzed using Mean, Standard Deviation, and t-test. The study revealed that the participants' pretest performance for the Speaking Test was categorized at the elementary level, while their post-test performance was at a lower intermediate level. There was a significant difference in the participants' speaking test performance after the intervention was conducted. The use of computer-based instruction as facilitated by teachers could improve the English-speaking performance of language learners. It is recommended that institutions utilize computer software that can enhance the speaking skills of college students.

**Keywords:** performance, Philippines, proficiency, speaking, students

## 1. Introduction

The need to master spoken English is a priority for many Iranian language learners, but opportunities to acquire spoken English through the public school system are very small, propelling many students to enroll in "conversation" courses in private institutes (Sadeghi & Richards, 2015). The study by Gudu (2015) on classroom practices in language-learning classes found that the most used technique was conversation, while the least used was oral drill. However, the lack of authentic language learning circumstances outside the classroom poses a significant obstacle to developing student communication skills in English (Alharbi, 2015). A quasi-experimental study conducted in Malaysia that utilized a board game in speaking to lessen student anxiety disclosed that the speaking performance of the experimental group was significantly higher than that of the control group (Fung & Min, 2016).

The ability to communicate effectively with other target language users is a significant purpose in studying foreign languages, especially English, which has become a lingua franca in many parts of the world. The teachers should, therefore, provide opportunities for learners to improve their speaking skills (Kusnierek, 2015). A study conducted in Indonesia aimed to identify the factors contributing to the students' English-speaking success. It disclosed that environment, peer, instructor, and related technology were the contributing factors, with environment as the major factor (Kondo, 2018).

The ASEAN integration has forced the Philippine education system to track the effectiveness of the country's English language education (Madrurnio et al., 2016). However, language learning needs to be given the utmost attention, as it is a primary component in shaping a better-performing Filipino worker, considering the need to produce globally competitive professionals (Valdez & Tan, 2018). Among the four English language skills, speaking skills taught in college are considered difficult for most students, requiring the latter to have the appropriate vocabulary and phrases, and grammar while communicating their ideas, feelings, and experiences thoroughly and communicatively (Alim, 2018).

Low-skilled language learners are more anxious about making errors and being negatively judged, whereas high-skilled language learners are more concerned about learning the second or foreign language itself, both factors in their test performance (Liu, 2018). A few studies found that psychological factors such as fear of making mistakes and lack of self-esteem led to their poor performance in speaking (Ariyanti, 2016). A study conducted on Filipino students involving self-assessment of their oral communication skills revealed that the respondents found their confidence, grammar, vocabulary and fluency, and pronunciation problematic (Separa et al., 2015).

Speaking is a major focus of language teaching. However, both the nature of speaking skills and teaching approaches have undergone a major shift (Richards, 2017). Though speaking is essential in second language learning, such skill is overlooked in schools and universities despite its importance due to the emphasis on grammar and unfavorable proportions of teacher-student (Leong & Ahmadi, 2017). In this vein, a study conducted in the Philippines involving the use of DynEd courseware in English classes found that the courseware was useful in teaching fluency to students. DynEd was one of the two EFL software programs with the highest potential to develop the EFL skills of the learners due to their high integration of technical features associated with interactive Computer-Aided Language Learning (CALL) and CLT approach pedagogical features (Huong, 2018).

Ellsworth (2015) pointed out that students needed coaching to improve their performance on other DynEd tasks that are central to the courseware. A study in Davao City, Philippines, examined predictors of college students' grammar proficiency from established HEIs. Results showed that the students' grammar skills were poor. The predictors described (choice of reading materials, communicative environment, language transfer skills) had no significant influence on student grammar skills (Suarez et al., 2018). Another study conducted in Batangas City, Philippines, on maritime students' English skills, disclosed that the students were not skilled in vocabulary and reading comprehension (Navarro et al., 2015).

In this study, it was observed that a number of Maritime students enrolled in English Proficiency classes had limited skills in the use of the English language. Thus, the researchers in one of the private higher education institutions explored the effectiveness of DynEd courseware for computer-based instruction in English Proficiency 1 Start class, designed to enhance the speaking skills of the students enrolled. Specifically, the study determined the speaking performances of Maritime students through the pretest and post-test results of the Speaking Tests administered and explored a significant difference in the performances.

## 2. Materials and Method

### 2.1. Research Design

The pre-experimental research design, a one-group pretest-posttest design, was used in the study. The design was appropriate for determining the difference in the levels of the participants' speaking performance before and after an intervention. Knowing the impact of computer-based instruction could

provide concrete evidence of the effectiveness of language software in helping students gain better speaking proficiency in the English language.

## **2.2. Research Setting**

This study was conducted in a higher education institution in Ozamiz City. The research locale offers baccalaureate programs related to the maritime industry. The institution has used DynEd courseware for computer-based instruction aimed at enhancing students' speaking skills to provide future graduates with better employment opportunities, especially in the global arena.

## **2.3. Participants of the Study**

The participants were 38 Maritime students enrolled in a English Proficiency 1-Start class. They took the DynEd courseware Placement Test to determine their proficiency level, before courses became accessible to them.

## **2.4. Research Instrument**

The research used the DynEd courseware to determine the participants' speaking performance. The courseware contains eleven courses that are accessible to students based on their performance in the Placement Test. DynEd's Speaking Test uses advanced speech recognition technology, and it helps determine oral fluency levels. The test requires reasonable test-taking skills and a level of concentration that has to be sustained during the test. It must be given in a controlled environment where external or background noise is minimal and where a suitable microphone is used. Before the test is taken, a proper orientation needs to be given to the students, requiring them to take the practice test before taking the actual speaking test to familiarize themselves with the test format.

## **2.5 Data Collection**

The researchers first sought permission from the Vice President of Academic Affairs in the institution where the study was conducted. After approval was obtained, the researchers informed the students about the study, and the latter were asked to take the Placement Test to determine the latter's English language proficiency level as the basis of the number of courses accessible to the students. The participants were then asked to take the first Speaking Test to determine the student's pretest performance. The researchers oriented the participants on the use of microphones, headphones, and repeat buttons in the software for their practice activities. The importance of sentence repetition and elicited imitation was emphasized to the participants. During the conduct of intervention, the students were required to repeat sentences and other language structures using the DynEd courseware embedded in the computers in the Job Enabling English Proficiency (JEEP) Laboratory. The intervention lasted for one month and involved intensive lessons on speaking, imitation, and repetition activities, sound and speech recognition activities, and exercises from several DynEd courses. The students performed speech recognition (SR) exercises for each course, which included modules/ units present. After a month, the researchers made the participants take the second Speaking Test, the results of which served as their post-test performance.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### **3.1. Speaking Test Performance**

Table 1 shows the participants' performance in the speaking test during the pretest. It was found that the Speaking Test level was in the Elementary Level. However, their posttest performance after the intervention period was in the Lower Intermediate category. Data revealed an increase in their Speaking test results from pretest ( $M=1.54$ ) to posttest ( $M=1.88$ ). This finding implies that the EPIS students could produce short or fragmented sentences, though limited to basic patterns. However, the intervention

conducted, which involved exploration of the different courses in the courseware, proved to increase their level of performance. However, they still needed further language exposure for better performance. Since English is the international language at sea, Maritime students need to be proficient in the language. Speaking fluency is also an essential aspect of developing English language skills. A study in Cagayan de Oro City, Philippines, determined that L2 students' English-speaking skills are influenced by their language exposure. The oral English skills of students were considered very good. However, fluency was seen as the weakest among the areas of English-speaking skills measured (pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency, and comprehension) (Candilas, 2016).

A few factors contribute to low speaking fluency because speaking in English causes apprehension and anxiety to some students since English is either a second or foreign language to them. A study in Indonesia revealed that the students in EFL oral communication were generally apprehensive, particularly in the area of public speaking (Aeni et al., 2017). However, the study stressed the importance of students' speaking skills (Aeni et al., 2018).

Students attending college may not necessarily have the desired level of linguistic competence in using the English language. However, specific professions like the maritime industry may require proficiency in the language as a competitive advantage since mariners may deal with various nationalities, for which English is the lingua franca. Thus, providing maritime students exposure to the language through computer-based instruction may enhance their speaking skills for the profession in which they intend to take part.

**Table 1 Students' Speaking Test Performance**

| Variable                  | N  | M    | SD   | Remarks            |
|---------------------------|----|------|------|--------------------|
| Speaking Test Performance |    |      |      |                    |
| Pretest                   | 38 | 1.54 | 0.92 | Elementary         |
| Posttest                  | 38 | 1.88 | 0.77 | Lower Intermediate |

Note. Speaking Test Scale:4.15-5.0(Higher Intermediate);4.14-3.32(Advanced); 2.49-3.31 (Intermediate); 1.66-2.48 (Low Intermediate); 0.83-1.65 (Elementary); 0.0-0.83(Beginner)

### 3.2. Test of Significant Difference in the Students' Speaking Test Performance

Table 2 shows that there was a significant difference in the pretest and posttest of students' speaking test performances ( $t$ -value= -2.161;  $p$ -value=0.037). In the study, the participants were focused on speaking and doing speech recognition exercises in the different courses made available for them. The speaking activities the teacher chose for the participants to engage in enabled the latter to fully utilize the lessons in the courses. The intensive exposure led the students to become more engaged in the oral drills, with the features of the DynEd courseware giving them immediate feedback on their speaking performances. The guided explorations of the oral drills and other activities could be instrumental in the significant difference in the Speaking Test results during the posttest.

Providing meaningful language tasks to students in computer-based instruction is essential for language learning geared toward developing enhanced speaking skills. It is important to provide authentic language materials, particularly in speaking activities that students can relate to, so they may find the activities more enjoyable and engaging. In this study, the students' speaking performance was measured through pretest

and posttest Speaking Test results, assessing the effectiveness of the intervention.

A study in Ecuador examined the effect of a task-based approach to improving the fluency of speech among university students. The result showed a significant improvement in the experimental group's speaking fluency, using an activity guide, compared to the control group, which used traditional techniques (Zambrano & Fernanda, 2019). Also, a study in Iran looked at the impact of conventional and virtual scaffolding techniques in improving Iranian students' speaking ability. Before and after the scaffolding treatments, the students were given a pretest and posttest of speaking ability. The results of the study showed that the students' posttest results had outperformed the pretest performance. Their fluency, grammar, lexicon, and pronunciation have also demonstrated significant improvement (Mirahmadi & Alavi, 2016).

Innovation in teaching through the use of technology plays a significant role in facilitating the enhancement of English language skills. Students who are exposed to interactive computer-based instruction can be given a venue to improve their speaking skills that are needed for their future profession. Academic courses may prove effective in helping students gain better proficiency in English as an international language that is especially useful in the Maritime industry.

**Table 2 Test of Significant Difference in the Students' Speaking Test Performance**

| Indicator     | M    | SD   | <i>t</i> value | <i>p</i> value | Remarks     |
|---------------|------|------|----------------|----------------|-------------|
| Speaking Test |      |      |                |                |             |
| Performance   | 1.54 | 0.92 |                |                | Significant |
| Pretest       | 1.88 | 0.77 | *-2.161        | 0.037          |             |
| Posttest      |      |      |                |                |             |

Legend: 0.00-0.01\*\* Highly Significant    0.02-0.02\* Significant    above 0.05-Not Significant

#### 4. Conclusion

The speaking skills of the students can be enhanced through the integration of innovative means of teaching. Computer-aided instruction exposes the students to alternative yet effective means of developing their pronunciation, fluency, vocabulary, and other elements of speaking that are necessary for effective communication. Lessons and activities in academic software can also be engaging and motivate the students to engage extensively, resulting in improved speaking performance.

The study recommends that academic institutions implement computer-aided instruction to sustain the availability of educational software. They may also explore other innovative, technological materials that are designed to enhance students' communication skills, which are essential in preparing college students as they embark on their future professions requiring proficiency in the English language. Future researchers may explore other computer-based materials that are likewise found effective in improving students' speaking skills for a desired communicative performance.

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