

# **Metalanguage in Teaching Oral Communication**

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## **Abstract**

**This study explores the role of metalanguage in oral communication, focusing on how speakers use language to discuss, describe, and analyze linguistic elements within conversations. Further, this study investigates the effectiveness of integrating metalanguage in teaching oral communication to senior high school students in Surigao City. The research employed a quasi-experimental design, comparing a control group receiving traditional instruction with an experimental group taught using integrated metalanguage. Data was collected through pre-tests and post-tests, focusing on vividness, appropriateness, grammar, and pronunciation. The findings indicate that integrating metalanguage significantly enhances students' oral communication skills, particularly in vividness, grammar, and pronunciation.**

**Keywords: Metalanguage Teaching, Oral Communication, Experiential Method**

## **Introduction**

The English language has become increasingly indispensable on a global scale, acknowledged by nearly all countries. In the Philippines, using English in oral communication has demonstrated significant progress over time. The nation has made strides in teaching English as a second language, attracting international students to enroll in English language education courses (Ikeda, 2020). However, as observed by the researcher that some high school students are having difficulty with oral communication, particularly using the English language. Chentez et al. (2019) pointed out that many students faced significant challenges in oral communication, often accompanied by communication apprehension—defined as the fear or anxiety associated with speaking or the anticipation of speaking. These challenges were largely due to the limited use of English in students' daily interactions, which contributed to heightened nervousness when using the language. This observation prompted the researcher to explore effective strategies to support students struggling with oral communication, particularly through the use of metalanguage—a language used to describe, analyze, or study another language.

Despite the evident impact of teaching methods on learners' capabilities in oral communication, there has been limited exploration of the role and effects of Metalanguage in the interpretation and linguistic performance of Filipino learners. Harun et al. (2017) highlighted that learners utilize metalanguage as a cognitive process to focus on specific linguistic concepts, integrating metalinguistic knowledge, deploying paraphrasing and analytical strategies, and forming hypotheses to facilitate comprehension. This enables learners to navigate lessons with ease, even when English is not their native language.

Metalanguage emerges as a noteworthy trend in English language instruction, emphasizing its role as the language used to study a language. The concept, though not new, finds application in Communicative Language Teaching, promoting interaction and critical analysis among students in the classroom. According to Harun et al. (2017), the role of metalanguage, expressed through learners' verbalization, is considered a crucial tool for intentional organization and control of mental processes during complex cognitive tasks, facilitating the discovery of meanings and connections.

In response to the gaps in research, this study aims to evaluate the effectiveness of integrating metalanguage in language learning, specifically in oral communication. The hypothesis posits that learners benefit from enhanced ease and effectiveness in learning when metalanguage is incorporated into the teaching and learning process. The research further aims to investigate the efficacy of integrating metalanguage into teachers' prepared activities for learners. The outcomes of this research will be utilized to develop a comprehensive teaching and learning guide for the oral communication course.

### **Objective of the Study**

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of incorporating metalanguage into classroom activities in teaching the Oral Communication course among the Grade 12 students of Northeastern Mindanao Colleges. In particular, it aims to assess the effect of metalanguage on the oral communication skills of students in terms of vividness, appropriateness, grammar, and pronunciation. The results will be used as reference in creating a Teaching and Learning Guide to improve oral communication instruction.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed a quasi-experimental research design. It involves two groups (control and experimental). This was deemed appropriate since it was chosen for its ability to provide a controlled environment, facilitate hypothesis testing, and offer insights into the causal mechanisms underlying the variables of interest. This methodological approach will not only address the research gaps identified but also contribute valuable findings with implications for theory and practice in the area of study.

### **Participants**

The participants were the selected Grade-12 (GAS) High School students of Northeastern Mindanao Colleges of Surigao City. They were chosen because the course Oral Communication is only offered on their grade level. The researcher has chosen the two sections of the same grade level and labeled the first section as controlled while the other as experimental group. Each section had 30 students and the total number of participants for the study was 60 students.

### **Research Instrument**

A researcher-made Teaching and Learning Guide instrument that seeks to determine the effectiveness of integrating metalanguage in teaching Oral Communication. This teaching and learning guide contained pretest and post-test written activities as well as performance tasks that measured the students' prior learning, as well as learning gains. The teaching and learning guide crafted by the researcher was used in

teaching the course Oral Communication which abides by the 4A's format of the Department of Education; however, metalanguage is being integrated into the activities and discussion given by the researcher. The data collected by the researcher will be used to create a new teaching and learning guide that is more suitable to the learning of the students. To ensure the validity of the research instruments, they were subjected to thorough inspection by experts, which include the research adviser and the thesis panel of examiners.

### **Ethics and data Gathering Procedure**

The researcher asked for permission first by sending a request letter to the President and Vice-President for Academic Affairs of Northeastern Mindanao Colleges. After the approval, another letter of intent was made to ask permission from the School Head/Principal of the target school to permit the researcher to conduct the study.

As soon as the researcher complied with all the necessary procedures for the conduct of the study, he then administered a pre-test at the beginning of the school semester, which took two school days, since it is an oral communication activity.

### **Data Analysis**

The research utilized some statistical measures to compare the performance of an intervention in improving the knowledge of students in oral communication. Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was utilized as the key measure to contrast the posttest scores of the control and experiment groups while taking into consideration the initial pretest scores; through this, there was a possibility of accurately assessing the impact of the intervention by applying adjusted means. To describe and compare levels of student performance both before and after the intervention, mean and standard deviation scores were utilized by the researchers. The Wilcoxon Signed Rank Test was utilized to ascertain whether there was a significant difference in the level of student performance within each group from pretest to posttest. Finally, the Mann-Whitney U Test was employed to contrast the mean gain scores between the two groups and determine if the teaching method or strategy used had a statistically significant impact on students' learning achievements.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Profile of Respondents**

The research findings indicate that students in the controlled group demonstrated only fair proficiency in oral communication during the pretest, with mean scores for vividness, appropriateness, grammar, and pronunciation all falling below expected levels, aligning with De Vera and De Vera's (2019) categorization of "good," which parallels the "fair" rating in this study. Contributing factors to low performance included limited English proficiency, lack of topical knowledge, and psychological barriers such as anxiety (Ayawan et al., 2022), exacerbated by the lack of real-time interaction during the pandemic (Peñalver & Laborda, 2021).

The continued use of traditional, teacher-centered teaching methods resulted in minimal improvements, with only appropriateness showing a slight increase in posttest results (Murphy et al., 2021). In contrast, the integration of metalanguage in the experimental group led to notable gains across all variables, with posttest scores moving from "fair" to "good," supporting claims by Iddings (2021), Mohammed and

Sanosi (2022), and Canals (2022) that metalanguage use enhances students' grammatical awareness, speaking accuracy, and peer interaction. These results affirm that metalanguage-based instruction significantly improves oral communication proficiency among senior high school students.

Table 2 Proficiency Level in Oral Communication of the Control and Experimental Group

Group	Variable	Pretest			Posttest		
		Mean	SD	D	Mean	SD	D
Control	Vividness	2.17	0.65	Fair	2.33	0.71	Fair
	Appropriateness	2.40	0.50	Fair	2.57	0.50	Good
	Grammar	2.17	0.65	Fair	2.33	0.71	Fair
	Pronunciation	2.23	0.68	Fair	2.37	0.72	Fair
	Average	2.24	0.59	Fair	2.40	0.57	Fair
Experimental	Vividness	2.30	0.65	Fair	2.87	0.35	Good
	Appropriateness	2.50	0.68	Fair	2.77	0.43	Good
	Grammar	2.07	0.52	Fair	2.87	0.43	Good
	Pronunciation	2.00	0.45	Fair	2.50	0.51	Good
	Average	2.22	0.50	Fair	2.75	0.32	Good

Legend: SD – Standard Deviation D – Description

The comparison of the pretest and posttest scores of the control group, which was instructed with conventional, teacher-directed methods without metalanguage intervention, showed statistically significant gains in all four oral communication variables of vividness, appropriateness, grammar, and pronunciation with mean differences of 0.13 to 0.19 and p-values less than the 0.05 level. The overall mean gain on all variables was 0.16, with a significantly high t-value of 3.90 ( $p < 0.01$ ), indicating that even without intervention, the control group also made measurable gains. This corroborates the work of Altun (2023), who claimed that although conventional methods can improve language learning aspects, particularly reading comprehension, they are more effective when supplemented with student-centered approaches. In addition, Aini et al. (2020) confirmed that repeated practice and drilling under instructor guidance can improve speaking abilities. These findings suggest that the routine and consistency of conventional instruction, such as repetitive oral activities and guided feedback, continue to enhance learners' communicative competence.

Table 3. Difference in Pretest and Posttest Proficiency Levels of the Learners in the Control Group

Variable	Mean Difference (Post-Pre)	t	df	p	Decision on Ho	Inter'n
Vividness	.17	2.41	29	.02	Rejected	Significant
Appropriateness	.16	2.43	29	.02	Rejected	Significant
Grammar	.19	2.37	29	.02	Rejected	Significant
Pronunciation	.13	2.11	29	.04	Rejected	Significant
Average	.16	3.90	29	<0.01	Rejected	Significant

Nevertheless, the gains in the control group were comparatively modest and slower, especially in pronunciation. This is in line with arguments by Ahmed et al. (2023) that while the teacher-centered model provides structure and discipline, it can limit students' chances to think critically and speak freely. Busa and Chung (2024) pointed out the limitations of using this method exclusively, citing that students who were only exposed to teacher-led instruction had more difficulty with comprehension tasks than their counterparts in student-centered settings. Vireak and Lan (2024) also added that although such traditional approaches as the Audiolingual and Direct Methods could enhance rote memorization and pronunciation practice, they tend to be inflexible and do not promote authentic language use or critical thinking. Therefore, while some language development can be facilitated through traditional teaching, the inability of this approach to facilitate interaction and one-to-one learning argues for the incorporation of other strategies, like metalanguage-based instruction, to advance and consolidate students' oral communication skills.

Table 4. Difference in Pretest and Posttest Proficiency Levels of the Learners in the Experimental Group

Variable	Mean Difference (Post-Pre)	T	Df	p	Decision on Ho	Inter'n
Vividness	.57	6.16	29	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
Appropriateness	.27	2.80	29	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
Grammar	.80	10.77	29	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
Pronunciation	.50	5.39	29	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
Average	.53	9.77	29	<0.01	Rejected	Significant

The comparative changes between the pretest and posttest scores of oral communication related to the experimental group exposed to instructions using metalanguage indicate highly significant improvement in all measured variables. Noteworthy increases occurred in grammar (mean difference = 0.80), vividness (0.57), and pronunciation (0.50). All t-values indicated strong statistical significance ( $p < 0.01$ ). Thus, these findings serve as the basis for saying that the metalanguage is effective in improving students' oral communication skills. Mohammed and Sanosi (2022) state that when metalanguage finds its place into instruction, it enhances learners' grammatical recognition and contributes to metalinguistic awareness as set off to second language acquisition. This is corroborated by Gordon and Arias (2024), who qualify their findings on pronunciation and articulatory benefits-granted through metalanguage-as core to the addressal of phonological spirits for the clear articulation of speech.

Another variable enhanced by the intervention was students' ability to use the language appropriately in various contexts, being evidenced by a mean difference of 0.27 on the measure of appropriateness. As Komilov et al. (2023) noted, metalanguage enhances clarity and professionalism in direct and digital communication. Metalanguage, as per Schleppegrell (2023), is significant in teaching academic language and fostering contextually specific language learning. These findings suggest that metalanguage not only supported and improved specific language components.

Table 5

Comparison of Proficiency Levels of the Control and Experimental Groups

Variable	Group	Adjusted Mean	F	p	Decision on Ho	Inter'n
Vividness	Control	2.38	20.58	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
	Exp'l	2.82				
Appropriateness	Control	2.59	2.59	.113	Not Rejected	Not Significant
	Exp'l	2.74				
Grammar	Control	2.29	39.70	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
	Exp'l	2.91				
Pronunciation	Control	2.27	8.23	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
	Exp'l	2.59				
Average	Control	2.39	40.46	<0.01	Rejected	Significant
	Exp'l	2.76				

The results of the study reveal that the metalanguage intervention had a significant positive impact on learners' oral communication proficiency, particularly in the areas of vividness, grammar, pronunciation, and overall performance. The experimental group outperformed the control group in vividness, with an adjusted mean of 2.82 compared to 2.38, supported by an ANCOVA F-value of 20.58 and a p-value of less than 0.01. This indicates that students who received instruction with metalanguage developed more expressive and descriptive language skills. Canals (2022) supports this by emphasizing that metalanguage enhances students' ability to express ideas clearly, engage in peer feedback, and build sustained interaction. In grammar, the experimental group again showed significantly higher results (adjusted mean = 2.91) compared to the control group (adjusted mean = 2.29), with a highly significant F-value of 39.70 and a p-value below 0.01. This supports Mohammed and Sanosi's (2022) assertion that metalanguage instruction deepens grammatical understanding and promotes accuracy in spoken language.

Pronunciation also improved significantly in the experimental group (adjusted mean = 2.59) over the control group (adjusted mean = 2.27), as confirmed by an F-value of 8.23 and p-value < 0.01. Graeeme (2021) attributes such gains to metalanguage and critical listening. However, in the area of appropriateness, the difference between the experimental (adjusted mean = 2.74) and control groups (adjusted mean = 2.59) was not statistically significant (p = 0.113). This may be due to students' reliance on slang and colloquial expressions shaped by cultural and social influences, as Zahid (2023) noted. Almuslimi (2020) further explained that mother tongue interference and limited exposure to formal language contribute to difficulties in mastering appropriate language use. Despite these challenges, the overall average proficiency of the experimental group (adjusted mean = 2.76) significantly surpassed that of the control group (adjusted mean = 2.39), with an F-value of 40.46 and a p-value less than 0.01. These findings affirm the effectiveness of explicit, metalanguage-based instruction in improving oral communication and highlight the need for more contextualized teaching strategies to address gaps in appropriateness.

## Conclusion and Recommendations

The study concludes that although the learners had developed some initial oral communication skills, those taught through metalanguage had greater improvement in fluency, accuracy, and confidence.



Traditional teaching methods, although found to have some effect manifested in the improvement of learners' pretest scores, were overshadowed by the effect of metalanguage, where posttest scores were much higher and suggested greater instructional impact. The study recommends using the proposed Teaching and Learning Guide, which incorporates metalanguage into oral communication, as more effective than other conventional methods.

The study's recommendations to educators that they prioritize oral communication teaching, as pretest data found not even one student, in either group, and well below any expected competency levels, needed improvement. The principal and teachers should integrate this course with traditional teaching, and innovate practices including metalanguage, to build on oral communication ability. Language teachers should integrate metalanguage practices into their baidua teaching, in order to assist the students to develop meaningful communication in the province's Senior High Schools. It is also suggested to create a Teaching & Learning Guide that is relevant to lesson objectives, topics covered, curricula, curricula standards, and prescribed competencies outlined by the Department of Education. This guide should also be supplemented with metalanguage-based activities to enable learner voice participation (Craig, 2015), and consequently, lessen the fear of making mistakes in oral communication of the learners. This study ultimately suggested that classroom activities should encourage role-play, dramatization, talk shows, reporting, close conversations, and discussions with other students. The reasonings are that this action would authentically practice students' competencies and develop their abilities communicatively.

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