

Oral Proficiency Assessment of Pre-Service Teachers of a Public University in the Philippines

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Grammar Test: 93/100

Originality: 100/100

Gunning Fog Index: 12.66

Flesch Reading Ease: 37.88



ABSTRACT

In 2016, the Philippines ranked 13th in the English Proficiency Index worldwide as released by Education First, Ltd. With this, English teachers from the Philippines should continuously revitalize their teaching strategies and classroom practices to be competitively at par with other Asian countries. This quantitative study assessed the oral proficiency of the graduating Bachelor of Secondary Education major in English students or pre-service teachers from Cavite State University- Imus Campus. The study was anchored on the concepts of Bachman and Palmer (1996)'s oral language ability. Methods such as utilization of survey questionnaire, observation of speaking mistakes, and assessment of oral proficiency during focus group discussions and teaching demonstrations were done. The results showed that participants seldom use English in daily tasks, thus, also seldom encounter speaking difficulties. As observed, during focus group discussion, the most speaking mistake they committed is the code-switching of Filipino and English languages. However, when it comes to

teaching demonstrations, grammatical errors, mostly subject-verb agreement, became evident. In the assessment of the oral proficiency, the mean ratings of 3.35 and 3.15 determined the proficiency level of the participants. These scores categorized the pre-service teacher participants as advanced speakers of English.

Keywords: *Oral Proficiency, language assessment, English proficiency, language use, language profile, pre-service teachers, descriptive design, Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

The coining of the Philippines as a Budget English Teacher (McGeown, 2012) and the increasing number of foreign students pose a challenge for Filipino English teachers to answer the demand for quality education and still promote English proficiency despite low tuition fees of the schools in the country. With this, English teachers need to continuously revitalize their teaching strategies and practices in delivering their lessons for the students to fully comprehend them. Wichadee (2012) states that language teaching is the only subject where effective instruction requires the teachers to use English as a medium of instruction (MOI), so the ability to carry on conversations in English well is required. Once achieved, teaching then becomes an adventure and a daily quest for every educator.

One of the underlying successful practices of a language teacher is to portray communicative competence which Petkute (2010) simply presents in a study as the correlation of expertise in communication and quality of the communicative language teaching. Most studies usually discuss the development of communicative competence pertaining to students and a few for teachers. This concept is attributed first to Hymes (1972), sociolinguist and was later elaborated by Canale and Swain (1980). Recent studies of Bachman (1990) and Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei, and Thurrell (1995) also paved the way for communicative competence to be divided into four components: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence.

Proficiency Tests

The National Board for Professional Teaching Standards as mentioned by Wichadee (2012) included effective communication among the desirable characteristics and skills of teachers. The results of his investigation showed that students place too much importance on the organization and communication skills of teachers. Thus, regular evaluation of faculty is being promoted. Seemingly, studies show that in faculty or teacher appraisals, among the factors

to be considered aside from classroom management are the communication skills, both written and oral. Variety of communicative strategies can help create unique communication styles but the best showcase of teacher's communicative competence according to Petkute (2010), is rhetoric or oral communication which helps improve and enhance a student's performance in class. Theories Basic Interpersonal Skills (BICS) and Communicative/ Academic Language Proficiency (CALP) are also significant in understanding oral communication proficiency. The CALP pertains to knowledge about language forms, rules and structures, while BICS refers to a person's communicative ability to function in daily exchanges of communication. Cummins (1999) as stated by Olivier (2002) was able to observe that a person's BICS are better than CALP since it requires low-level of memorization and application skills. Since CALP requires higher order thinking skills, performance is less than satisfactory.

Dandanoli states that proficiency tests are used to measure an individual's general competence in a second language, independent of any particular curriculum or course of study (as cited in Hadley & Johnson, 1993, p. 412). The proficiency tests like IELTS, TOEFL, and TESL commonly evaluate the performance of an individual when speaking, writing, listening, and reading.

Speaking or oral proficiency evaluation tests vary in their approach and indicators being evaluated. The New Nouveau Brunswick Canada and ACTFL Speaking Guidelines are tests which are given to students and teachers. However, in her dissertation, Olivier (2002) studied the oral proficiency of ESL teacher trainees in various discourse domains. Teacher trainees are not yet graduates but are still undergoing the course or subject of practice teaching. The constructs for oral proficiency that were measured in Olivier's were accuracy, fluency, classroom language and non-verbal communication. The results of the study revealed serious problems across the three constructs where the ESL teacher trainees receive more satisfactory evaluation when it comes to casual conversations compared with the actual language teaching. Olivier then calls for curriculum revision, creation of intensive courses to upgrade the English of qualified teachers and English improvement programs for these teacher trainees.

For Ediger (2013), proficiency in oral communication is indeed necessary in school and the society. This was already proven beforehand by Loy (2006) in his research which showed that there is a relationship between the individual's ability to communicate effectively their ideas or thoughts and the success he meets in the classroom as an instructor.

In the Philippines, English is not just considered a second language but also as national language and medium of instruction whether in elementary, secondary or tertiary. A good skill in this powerful language is one of the requirements concerning employment of Filipino intellectuals. This shows that