

Assessing the oral English proficiency of the Faculty of Fountain international School: Inputs to in-service training

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Article history

Received:
26.07.2013

Received in revised form:
04.10.2013

Accepted:
05.10.2013

Key words:

Oral, English, proficiency, service, teacher, test

This descriptive-correlation study attempted to assess and correlate the level of oral English proficiency and selected profile variables of 79 faculty of the Fountain International School (Philippines), consisting of 8 pre-elementary school, 29 elementary school and 42 high school teachers. A researcher-made questionnaire consisting of 25 items which were content validated covers five (5) dimensions, namely; pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, fluency and intonation. The assessment was made by the unit head, peers and the teachers themselves, including selected students in the case of elementary and high school teachers. The obtained raw data were treated statistically using the percentage, weighted mean, ration coefficient, and point biserial coefficient of correlation. Likewise, the ANOVA was used to test the significant difference in the assessment of the groups of respondents. From the findings revealed in the study, the researcher is moved to conclude that pre-elementary, elementary and high school teachers of the school respondent are “much proficient” in their oral English, with varying level of proficiency. Also apparent from the findings has lead to construing that the high school teachers are more proficient than the elementary and pre elementary teachers. Their level of proficiency varies in relation to their profile. Among others, fluency and vocabulary need to be emphasized in teachers’ in service training.

Introduction

English is dubbed as an international language. It is the language of economy, diplomacy, industry, education, sports and the like. It is the world’s language. It is spoken as a native language by developed countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada which are the dictators of language that has to be spoken universally. It is also considered as a second language by other countries like the Philippines. A lot of people today are learning the language especially those countries where English is considered a foreign language.

As Roland J. Breton, a geolinguist from the University of Paris states: “The spread of English may be seen as a positive development which saves resources and makes cultural exchange easier. After all, it might be said, the advance of English is not aimed at killing off local language or languages. And over several generations, the most useful language eliminates the others.”

Furthermore, voices calling for multicultural education, long in the background of education,

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are growing more audible in the mainstream, and new voices are joining the chorus. Multicultural education owes its momentum to a variety of interrelated factors.

Foremost among these factors is society's burgeoning demographic diversity, which is reflected in the nation's schools. In 1984, approximately one in four school children were minority students. By 2020, that figure likely will increase to nearly one in two, and many of these students will be poor (Pallas, Natriello, & McDill, 1989).

Compounding this demographic phenomenon is the academic underachievement of many minority students. Such relative low achievement is attributable to a complex configuration of causes, one cause being the lack of equity of opportunity to learn. Jones and Fennimore (1990). They noted that schools do not legitimize the knowledge or experiences these [minority] children bring to school.

To address these issues, Banks (1991a) notes the importance of integrating multicultural education within the teacher education curriculum. According to him an effective teacher education policy for the 21st century must include as a major focus the education of all teachers, including teachers of color, in ways that will help them receive the knowledge, skills, and attitudes needed to work effectively with students from diverse groups.

Background of the Study

Fountain International School, which is the researcher's school, is committed to the realization of a dream to provide the youth with an authentic learning environment that would make them acquire solid competencies in critical thinking, creative problem solving, consensus building, informed decision making and technical literacy.

It is a co-educational reload with diverse multi-cultured students. However, it emphasizes English as a second language (for non-speakers of English), English conversational fluency and Turkish as a foreign language which are non-academic subjects.

The teachers are dominated by Filipinos and Turkish and the researcher would like to actually verify the level of speaking proficiency in English. The researcher is motivated to elevate their skills in teaching by means of measuring some of their communicative competence specifically speaking. Their levels in this particular competence should be measured first before enhancing more of their communicative as well as their teaching abilities in this area of language. It is on this premise that this study was undertaken.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical foundation of this study was taken from the theory of communicative competence by Canale and Swaine (1980). They define communicative competence in terms of four components: grammatical competence: words and rules sociolinguistic competence: appropriateness, discourse competence: cohesion and coherence, strategic competence: appropriate use of communication strategies

A more recent survey of communicative competence by Bachman (1990) divides it into the broad headings of "organizational competence," which includes both grammatical and discourse (or textual) competence, and "pragmatic competence," which includes both sociolinguistic and "illocutionary" competence. Strategic Competence is associated with the interlocutors' ability in using communication strategies (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Lin, 2009).

Through the influence of communicative language teaching, it has become widely accepted that communicative competence should be the goal of language education, central to good classroom practice. This is in contrast to previous views in which grammatical competence was commonly given top priority. The understanding of communicative competence has been influenced by the field of pragmatics and the philosophy of language concerning speech acts as described in large part by John Searle and J.L. Austin (2008).

Communicative competence is a term in linguistics which refers to a language user's grammatical knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, lexicon, discourse and the like, as well as social knowledge about how and when to use utterances appropriately. The term was coined by Dell Hymes in 1966, reacting against the perceived inadequacy of Noam Chomsky's (1965) distinction between competence and performance. To address Chomsky's abstract notion of competence, Hymes undertook ethnographic exploration of communicative competence that included "communicative form and function in integral relation to each other" (Leung, 2005).

Research Paradigm

The research paradigm (Fig. 1) clearly reflects the research flow which guided this researcher in conducting the study. The legend explicitly identified the groups that assessed the oral English proficiency of Prep, Elementary and High School Teachers, separately, as shown in the three (3) rectangular boxes in the middle of the frame. It will be noted that selected grade VI pupils are included among the four (4) groups asked to assess the oral English proficiency of their teachers.

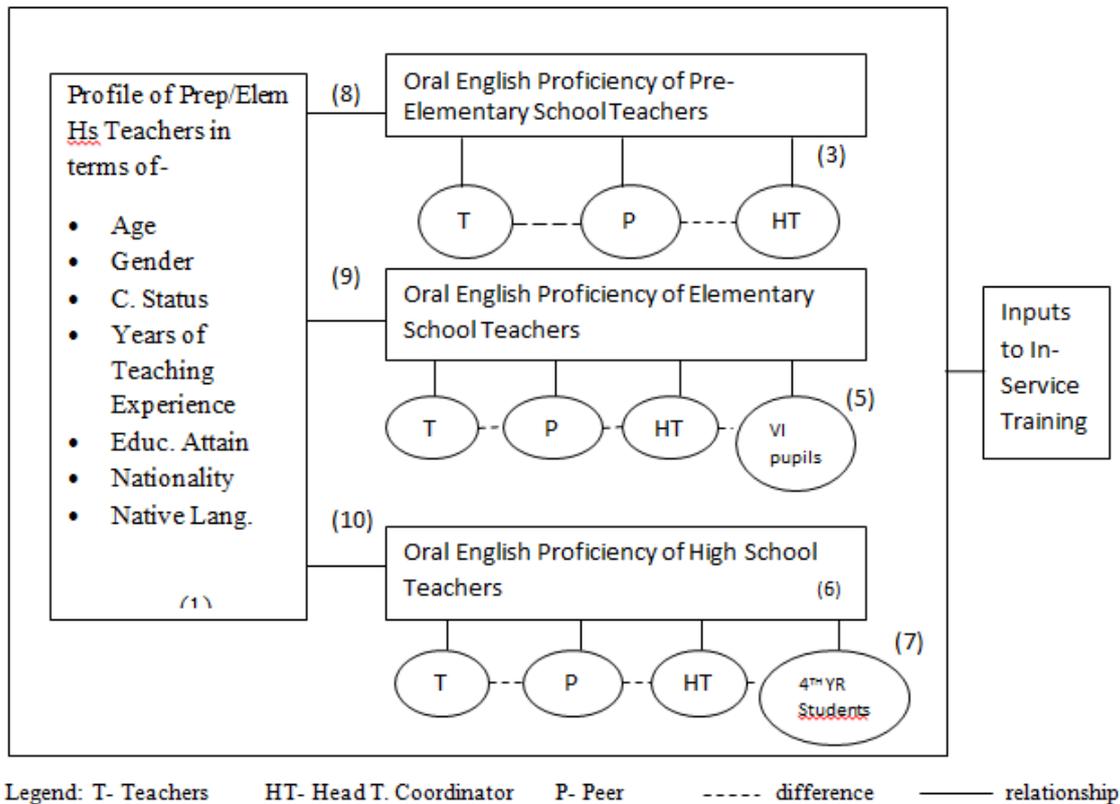


Figure 1. Research Paradigm

Likewise, in the high school level, selected fourth (4th) year students are included; this was done to eliminate bias in the self-assessment done by the teachers-respondents who are the

main subjects of this study. The heavy lines numbered 8, 9 and 10 indicate relationship while the broken lines numbered 3, 4 and 7 indicate differences in the assessment of the groups concerned. The expected output as shown in the last frame is the proposed in- service training program on oral English proficiency, based on the result of the study

Statement of the Problem

This study assessed the oral English proficiency of pre-elementary, elementary and high school teachers of Fountain International School as basis for in-service training activities.

Specifically it sought to answer or provide information on the selected demographic profiles of the teacher-respondents and their levels of oral English proficiency as assessed by the school head, peers and themselves in terms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency, and intonation. To have statistical bearing, the researcher made corresponding tests of significant differences in the assessment of the three groups of respondents as to their levels of oral English proficiency. Further, in here attempts to correlate the profile variables of the respondents and their levels of oral English proficiency are made. Considering these all premises, the query as to what in –service training to improve the oral English Proficiency of the teachers in FIS can be proposed is timely answered.

Scope and Delimitation

The study centered on the assessment of the level of the oral proficiency in English in terms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and intonation of pre elementary, elementary and high school teachers. This is speaking which is one of the macro skills in communication. It does not measure the other macro skills which are listening, reading and writing.

The number of participants of the study is limited to 79 teachers of Fountain International School which has three branches – Greenhills, Pinaglabanan and in Zamboanga del Sur. All the teachers/respondents are teaching for the school year 2010-2011. To reduce the bias in the self-assessment, peers, representative’s heads and selected students were also asked to assess the target respondents.

Method

This chapter includes the research design, the respondents, research instruments, data gathering procedure and the statistical treatment of data.

Research Design

The researcher used descriptive – correlational research design employing both qualitative and quantitative approaches, to provide detailed information and understanding of the study. According to Fraenkel (2006), correlational research is a form of descriptive research because it describes existing relationship between variables. This design also includes identifying, analyzing, interpreting, and testing the difference on relationship among variables.

First, a quantitative analysis of the teachers/respondents profile was made. Second, a qualitative analysis and interpretation of the teachers/respondents assessments of the oral English proficiency, leading to the final results was done.

Population, Sample and Sampling Techniques

The researcher utilized all the 79 teachers of Fountain International School as main subject of the study. They are teaching preparatory, elementary and high school. Other participants who were asked to assess the oral English proficiency of the subject teachers were the head teachers, peers and students, in the case of elementary and high school levels, no sampling techniques was used since all the teachers and students assessors were involved of the 79 subject teachers, 33 are from Zamboanga unit of Fountain International Schools and 46 are from the two Fountain Schools in Metro Manila.

Research Instrument

The main instrument that was used in gathering data is a researcher made questionnaire. It is a 25- item multiple –choice survey created to measure oral English proficiency. The self-rating questions are divided into five categories: (a) pronunciation (b) grammar (c) vocabulary (d) fluency (e) intonation, the researcher based the items in questionnaire from the reviewed literature and suggestions of English experts.

The research instrument was validated by a pool of experts; language professors and tested for reliability through a dry-run.

Data Gathering Procedure

After the instrument was validated and finalized, data gathering started first week of January 2011, upon the resumption of classes. The researcher who is the Director of the School, gathered all the faculty members from Greenhills and Pinaglabanan units, they were oriented on the purpose of the survey, after which they accomplished the questionnaire which were immediately retrieved by groups. For the student assessors, in the case of grade six and fourth year students, assessment was done with the help of the teacher adviser. For Zamboanga participants, the research questionnaires were mailed to the school and were managed by the principal and sent back to Greenhills where the researcher holds office.

Statistical Treatment of Data

For the purpose of this study, the following statistical techniques were used: Frequency and Percentage, Weighted mean, F-test, Point- Biserial Coefficient of Correlation, and Ratio Coefficient of Correlation.

To interpret the weighted mean, a 5- point likert scale was used observing the following:

Scale	Range	Verbal Interpretation
5	4.21-5.00	Very Much Proficient
4	3.41-4.20	Much Proficient
3	2.61-3.40	Proficient
2	1.81-2.60	Less Proficient
1	1.00-1.80	Least Proficient

The qualitative interpretation of the degree of linear relationship existing is shown in the following range of values:

±1.00	perfect positive (negative correlation)
±0.91- ±0.99	very high positive (negative) correlation
±0.71- ±0.90	high positive (negative) correlation
±0.51- ±0.70	moderately positive (negative) correlation
±0.31- ±0.50	low positive (negative) correlation
±0.01- ±0.30	negligible positive (negative) correlation

Results and Discussion

This chapter includes the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data on the assessment of oral English proficiency of pre-elementary; elementary and high school teachers of Fountain International School basis for faculty in-service training.

For consistency, the presentation of data follows the order in which the specific problems and the research hypotheses are presented in statement of the problem section.

Profile of pre-elementary, elementary and high school teachers respondents in terms of age, gender, civil status, years in teaching, education, language use and nationality.

It is found out that according to age, majority, 29 or 31 percent belong to the age bracket of 26-30; 20 or 25 percent are within 31-35 percent; 11 are in bracket 4 and above. For the gender, 49 or 62 percent are males and 30 or 38 percent are female. Considering their civil status, 50 or 63 percent are married and 29 or 27 percent are single. Meanwhile, in terms of years of teaching, 32 or 40 percent are in 6-10 years; 21 or 26 percent are in bracket 1-5 years; and 18 or 22 percent are in bracket 11-15 years. It is also revealed that in terms of the respondents' education, all the 79 respondents are bachelors degree in education either pre-school, elementary or high school. The top 3 majors are Science, English and Math. All the 8 pre-school teachers have units in Early Childhood Education. As to the native language used, four (4) of 5 percent are native speakers of English; 31 or 39 percent are Filipino speakers and 44 or 56 percent speak Turkish. Gleaning further, according to their nationalities, it is apparent that majority of the teachers are Turkish, 44 or 56 percent; 31 or 39 percent are Filipino; and 4 or 5 percent are Americans.

Level of oral English proficiency of pre-elementary teachers as assessed by the school head, peers and pre-school teachers themselves.

The overall level of oral English proficiency of pre-school teachers is described as “much proficient” with a composite mean of 3.50. Receiving the highest mean are grammars and intonation (3.50) and the lowest is fluency (3.43).

There is significant difference in the assessment of the level of oral English proficiency of pre-elementary teachers made by the head, peers and the teachers themselves.

Table 1: Summary of Values on the significant difference in the Assessment of the Three Groups of respondents of the Oral English Proficiency of the Pre-Elementary Teachers

Computed F Value	F Critical value	Decision
9.59	3.12	Reject Ho

Level of Significance- 0.05

Using the analysis of variance (ANOVA) the computed F is 9.59 which is greater than the F critical value of 3.12 and therefore, the null hypothesis of “no significant difference” is rejected. This means that the assessments of the peers, unit head and the teachers differ as regards the oral English proficiency of pre-school teachers along the five dimensions of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and intonation.

Comparing the assessment of the three groups the unit head gave lower ratings than the peers and the teachers themselves. This appears to validate the assessment made since the unit head of the pre-school has direct supervision over the preschool teachers inside and outside the classroom. Through classroom observations, pre-school teachers’ oral discourse and interaction with multi-cultural pupils can be readily assessed objectively by the unit head.

Level of oral English proficiency of elementary teachers as assessed by the principal, peers, grade six pupils and the elementary teachers themselves.

On the whole, the level of oral English, proficiency of elementary teachers in terms of pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, fluency and intonation is described as “much proficient” with an overall mean of 3.79, the highest being intonation (3.83) and the lowest is fluency (3.71).

There is no significant difference in the assessment of the level of oral English proficiency of elementary teachers as assessed by the four (4) groups.

Table 2. Summary of F-test Values showing the significant difference in the assessment of the four of respondents in the oral English proficiency groups of the Pre Elementary School Teachers

F computed value	F Critical value	Decision
15.31	2.69	Reject Ho

Level of Significance 0.05

As shown on the table, the computed F value of 15.31 is greater than the F critical value of 2.69, suggesting the rejection of the null hypothesis of “no significant difference”. Therefore it can be concluded that the four (4) groups the principal, peers, students and the teachers themselves significantly differ in their assessment of the oral English proficiency of Elementary teachers. Mostly the assessment of the head and the students appears to be slightly lower than that of the teachers themselves, thus the element of bias is reduced.

Based on the obtained data, it appeared that in almost all the five (5) dimensions of oral English proficiency, the assessment of the unit head and the students are a few points lower than the teachers themselves, tending to prove that the receiver of the message is in a better position to assess the oral English proficiency of the elementary teacher, more so if one is speaking in a second language, which in this case is English.

Level of oral English proficiency of high school teachers as assessed by the principal, peers, fourth year students and the high school teachers themselves.

The level of the oral English proficiency of high school teachers can be summed up as “much proficient” with a composite mean of 4.01. The lowest dimension with an overall mean of 3.76 are vocabulary and fluency while the highest is intonation (4.08).

There is significant difference in the assessment of oral English proficiency of high school teachers as assessed by the principal, peers, fourth year students and the teachers themselves.

Table 3. Summary of F-test values showing the significant difference in the assessment of the four groups of respondents in the level of oral English Proficiency of High School Teachers

F computed value	F Critical value	Decision
9.91	2.70	Reject Ho

Level of significance 0.05

Using the analysis of variance (ANOVA), the computed F is 9.91 which is greater than the F critical value 2.70, supporting the decision of rejecting the null hypothesis. Therefore, there is significant difference in the assessment by the four groups on the oral English proficiency of high school teachers. Although the verbal interpretations of the obtained measure in the assessment made by the four (4) groups are generally the same as “much proficient” it is evident that the student respondents and head gave lower ratings than the teachers. Since many high school students come from multi-cultural backgrounds with diverse socio-linguistic orientations they seem to find difficulty in adjusting to the oral discourse of their teachers.

Significant difference between the level of oral English proficiency of pre-school teachers and their profile variables.

Age, education, years of teaching has low positive correlation. Gender and civil status have negligible correlation, and Language and nationality have moderate correlation. All profile variables have significant relationship to the level of oral English proficiency at varying degree of linear correlation.

Significant relationships between the levels of oral English proficiency of elementary teachers and their profile variables.

Age and years of experience have negligible negative correlation. Gender, civil status, language and nationality have negligible positive correlation. Education has very high positive correlation. There is significant relationship between the level of oral English proficiency of elementary teachers and their profile variables at various degree of linear relationship.

Significant relationship between level of oral English proficiency on high school teachers and their profile variables.

Age and years of experience showed negligible negative correlation. There is no significant relationship. Gender, civil status and education revealed negligible positive correlation, while language and nationality registered low positive correlations. All profile variables except age and years of experience, have significant positive relationship to the level of oral English proficiency of high school teachers.

Based on the findings, the researcher proposes in-service training to improve oral English proficiency of the teachers

Proposed Framework of In-Service Training on Oral English Proficiency for Pre-school, Elementary and High School Teachers of Fountain International School

Rationale

This proposed framework consists of two levels, each level to be accomplished in a 5-day in-house training using the school’s speech laboratory. Aside from the findings of this study which will serve as anchors of this framework, the researcher who is also the school Director will seek the help of the American special English teacher to conduct a more in-depth needs assessment of the teachers with regards to oral communication skills, as basis for classifying their level of training.

Objectives of the Training

For Level 1: To provide a language learning environment for the acquisition of basic oral English skills

- Attain high level of intelligibility in speech through correct pronunciation, intonation, fluency and proper use of words
- Interact and converse freely with ease and confidence

For Level 2: To augment and improve upon the skills acquired in level 1

- (a) Make oneself understood by other speakers with ease.
- (b) Participate and discuss wide range of topics effortlessly.
- (c) Speak before an audience and express oneself effectively.

III. Strategies/Activities

Area of Concern	Strategies/ Activities
<p><i>A. For Pre-school and Elementary school Teachers (assumed to be in level 1)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency • Intonation • Vocabulary enhancement • Grammar • Pronunciation <p>(Based on weaknesses revealed in the study)</p>	<p>Eclectic Methodology using a variety of instructional device, classrooms procedures, multimedia devices.</p>
<p><i>B. For High School Teachers (level 2)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fluency • Vocabulary • Pronunciation • Grammar • Intonation <p>(based on priority weaknesses as revealed in the study)</p>	<p>Use variety of</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional materials, classroom modes such as simulation, role playing, small group discussion, debates, public speaking • Use of programmed TESOL materials • Reflection journals for self-evaluation

IV. Evaluation

Evaluation for both levels is through performance test.

Level 1

1. Recorded speech of individual teachers
2. Impromptu speech

Level 2

1. Group discussion (by 4's)
2. Public speaking

3. Group discussion (by 4's)

Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusions

Based on the findings, the researcher analytically concluded that in terms of their demographic profiles, the teachers-respondents can be described as young, married, mostly male, experienced and educationally qualified. Most of them are Turkish and Filipino teachers.

It is also concluded that the oral English proficiency of the respondents across all levels can be described as "much proficient" and the assessments made for this vary accordingly.

Further, it is concluded that pre-elementary, elementary and high school teachers profile and their level of oral English proficiency have varying degrees of relationship.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions, the following are recommended:

- (1) Since pre-school and elementary teachers appear to have lower level of oral English proficiency, the school administrator should provide more intensive training for this group, particularly on fluency, vocabulary and grammar.
- (2) High School teachers with major in English or native speakers of English should be tapped as trainers or hire professionally trained English trainers from service providers such as Speech Powers.
- (3) In hiring new teachers, give oral English Proficiency Test or its equivalent.
- (4) If funds permit send special English teachers for further training in English Language Center to become the school trainer.
- (5) Encourage teachers to take TESOL test on line.
- (6) Encourage teachers to join the Toastmasters' Club to enhance their oral English proficiency.
- (7) For further research the oral English proficiency of high school students from diverse culture is proposed.

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